

WILLAPA WHISTLER

A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society

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Fall 2020



American Redstart -- Image by Terry Anderson, June 12 near the Port of Kalama

Life in the Floodplain

By President Steve Puddicombe

I live alongside Gray's River, a watercourse still wild and unpredictable despite modern man's strictures and depredation. I've been here 30 years now, since making the decision to buy this old homestead and defunct dairy farm in my unadulterated, idealistic nascence, with no idea what it meant to live in a flood plain.

I learned about that soon enough: my first winter, according to my journals, there were several flooding events with one quite large one. Then, over the next few years, more and worse. And then a respite for a year or two. Then, several nearby neighbors flooded out and a home destroyed. The heavy Fall and Winter rains brought a sense of impending doom, as if the pounding drops were a drum roll at an execution.

There were consolations, of course: the silt that covered my gardens brought bounteous harvests; and common cause brought the disparate community together. In Summer, a bracing swim in a

deep pool on a hot day was a true delight, and the sound and scent of the Autumnal salmon runs, along with the falling leaves and crisp temperatures, always offered satisfying reflection. If I could distill it all down it might be to the riparian woods and fringes and its rich habitat and diverse inhabitants. Along with the nesting migrants and more common bird-life are the porcupine, skunk, rabbit, beaver and ubiquitous raccoon; deer, elk, bear and occasional bobcat. The riparian is the flesh the river profuses and nourishes.

This summer I've been culling firewood, as I always do, from the bodies of trees pushed onto my beach with last Winter's high water. A welcome surprise in Spring were several hulks of old growth Douglas fir that have been wending their way down from the high divide, perhaps for centuries, each flood moving these slabs a little farther along the river. One of the logs is fully 35 feet long and nearly 5 feet in girth.

Christmas Bird Counts 2020

Save the dates:

This is a fun event for seasoned and new-be birders alike. All dates and events are preliminary as there might be changes and adjustments due to Covid 19. We will have all the details on our website and in the Winter Whistler - published in early December.

Leadbetter CBC (Pacific County) – December 19, 2020

Coordinator: tba

Wahkiakum CBC – December 29, 2020

Coordinator: Andrew Emlen

Cowlitz-Columbia CBC – January 1, 2021

Coordinator: Bob Reistroffer

Cutting and splitting some the other day I had to remark upon its utter beauty, the unique, blond hue and neat dark growth rings; it's scent, to my mind, even more ambrosial than the musk of cedar. It's the product of the deep primordial forest, brought to me by the river as a gift to my firebox (it's the best firewood-- burns long and hot with little ash).

Other thoughts crossed my mind; too many, a flood, if I'm honest. But if life in the floodplain has taught me anything it's that even supposing a dire flood next Winter I'll be warmed by that old Doug fir in the stove, and that there will be more logs on the beach next Spring, more silt in the gardens, more thoughts in my head.

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Support our mission, join WHAS today!

Membership renewals are due March 1 of each year. If you prefer to pay by credit card use our online form on our website. 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
For membership in National Audubon Society visit <https://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 _____ Chapter # Y14

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

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.

Ridgefield BirdFest and Bluegrass 2020

October 2-3, 2020

This year, this event will be hosted completely online, so that you can virtually learn about the culture and the history of the area and how it affects how the land is used, or impress your friends when you can tell them what that backyard bird is saying
 More at <https://ridgefieldfriends.org/birdfest-bluegrass/>

Puget Sound Bird Fest 2020

September 12-13, 2020

The Puget Sound bird fest is going virtual this year. Enjoy all your festival favorites from the comfort of your own home. Renowned crow and raven specialist Kaeli Swift has been selected as the Keynote Speaker.
 More info at www.pugetsoundbirdfest.com/

Long Beach Peninsula Bird Festival 2020

The full Wings Over Willapa Festival has been postponed until Sept 23-26, 2021. This year's limited program will feature keynote speaker Rosemary Mosco on **September 25th and 26th**.
 More info: <https://wingsoverwillapa.org>

Coastal Purple Martin Project

By Suzy Whittey

2020 has been a successful year for the Purple Martins and the public here at the coast at both the Chinook and Ilwaco Marinas.

Thanks to funds from WHAS twelve new nest boxes were built and installed, as well as educational signs, one at each marina to inform the public about the project. I have received positive feedback from the staffs at the Ports and the public. It was fun designing the signs and working with Gopher Signs in Minnesota to have them produced them.

I chose to have nest boxes built and installed instead of the hanging gourds for many reason. The nest boxes, once installed do not need humans to clean them out each year. Because the flat bottom boxes have the entrance at floor level the martins will scrape out the nests from the previous year or add a new thin layer in the box for that years nest. The low floor level entrances discourage non-native species such as the house



sparrows and starlings because they don't like to duck and crawl into the boxes which the martins do not seem to mind doing.

We have storms that produce high winds due to the proximity to the Pacific Ocean, so the boxes are tightly secured to the pilings and do not swing like gourds. Nest boxes have been successfully used in the Pacific Northwest for over four decades and work well on pilings over the water.

In 2019 we had one pair nest in a metal freight hoist at the Chinook Marina. This year we moved the 6 boxes from last year to a better location to keep the predators from perching on the pilings above the boxes and added two more boxes. As soon as the martins arrived it was like a block party. They were singing, perching and swooping around the boxes. Six of the eight boxes are being used for nesting this year.

At the Ilwaco marina we added ten new boxes to bring the total to sixteen. Of those, fourteen boxes have pairs nesting in them as I write this is early August. Plus there are martins using holes and cavities in pilings as they have in years past. The young will fledge soon and before long the martins will head to South America where they winter.



Suzy Whittey

Board Meetings on Zoom - Members Welcome

By Steve Puddicombe

With the Covid 19 virus still on the loose the board meetings of WHAS are being held online with Zoom. One advantage to this is that our meetings are readily accessible to anyone with a computer and internet service. If you've ever wanted to attend a meeting or if you have any ideas or suggestions for the WHAS board to consider, you are welcome to attend. Suggestions might include possible future field trips or

programs to consider, or conservation concerns. The meeting will begin with an open session for guests and you will be free to leave or stay after that. Our next meeting will be in October, date, and time TBA.

Contact president@willapahillsaudubon.org for information regarding our next meeting time and password to join.

2020 Summer Update for the Cowlitz County Bird List

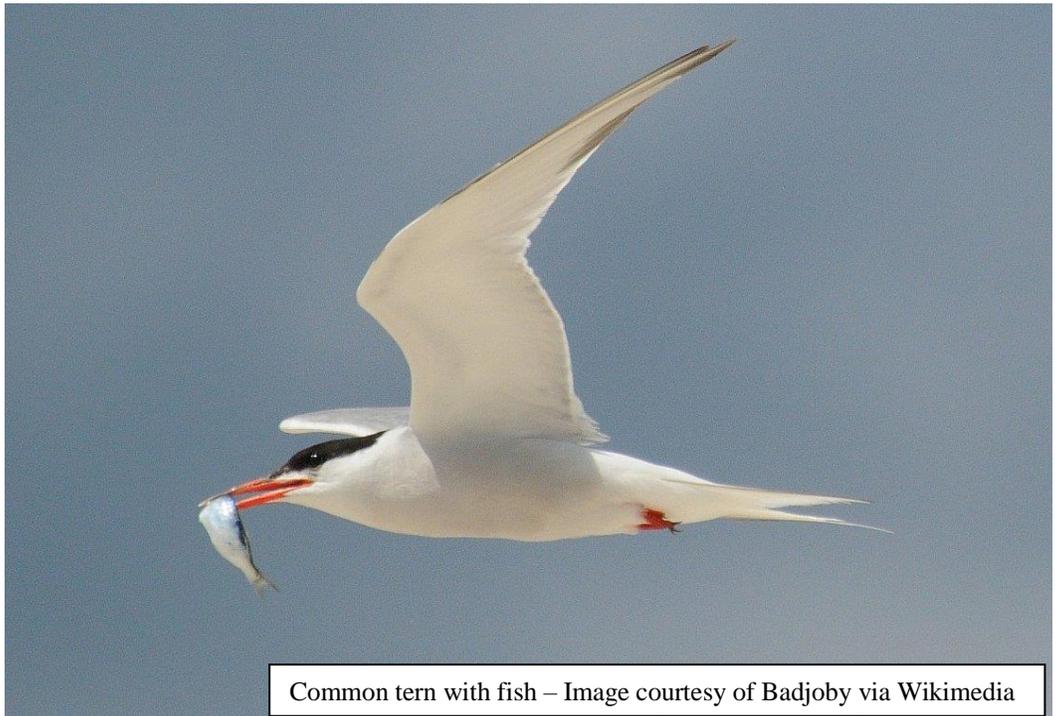
The Cowlitz County Bird List is maintained by Russ Koppendrayer.

As usual we only added a few species during July and August, having already welcomed all of our migrant nesters previously.

But of the four additions this year there were some nice finds. The rarest for the county was the **Common Tern**. This second ever record for Cowlitz County was found resting on a small sandbar in the Columbia River one afternoon and seen by five birders before the tide flooded its roosting spot and the bird was not seen again. While enjoying this bird one of the onlookers noted that in Cowlitz County the Caspian Tern is the common tern and the Common Tern is the rarer tern.

A couple of **Red-necked Phalaropes** were found on the former Longview Sewage Ponds providing the fourth record for the county. Found late in the afternoon of August 31st, they squeaked onto this list in the nick of time. **Western Sandpipers** were seen on numerous days in multiple locations to be added to the year list. Notable mostly

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



Common tern with fish – Image courtesy of Badjoby via Wikimedia

because in 2019 we inexplicably missed this normally annual species completely. Nice to have them on the list again.

ACOW 2020

The Audubon Council of Washington (ACOW) is coming to your screens over Zoom this October 2nd and 3rd. As in previous years, the Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee

(WSACC) meeting will be on Friday afternoon and ACOW on Saturday morning.

Registration and details at <http://wa.audubon.org/chapters-centers/chapter-meetings>

Vaux's Swifts are starting to roost in the Riverside Community Church chimney in Rainier

People wishing to check out this phenomenon for themselves will have the best chance from half an hour before sunset until half an hour after sunset. The southward migration of the swifts from all over the Northwest usually starts in September, affording us more opportunities to view thousands of them entering the chimney. You can watch them from the lower parking lot accessible from W C St next to Fox Creek.

Larry Schwitters of Vaux's Happening recently sent out the rankings for the top 14 roost sites on the flyway for the northbound migration Rainier's Riverside Community Church ranked second or third in all three categories! Looks like with a few more observations each season we can beat out those intrepid watchers at Joint Base Lewis-McCord. What say you?

Northbound Migration North America 2020 Rankings

	Roost Site	Total Swifts	Obs.	Average	High
1	Monroe Wagner	115,254	62	1,858	16,646
2	JBLM	68,198	42	1624	7,527
3	Rainier Riverside Church	66,261	26	2549	12,090
4	Eugene Agate	44,733	17	2631	10,517

<https://www.vauxhappening.org/north-am-nb-rankings-2020.html>

Finding a Snipe

By Thomas Bancroft

"What's that," someone said, and I whipped around. Just 10 feet off the dike at Wiley Slough sat a plump, melon-sized shorebird, standing on only one foot. It sat sideways, its long bill pointing down the log, its right eye glued on us, a perfect profile. The key field marks -- white buffy eye-stripe, crown stripe, back streaks, buffy chest, and barred sides -- were all visible.



I stuttered for several seconds before "Wilson's Snipe" came out. It was rare to have such a good view, so close. For most of my sightings, this bird had exploded out of a marsh, like a cannonball. It then zig-zagged and disappeared instantly. Their extra-large flight muscles give them that chunky look and also allow them to fly extremely fast, immediately hitting top speeds. People hunt this solitary sandpiper, and successfully shooting one is tough, taking a lot of skill. The word sniper in our lexicon comes from that ability.

Last summer, Wilson's Snipes were displaying around Roger and Tiffany Lakes in the North Cascades. In the mornings and evenings, winnowing drifted through the subalpine

landscape. Occasionally, I spotted a bird cruising across the sky, just barely visible in the subdued light. They make that sound with the outer tail feathers. Spreading the rectrices while flying, the resulting airflow vibrates. They modulate the tone by controlling the beating of their wings. That haunting chord is part of their territory defense and an advertisement for females.

They have a sexual call, too. Often given on the ground by either sex. Last summer, it had me stymied for the longest time. I kept searching for the source, never finding the bird, but finally realizing it was a snipe responding to the overhead winnowing.

The eyes on these birds are set way back on the sides of their heads. They have binocular vision out the back. Consequently, their sight is excellent while they have their bill stuck down into the mud. Their eye location is a good strategy for detecting a predator while they feed. The tip of that long bill is full of sense organs and flexible, allowing them to capture prey without having to pull it back out of the mud. Females have slightly longer bills than males.

The bird shifted position, giving us a face-on view of its pectoral muscles and the barring on its chest, but it still kept that right eye zoomed right on us. We backed slowly away, trying not to disturb it.

"Now you can tell your friends you went snipe hunting," I said to the ten people in my birding group. No one laughed; they just glared at me.

Next are two links to sound recordings. This first one is a long recording of winnowing. A yellow-rumped warbler is in it too, and the ground calls of the snipe are in the background. There is also a rail.

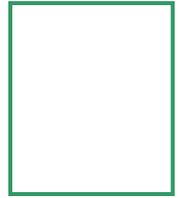
<https://soundcloud.com/tom-bancroft-2/wilsons-snipe-winnowing-yellow-rumped-warbler>

This second one is of a bird calling from the ground. It is the Wilson's Snipe song.

<https://soundcloud.com/tom-bancroft-2/wilsons-snipe-song>



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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 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.



Please recycle your *Whistler*
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Find us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Willapa-Hills-Audubon/1386609461578276>

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 at the beginning of the year.**