

# WILLAPA WHISTLER

*A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society*

Volume 50 // Issue 1

Spring 2024

WHAS membership is based on a yearly renewal date.

**All membership renewals are due in March, see page 2 for the details.**



*Bar tailed Godwit - Image by Michele Lamberti*

## A Message to Our National Members

Please become one of the National Audubon Society (NAS) members in our area who supports the local chapter, Willapa Hills Audubon Society (WHAS). Membership dues provide resources directly to the chapter. It is a very significant contribution towards local conservation work and education programs, which benefit our communities. We provide speakers and field trips open to all members of our communities free of charge.

Your membership donation to WHAS also allows us to send you a copy of our quarterly Willapa Whistler newsletter which includes project updates and event announcements. You will find more details on our member form on page 2.

Dave and his wife, Yvonne, are recent transplants to the area and new members of WHAS. They recently participated in two CBCs sponsored by WHAS. Dave enjoys leading field trips and is a welcome addition to the SW Washington birding community.

## Annual Banquet and Program

By Steve Puddicombe

After a 3 year hiatus WHAS will have an annual banquet and program this year, **Friday, March 29**, at the **Longview Women's Club**, 835 21st Ave in Longview, just east of lake Sacagawea.

We'll have a board meeting at 5 pm (set-up at 4:30) with a potluck supper to follow. Bring a salad, main dish, veg or desert to feed 6-8 people. Also bring your own table ware and serving implements, as well as a preferred beverage. Paper plates and napkins will be provided.

Our program, open to the general public, begins at 7 pm and will feature David Slater, a newcomer to the Long Beach Peninsula and avid birder. David will speak about shorebirds and their adaptive evolution.

Please join us for this lively event and meet fellow birders and conservation enthusiasts. If you can, RSVP Gloria Nichols [jgnt@comcast.net](mailto:jgnt@comcast.net), 360-636-3793

### Program features Shorebird Strategies

Willapa Hills Audubon Society is pleased to announce this year's annual banquet

program. **Adaptive Strategies of Shorebirds** will be presented at the Longview Women's Club, 835 21st Ave, Longview, at 7 pm, Friday, March 29, 2024. All are welcome.

Shorebirds are a fun and fascinating group of birds that have adapted to their environment physically, behaviorally, and physiologically to improve their chances at survival. Naturalist David Slater will lead a photo-based discussion to discuss some of these adaptations.

Join us for this investigation into our coastal bird life.

Dave Slater earned an M.S. degree in zoology and has had careers as a marine biologist, radiobiologist, environmental chemist, and aerospace project manager. He collaborated to publish research on Bowhead whale feeding, studied the adaptive strategies of a crustacean and led marine intertidal field trips for zoology students. Dave has taught or assisted in teaching five university zoology courses and has presented at many professional and community gatherings.

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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 or debit card use our online form on our website at <https://www.willapahillsaudubon.org/join-renew-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 \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**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.

✂ \_\_\_\_\_ -Clip

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<b>Membership:</b>	<b>vacant</b>	
<b>Finance:</b>	<b>vacant</b>	
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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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

### Othello Sandhill Crane Festival 2024

The 2024 Othello Sandhill Crane Festival is scheduled to be held for **March 22-24, 2024**. Celebrate their return and discover why nearly 35,000 sandhill cranes choose Othello...  
More info: <https://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/>

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### Olympic BirdFest 2024

**April 11-14, 2024**  
The April dates of Olympic BirdFest are timed to overlap wintering birds such as Harlequin and Long tailed ducks, songbirds, and seabirds with spring migration.  
Field trips are planned for [Sequim Bay](#), Port Angeles Harbor, Ediz Hook, [Dungeness Spit](#) and the Elwha River, as well as trips through wooded areas and fields to view songbirds.  
A [cruise around Protection Island](#) National Wildlife Refuge is available on Sunday morning.  
More info and BirdFest registration at [www.olympicbirdfest.org](http://www.olympicbirdfest.org).

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### Get Intimate with the Shrub Steppe

**May 10 - 12, 2024**  
The Kittitas Environmental Education Network (KEEN) invites you to the 25th annual Get Intimate with the Shrub Steppe (GISS), a community event highlighting the endangered shrub-steppe habitat in Central Washington.  
It's filled with expert guided field trips with birding, geology, snakes and reptiles, fish and river bugs, history, and more.  
Educational booths are set up with free educational materials and live animals. Saturday evening brings a keynote speaker with a shrub-steppe focused theme.  
More at <https://www.ycic.org/giss>

## Learning About the Life of John James Audubon

By Robert Sudar

**Editors note: see page 4 for information about changing WHAS's name!**

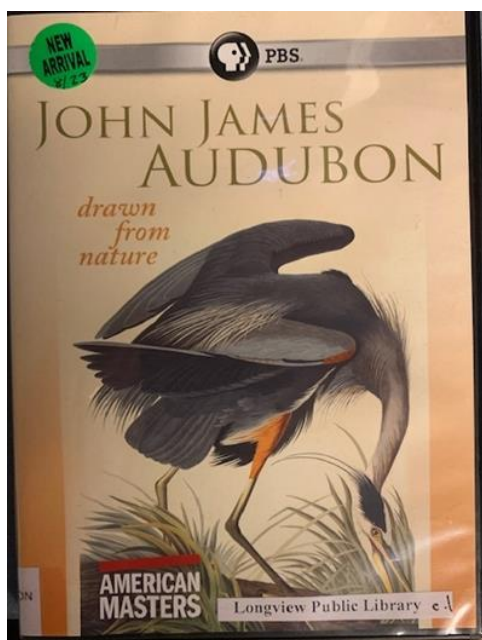
Who was John James Audubon, and why is his name used to grace the title of one of the premier conservation organizations in America? What did he do besides his drawings of birds? What were his actions as an immigrant, as a businessman, and as a naturalist? Those questions, and their answers, are driving recent discussions about diversity, equity, and changing the name of Audubon Society chapters to something reflective of protecting birds and bird habitat.

There was an article by our chapter president, Steve Puddicombe, in a previous issue of the Willapa Whistler that discussed an ongoing investigation by a subgroup of our chapter board into the life of John James Audubon and whether his name should be removed from our organization title. The root of the issue is recent information that has been brought to light about Mr. Audubon's personal life and actions outside of his bird artistry. For instance, it is known that he owned slaves at one time, and later sold them. He also provided skulls to scientists who were looking for links between race, physical features and intelligence. This subject may be abhorrent to us today, but it was a common field of study until the 1940's and there was coursework in that field, called Eugenics, at many major universities.

For our discussion, what sources are available to understand the life of Mr. Audubon? Wikipedia has a thorough discussion of his life, as do other online sources. Locally, the Longview Public Library has two videos about his life.

**The first is "Drawn From Nature", a 2004 PBS production for their American Masters series.**

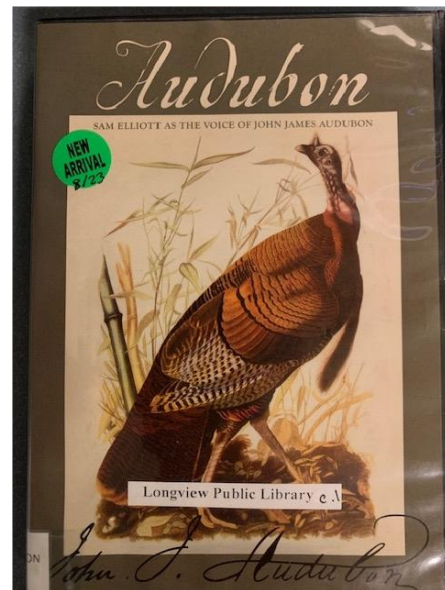
This video is focused on Audubon's work with birds and the radical change in bird artistry that he initiated. It does talk about his early years before he embarked on his signature work "The Birds of America", his struggles as a businessman and having to travel to England to find sponsors and to get his book published, but it doesn't mention anything about slavery or his other activities that have recently provided



additional insights into his life beyond birds. As with most American Masters productions, it is very watchable.

**The second video is entitled simply "Audubon" and is a 2017 release from Rare Avis Productions.**

Though considerably more recent, it still precedes the equity and inclusion movements that have brought into question Audubon's personal life and activities outside of his art. There are two versions on this CD – a 90 minute and a 60 minute. I watched the longer one and it did mention that he owned several slaves, and that he did sell them when



his businesses faltered. It was equally viewable and perhaps even a little better than the PBS video in how it wove dramatic recreations with artwork to tell at least part of Audubon's life story.

Both of these videos provide an appreciation for what Audubon's new inroads into bird art brought to the knowledge of birds at the time and how they later were used to help with the protection of some bird species. They also discuss his interest in nature, even though he probably collected thousands of birds with his shotgun in order to study them throughout his life and to complete his paintings. His methods are no secret. Nor are the facts that he was born into a slaveholding society in Haiti, that he spent his youth in France and that his father bought him a farm and a lead mine in Pennsylvania before he could be conscripted into Napoleon's army. He was more interested in nature than in managing the farm so he sold part of it and moved to Kentucky, and then to Missouri, and eventually moved his family to Louisiana, having spent a good portion of his life in slaveholding states. He died in 1851, a decade before the Civil War brought the issue of slavery to a head. He was a great storyteller, including tales of spending time with slaves during his forays into the wild but also of helping return them to their owners. He clearly didn't oppose slavery. Less is known about his collection of human remains for scientific studies that were popular at the time, though such activities would be an anathema to us today. In many ways John James Audubon was a man of his times. Perhaps these videos can provide some additional insights for the viewer in regards to his character and whether including his name provides a good representation of birding and our Willapa Hills Audubon chapter today.

## Announcements

**By Steve Puddicombe, President**

Birding Folks:

This issue of the Whistler is chock full of information for our local chapter members and the national Audubon members in our area, as this is our annual edition sent to all. If you are a chapter member, please note it is time to renew your membership. All should note we have our annual banquet and program coming up at the end of March, and several programs and field trips planned.

For chapter members we have inserts including a ballot for officers and a query about our continued investigation into changing our name. Please send us your opinion.

Finally, WHAS still has need of committee members and volunteers.

We need program and field trip coordinators, and our vice president chair is now empty. Beyond that we can always use volunteers for educational programs and other events. Consider helping this worthy organization with some of your time and energy!

Happy Birding!

## Field Trip to West Longview Locations

Join Russ Koppendrayner and Becky Kent on April 27, 2024 for a morning of birding at some west Longview locations. A great time to be out as spring migration will be ramping up and there should be some lingering winter birds as well as year round residents. We'll visit some dikes along drainage canals, the decommissioned former sewage treatment ponds, and Willow Grove Park.

Expect to walk a little over 2 miles on very level smooth gravel or paved roads. All are gated, so no traffic to deal with. We'll meet at 8AM and plan to be done by noon. Guides will have spotting scopes, but definitely bring binoculars and any other optics you wish. Bring any snacks and liquids you'll need. Dress for the weather and wear comfortable walking shoes.

To sign up or address any questions contact Russ at [russkope@gmail.com](mailto:russkope@gmail.com).

## Birding Walks at Fort Stevens

Rangers at Fort Stevens, near Astoria, OR., have been hosting birding walks at the popular state park. These walks are open to beginning birders. If interested, you can get on the email list at [Dane.OSIS@opr.d.oregon.gov](mailto:Dane.OSIS@opr.d.oregon.gov).

## Name Change

**By Steve Puddicombe**

The Willapa Hills Audubon Board voted a year ago to look into changing our name. This was because of recent historical notations of Audubon's life as a slaveholder and occasionally unethical entrepreneur.

Several chapters of Audubon have changed their names or have begun that process. National Audubon voted to retain the name it has had for 119 years.

You will see elsewhere in this and prior issues our own discussion of a name change, with many of the pros and cons involved, (aside from having to change all our stationary, mailing envelopes and insignia).

**Now, we want to hear from you.**

Below are some name options to choose from, and also an option not to change the name at all. If you would like to leave comments add them on another sheet or contact us via the website - we want to hear from you.

Please take a little time to consider this possible change, then mark your preference or write in a suggested name. Clip and send in along with your board election ballot. Thank you!

Mark one choice below or insert a suggestion.

- Willapa Hills Birding Society
- Willapa Hills Birders
- Lower Columbia Avian Association
- Willapa Hills Bird Alliance
- \_\_\_\_\_  
(suggested name change)
- NO change in name

## Field Trip to Leadbetter State Park

April 20, 2024, 9 a.m.--noon

Meeting place: Northernmost parking lot at the north end of Stackpole Rd./Highway 103

Kathleen Sayce and Dave Slater will co-lead a Birding and Botanizing walk in a beautiful area that often has large concentrations of migrating birds, and also interesting plants and lichens. The walk is mostly on level firm ground; in addition to birding, there will be frequent stops to learn about plants. Total distance is about one mile.

Group size is limited to 12. Advance sign up is required. Sign up by contacting Dave Slater: [slaterDL7@gmail.com](mailto:slaterDL7@gmail.com). On the subject line, please put "[your name] - Birding and Botanizing at Leadbetter Point SP".

Binoculars required. Spotting scopes helpful. Mosquito repellent recommended. Weather appropriate gear, water and snack. Discovery Pass is required for all vehicles, as the parking area is in the state park. Signing a liability release form will be required to participate. No pets.

## Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey tallies 31

By Darrel Whipple

Bald Eagles appear to be doing fairly well in the local area. The annual Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey sponsored by Willapa Hills Audubon turned up 31 eagles, five of which were sub-adults -- young ones not yet sporting white heads and tails.

That is a good sign that replacements for older birds are coming along.

Steve Hemenway and I conducted the survey on Sunday, January 28, 2024, covering the roughly 120-mile vehicle route in eight hours. Temperature was 55+ and visibility was good. Rivers were running high and brown, especially the Kalama, where no eagles (or fishermen) were observed.

WHAS volunteers 'way back in 1979 pioneered the route -- basically north along the Cowlitz River to the I-5 bridge and south to the Port of Kalama, with short side trips on tributary rivers. That first survey yielded just one eagle. Subsequent surveys netted fewer than ten birds for a number of years before we began to see an increase.

OK, I confess: Maybe some of the apparent increase has more to do with who did the observing than with absolute population gains. Steve Hemenway, after all, is one helluva Bald Eagle spotter!

It was Steve who was my partner when we tallied our three previous high counts: 2016 (24 eagles), 2018 (26), and 2020 (74), the latter during a Feb. 25 smelt run. This year's total of 31 Bald Eagles is a new record for the survey's usual time frame of the last half of January.

I have been lucky to have Steve's help in those times when he and Deb are not tending to their small farm in Gustavus, Alaska. I thank you, Steve. And WHAS thanks you!



Other species noted on January 28th included 99 Tundra Swans, 2,000 Scaups, 5 Red-tailed Hawks, 2 Kestrels, 30 other avian species, plus a beaver, a harbor seal and about a dozen resting sea lions.

WHAS's Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey covers two latitude-longitude blocks along the Cowlitz and Columbia rivers, originally assigned to WHAS as part of a nationwide study of eagle populations that ran from 1979 to 1989, coordinated by the National Wildlife Federation.

## Wahkiakum Christmas Bird Count 2023

By Andrew Emlen

For the 26th annual Wahkiakum Christmas Bird Count, we had 25 field observers and one feederwatcher, including 4 people in kayaks covering the islands.

We tallied 37,198 individuals of 113 species, plus 2 additional count week species (Snow Goose and Barred Owl). This is above our average for number of species, though there were fewer individuals than in recent years.

The most abundant birds were Greater Scaup (8793), Cackling Goose (8603), and European Starling (2447). New to the count were a Franklin's Gull and a Long-eared Owl, both on Puget Island. A Mallard X Northern Pintail hybrid was on Tenasillahe Island. Just one of the endangered "Streaked" Horned

Larks was found on Whites Island; presumably the main flock was on the east end of the island, outside the count circle. Species missed include Merlin, Ruffed Grouse, and Red-throated Loon.

Of the species for which we set new high counts, the species which showed the greatest percentage increase was Black Phoebe with 26 (previous high 12). New high counts were also set for Eurasian Wigeon with 5, California Quail with 7 (only seen on one previous count), Great Egret (54), Spotted Sandpiper (7), American Kestrel (43), and Orange-crowned Warbler (6).

Thank you to all who participated in making this a successful count!

## 2023 Willapa Christmas Bird Count

By Robert Sudar, Willapa CBC Compiler

On December 16th, 2023, fifteen counters and one feeder watcher in 8 sectors of the Willapa Bay Christmas Bird Count circle enjoyed beautiful weather (for December) while completing the annual tally of bird species for a count occurring (almost) annually since 1978. The weather was a sharp contrast to some recent years – 2021 was notable for the sideways rain and the steady strong wind – but moderate temperatures, dry skies and calm breezes were a welcome sight this past year.

A total of 92 species were seen on count day, and another 10(!) were seen or heard during count week (3 days on either side of count day), mostly by Kathleen Sayce of Oysterville. Thanks, Kathleen! The calm winds lead to calm water on the Bay, and that was helpful for seeing ducks and shorebirds that can be a challenge to record if the weather doesn't cooperate.

As usual, there were several notable unusual sightings - 3 Barrow's Goldeneyes were seen for the first time on this count in over 40 years. Black Phoebe, a species first spotted on this count in 2021, was seen in two sectors this year. Other unusual sightings were a Marbled Godwit and 4 Long-billed Dowitchers.

On the other side of the count ledger, there were notable absences this year, too. No Red-breasted Sapsuckers, Mourning

Doves, Brown Creepers, Hermit Thrushes, or American Coots were seen. Coot counts were as high as 120 in the late 1990s but have been seen very sporadically, and in much smaller numbers, since then and haven't been seen at all during the count since 2019.

In contrast, the first Anna's Hummingbird was recorded on this count in 1981 and a specimen was seen only occasionally until around 2004 when numbers began increasing each year to a peak of 82 in 2020. "Only" 18 were seen this year but that is closer to the 20-25 range often counted since the winter population expanded.

There was also good news for a population that is getting extra protection on the peninsula to help it recover - 25 Snowy Plovers, the most since 1978, were seen on count day.

The total of 92 species was a slight increase over the last few years and the additional 10 for count week (which can be added to the species list if they aren't seen on count day) pushed the total species to 102, the most since 2017. And considering that there were 34 counters in 2017 and 16 this year, 91 and 102 are great results. Pleasant weather and cooperative birds – what more could you ask for on a Christmas Bird Count?

## Cowlitz/Columbia Christmas Bird Count Wrap Up

By Russ Koppendrayer

The 42<sup>nd</sup> annual Cowlitz/Columbia Christmas Bird Count was held on December 30, 2023 in a break from the traditional New Year's Day date. After many years of Bob Reistroffer ably holding the Coordinator/Compiler duties he passed the reins on to Becky Kent. She made this date change in an effort to boost sagging participation in recent years. There was almost a 50% increase in participation from last year, but time will tell if this will be sustainable over the years. There were 19 individuals split into 10 teams covering 13 areas in the 15 mile diameter count circle centered in the Columbia River just downstream of the Lewis and Clark Bridge. Also participating were 6 feeder watchers. There definitely is lots of opportunity for more people to be involved in future years. Experience doing counts and birding expertise are not required and this is an opportunity to be in the field with more experienced birders. More eyes will find more birds.

Highlights included the first ever count day visit to a Columbia River Island. Thanks to Andrew Emlen and Jake Bonello for kayaking to Cottonwood Island. At the little pizzeria get together count evening they were excited to report finding a large area of flat short grass habitat on the downstream portion of the island. Here they encountered 80 Horned Larks which eclipsed the previous high count of 22 individuals. They also found 27 Least Sandpipers, which were the first ever on the count for this species. It was actually more surprising that this was a first for the count as this is a fairly common winter species in southwest Washington. Other species new for count day were a Northern Pygmy-Owl found in the hills south of Rainier and a

Barn Swallow seen at the end of Fibre Way. The fact that the owl was a first ever was also a surprise as there seems to be much good habitat for this species in the circle. The swallow was part of an influx of Barn Swallows into western Washington from late December and continuing into January. They have been reported almost to the Canadian border. This phenomenon has happened in other winters of Barn Swallows making a sudden mid-winter appearance, but reasons are only speculation to date.

Red Crossbills were also an all time new species to the count as a count week bird. Count week constitutes the 3 days before and the three days after count day and is limited to species not noted on count day. They are added to the species seen on count day, but the number of individuals is not recorded. There were 14,794 individuals of 100 species on count day and an additional 13 count week species. These numbers were a little above average for the last 15 years.

In addition to the previously mentioned Horned Larks there were 5 additional species where all time high counts were recorded:

- Common Goldeneye 245>126
- Double-crested Cororant 445>357
- Cooper's Hawk 5>4
- Bald Eagle 66>63
- White-breasted Nuthatch 4>2
- 2 American Dipper tied the previous high mark

## Children's Discovery Museum Science Saturday

By Ann Cordero

Many interesting and exciting activities are being planned for 2024 at the Children's Discovery Museum! Located at 1209 Commerce Avenue in Longview, this free museum serves children of all ages. Willapa Audubon Society sponsors their Nature Niche exhibit.

Science Saturdays or Science Sundays are monthly programs, each with a theme and activities on a particular aspect of science. February 24 was First Responders' Day, when the sheriff, coroner, chaplain, fire departments, Emergency Services, and health care organizations were represented. The next Science Saturday will be the unveiling of the museum's new exhibit on NASA and Space on March 16 from 10-2. CDM will be closed for exhibit construction from February 26 through March 15. On March 16 the young space scientists will be able to participate in four stations complete with videos. Mission Control will give an overview of NASA. The Moon Landing will be celebrated with a jungle gym moon rover, a moonscape backdrop, and a planetarium. The Mars station will feature a

rover and a slide painted as a rocket. In addition, the exhibit will have a Star Wars component. The museum is proud to present a Space Camp from April 1-5. Check CDM's Facebook page and website [www.cowlitzcdm.com](http://www.cowlitzcdm.com) for details.

Future exhibits will include a forestry exhibit featuring Weyerhaeuser and NORPAC, a small robotics exhibit partnering with Lower Columbia College, an "In the Depths of the Ocean" program, and a holiday exhibit. These offerings will be accompanied by a Science Saturday or Sunday or either a camp or a class. The Science Saturday in May will commemorate the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens. In August sports will be emphasized. And the museum hopes to begin Parenting classes.

And there is another surprise, and we hope that it involves you! Willapa Hills Audubon Society is presenting a Science Sunday about birds on June 2 from 1-3! See the accompanying article about the activities we are planning to host that day! Come join in the fun!

## Share Your Love of Birds with Kids on June 2 at the Children's Discovery Museum

By Ann Cordero

We invite you to join other Willapa Hills Audubon Society members in providing a two hour Science program on birds at the Children's Discovery Museum on June 2, 2024 from 1-3. Our volunteers will be presenting several ways for participants to experience and become more familiar with our avian friends.

Taxidermy mounts from the WHAS collection will give visitors a closer look at birds and volunteers will help kids and their parents appreciate and observe them gently. Some mounts will be placed at a distance to give young birders practice with binoculars. Our wooden wings will be ready to show how human "wingspans" measure up to those of birds. We will be featuring bird art, including coloring pages and free-hand drawing. If we have enough people helping, kids will be able to extract rodent

bones from owl pellets. We will have a table with field guides set up for kids to start their life lists and feathers that even babies can move through the air. The Nature Niche exhibit will be open. If you have any suggestions or ways of presenting ornithology to others, we welcome those additions.

The museum emphasizes interaction between children and adults, and if this would be fun for you we are eager to have you join us. Teenage volunteers are welcome, too. The event will also be a good opportunity to visit the museum and see what it has to offer the children of Cowlitz County. If you are interested in participating, please contact Ann Cordero by email at [flnatureniche@gmail.com](mailto:flnatureniche@gmail.com). We hope to see you there!

### Vaux Swift Program with Larry Schwitters

Join Larry Schwitters, National Audubon's most recent William Dutcher award recipient, in a zoom program to be held at 7 pm, Wednesday, April 17, 2024.

Schwitters is the champion of the Vaux Swift and has organized and compiled the counting of their numbers during migration all along the Pacific flyway.

He'll educate us about Swifts and tell us more about his project known as Vaux's Happenings. The program will be about an hour, with some time for questions.

We'll announce the zoom link at our website [willapahillsaudubon.org](http://willapahillsaudubon.org) a week prior to the event and also announce via our alert list.

More information about the alert system here: <https://willapahillsaudubon.org/get-involved/member-services>

### Washington Ornithological Society Annual Conference at Long Beach, WA

**April 25-28**

The Washington Ornithological Society (WOS) has announced that this year's annual conference will be held in Long Beach, WA.

WOS is busy recruiting trip leaders and arranging for evening programs. It plans to offer half and full day field trips, including potential pelagic trips, if possible.

The keynote speaker will be well-known photographer Gerrit Vin, who will speak on global shorebirds that nest in the North American arctic.

More information will be forthcoming at <https://wos.org> as it becomes available.

## The Best Gift of All

By Cathy Kendall

It was three days before Christmas and I was wrapping the last few gifts on our dining room table, which faces a small patio. This patio has a sloped roof with two large skylights and is our favorite outdoor spot in warm weather. Whenever it's cool and damp, however, swarms of little black gnats gather beneath the skylights. Though they don't hurt anything, they're annoying, and I don't want them in the house.

We don't use insecticides. The pest control folks come around every year offering to spray the perimeter of our house, and every year I send them packing, explaining that we love birds and have no intention of killing the spiders and insects around our house. Even if we did use pesticides, we wouldn't use them on the patio, home to a pair of elderly domestic doves in a large cage. Our solution to the gnat problem is to simply avoid opening the sliding glass door when they are present. It's not much of an issue, as we normally go in and out the utility room door off the kitchen anyway.

At any rate, I was cutting the last piece of wrapping paper when my husband wandered into to the room and said, "Hey, there's a bird on the patio—it's eating gnats!" I dropped what I was doing and hurried to the glass door. What should meet my eyes but the delightful yellow and black striped face of a Townsend's warbler! Though they frequently visit our suet feeders (on the opposite side of the house) during winter, I had never seen one on the patio before.

This one was chowing down on the hapless gnats, clearly reveling in the easy pickings. We both stood, transfixed, for more than ten minutes while our tiny visitor ate its fill. It would fly down and rest on the roof of the dove cage for a minute or two then flutter back up for more tasty bugs. Seeing it up close was mesmerizing. For those few minutes, I stopped worrying about whether I'd bought everyone the rights gifts, made enough treats, or purchased enough groceries. I stopped

stressing over whether everyone would get along when we gathered in three days and focused solely on the gorgeous little creature in front of me.

It occurred to me at that moment that no matter how Christmas went, welcoming a warbler was the best gift of all, and so it proved to be. The warbler returned multiple times in the



coming days, at one point delighting our guests with its acrobatics. The gnats are gone now but the warbler continues to visit our suet feeders and once in a while, it checks the patio skylights again for stragglers. Best pest control ever, and definitely my favorite Christmas gift of 2023.

## Wenas Campout

May 31-June 2, 2024

You are invited to a celebration of birds, bats, butterflies, botany, and the beauty of spring in eastern Washington. Each year, Audubon chapters and their friends gather for a few days of camping, birding, and exploring the Wenas Wildlife Area near Ellensburg, WA.

The casual and friendly gathering offers a variety of activities, including birding field trips, wildflower walks, field sketching, activities for the youngest explorers, and evening campfire presentations.

Come for the weekend or a single day. There is no charge to attend, and no registration is required. Donations are accepted for organizing costs, including sanitation service.

Information on dispersed camping, activities, and what to expect are on the website, [wenasaudubon.org](http://wenasaudubon.org)



- Image of Bullock's Oriole by Carol Kohler





## Royce Craig

Royce Craig, longtime contributor to the Willapa Whistler passed away in December at the age of 76.

A lifelong birder, he grew up in New Mexico and came to the Pacific Northwest in the 1980s, making his career as a chemical engineer in the lumber industry. An avid nature enthusiast, Royce was at his best outdoors, pursuing hobbies such as landscaping, gardening, golfing, and photography.

Frequently traveling with his wife Beth, he visited nearly every wildlife refuge in the Pacific Northwest regularly, with Malheur National Wildlife Refuge topping their list of favorites. When he was visiting family in New Mexico, Texas and other southern states, Royce was rarely seen without his camera or binoculars in hand.

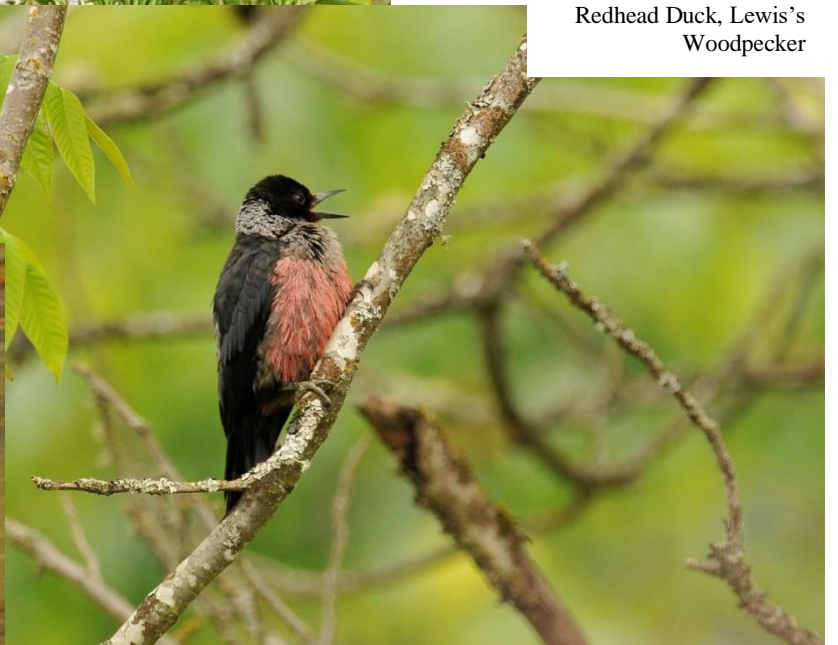
Several years ago, Royce established a Purple Martin colony in his own backyard, a source of great pride and enjoyment. Making their home in Cowlitz County, Royce and Beth have spent decades living a sustainable



lifestyle while building a habitat for wildlife on their property, planting native plant species, ensuring shelter and water for pollinators, and providing feeders and nest boxes for a large variety of birds and other wildlife.

You can find a selection of his photos at [willapahillsaudubon.org/royce\\_craig](http://willapahillsaudubon.org/royce_craig)

Left:  
Caliopo Hummingbird  
Below:  
Redhead Duck, Lewis's  
Woodpecker



## 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.

### Friday, March 29, 2024 at 5pm

Annual Banquet and Program, find all the details on page one

### Friday, March 29, 2024 at 7pm

Program: Adaptive Strategies of Shorebirds with Dave Slater, more info on page one

### Wednesday, April 17, 2024 at 7pm

WHAS will have a short program via zoom with Larry Schwitters on the Vaux Swift program. We'll send out the zoom info later, watch our website and/or signup for our email list (see below).

### April 20, 2024, 9 am

Field Trip to Leadbetter State Park, find more information on page four

### Saturday, April 27, 2024

Field Trip to West Longview Locations, more info on page four

### Sunday, May 12, 2024, 6pm

Vaux Swift Dinner and Viewing  
Dinner at El Tapatio in Rainier, Ore at 6pm. Afterwards observe the Vaux Swift at W 3rd Street at the Riverside Community Church.

Don't forget to **vote** for  
**WHAS Board Officers!**

See ballot attached to this issue  
for all local WHAS members!

### 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 [whistler.willapahillsaudubon.org](https://whistler.willapahillsaudubon.org) for this and past issues.

**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: <https://willapahillsaudubon.org/get-involved/member-services>**

Find us on Facebook at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/willapahillsaudubon/>

Please recycle your *Whistler*  
or pass it on to a friend.



**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).

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



PO Box 399  
Longview, WA 98632

