



# WILLAPA WHISTLER

*A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society*

Volume 52 // Issue 2

Summer 2026



*Chestnut backed Chickadee*

## WHAS Summer Picnic Invitation

By Larry Turner

Our annual WHAS picnic is coming up on Saturday, Aug 8, from 2-5 PM at the Turner residence in Rose Valley. Attendees are asked to bring one covered dish (a salad, entree, dessert or snack) to feed 4 to 6 people. Each person should bring their own plates, cups and tableware. Ice, water, iced tea, napkins, paper towels, tables and chairs will be provided. We will have tables, chairs and sun (or rain) protection.

The Turner residence is about 8 miles up into Rose Valley, elevation 500 feet. To get to the Turner house from Longview take Tennant Way east towards I-5. Stay in the left lane to head towards Seattle & Kelso Drive. Then continue in the left lane (towards Kelso Drive) to the roundabout.

Take the first "exit" South (not counting the freeway entrance into the roundabout) on to Highway 99 south. In one mile take a left on Rose Valley Rd. After 5.1 miles on winding Rose Valley Road, turn right [slight uphill right] on

South Goble Creek Road and wind your way about a mile until you pass a large white barn on the right; then turn right on very steep Zillig Rd. After 0.4 miles, turn left on Jensen Rd - we'll have a black on yellow "TURNER" sign on the mailbox. We are the second driveway on the right. There should be quite adequate room to park on the pavement.

We look forward to seeing you.

### Next WHAS Board Meeting:

**Saturday, June 27<sup>th</sup> at 10am**

Location: TBA,

For more info check with any board member on page 2.

## Help With an Audubon Field Trip

By David Slater

**Do you enjoy birds, nature, and sharing discoveries with others?**

We are looking for volunteers to help lead or co-lead field trips for our Audubon chapter.

You do not need to be an expert birder. Friendly people who enjoy learning, encouraging others, and spending time outdoors are exactly what we need.

Field trips can include birding walks, wildlife and botany viewing, beach explorations, wetland visits, or simple nature walks. Experienced leaders are happy to mentor newer volunteers.

If you have a favorite local spot, enjoy helping beginners, would like to assist on occasional outings, or know someone who could lead or help with a field trip, we would love to hear from you.

To learn more or volunteer, please contact contact Dave Slater at [DSLater.Fieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:DSLater.Fieldtrips@gmail.com)

### In this issue of the Whistler:

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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.

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Please indicate any **new** information:  
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 Email  
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**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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

### Rainier Audubon Nature Festival

**June 6, 2026**, at Flaming Gysler State Park, Auburn - free Pass Day  
 More info here <https://rainieraudubon.org/>

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### Puget Sound Bird Fest

**June 6-7, 2026** in Edmonds, WA  
 Become more aware of the importance of all the connected habitats in the watershed, from the upland forested parks and natural areas, through the streams and marshes down to the intertidal and nearshore areas of Puget Sound.  
 More info here: <https://www.pugetsoundbirdfest.com>

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### WCNC Jr. Naturalists Summer Camp

The Wildlife Center of the North Coast (WCNC) is a wildlife rehabilitation and conservation education center based in Astoria, Oregon. They organize summer camps in July for grades 1-3, 3-5, and 6-8. More info at: <https://coastwildlife.org/summer-camp/>

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### BirdFest & Bluegrass Festival

**October 3, 2026**  
 BirdFest and Bluegrass is the main event every year that the Friends & the City of Ridgefield put on to bring awareness to Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, and all that it has to offer. We celebrate the Sandhill Crane returning to the Refuge, a huge stately bird that is endangered in Washington State, and we celebrate everything the Refuge is and what it brings to the community.  
 More info at <https://ridgefieldfriends.org/birdfest-bluegrass/>

## Audubon SW Washington Regional Meeting

By Robert Sudar

Audubon Washington held a SW Washington Regional Meeting in Chehalis on Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>. Chapters from Vancouver, Grays Harbor and other areas south of Puget Sound were represented, about a dozen in all, and I was able to attend part of the meeting for our Willapa Hills chapter. A good portion of the meeting was devoted to each chapter discussing what projects they were working on and also the challenges they face. Here are a few examples:

- The Hoquiam chapter in Grays Harbor sponsors the shorebird festival each year and it is a success, but it also takes a lot of work. They struggle with growing the membership and including more local residents. One recent project was sponsoring a large mural of local birds painted on the side of a local building in downtown Hoquiam, where it would be visible to pedestrians and motorists. A local artist did the work and it came out very nicely.
- The Tahoma chapter leases a house south of Tacoma and sets up bird feeders outside. People in the community – members and non-members – can sign up to monitor the feeders and record what is seen. It's been a great way to introduce new birders to local species and they've added some members, too. I thought this was a great idea but I haven't come up with a great place to do something similar in the Longview/Kelso area.
- Several chapters mentioned using Instagram and Facebook and similar media platforms for advertising their chapter activities and attracting younger members. They claim it has been a positive effort for them. I occasionally look at

Facebook but I know that my children use a variety of social media. Anyone proficient with these in our chapter?

- Lights Out Washington, a regional effort promoting reducing artificial lighting to improve bird safety during migration, is a program every chapter can be involved in. A social Media toolkit is available from Audubon Washington.

I discussed the things we've done over the years – promoting protection for Mt. St. Helens and the northern half of Long Island in Willapa Bay, organizing multiple Christmas Bird Counts each year, replacing the bird ID signs at Lake Sacajawea, etc. I also missed a few like the Purple Martin nest boxes – something to mention next time! And when I said that we usually contribute around \$20,000 a year to various worthy projects in our region a lot of jaws dropped. Our financial situation is unique compared to most chapters in our region (and probably beyond). The way we use that financial foundation is a tribute to the member who created it at her passing, and to the chapter as a whole for supporting that generous tradition every year.

Overall, attending the meeting was a very positive experience. Though we struggle with total membership growth and enough active members to “keep the ball rolling”, we continue to accomplish a lot for having the smallest active chapter in the state. I'd definitely consider attending again next year – and being better prepared! It's good to know what other chapters are doing, and that we aren't alone when facing chapter challenges!

## 2026 Earthday Recap

By Ann Cordero

Earth Day was celebrated in two locations in Cowlitz County this year on April 25. WHAS participated in the event held at the Children's Discovery Museum with an outdoor table offering some of our chapter's taxidermy mounts on view and the wooden wings measuring visitors' “wingspans”. There were five organizations exhibiting and WHAS was the most visible among them. Carolyn Norred and Ann Cordero spent the afternoon staffing the exhibit.

There was a larger Earth Day celebration at the Lower Columbia School Gardens site at Northlake Elementary School in Longview. Visitors were invited to walk through the garden, which proved to be larger than many participants had realized, to stop at various booths of ecological and conservation interest, and to eat delicious pizza prepared from corn grown and processed at the garden.

Last year the Longview Parks and Recreation department discontinued its sizeable Earth Day events after 20 years of hosting the celebration. The organizations which now offer Earth Day events, the Children's Discovery Museum and the Lower Columbia School Gardens, both receive grants from the Willapa Hills Audubon Society. We appreciate their stewardship of Earth Day and hope the tradition will continue locally. I hope to see everyone again next year!

*Ann Cordero measures Danielle Robinson, whose “wingspan” is comparable to that of a bald eagle. Photo by Carolyn Norred*



## Secretive Bird Survey

By Robert and Lisa Sudar

The Puget Sound Bird Observatory organizes a Secretive Bird Survey each year to try and gain a better understanding of the populations of several wetland bird species that, in most cases, are difficult to see. Think Virginia Rail. Or American Bittern. There are actually six species of interest – the Rail and Bittern, plus Sora, Green Heron, Pied-bill Grebe and Marsh Wren. I don't think I've ever seen a Sora!

The organizers of the survey, led by Cindy Easterson, have investigated likely wetlands throughout the Puget Sound area – around 140 in all. This year, several in the Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay area were added. They investigated likely wetlands and identified viewing/listening sites within each wetland (typically one to five possible sites). A latitude/longitude “pin” is provided for each location within a wetland so that the surveyors can be certain there is continuity in where the recording is being done. The survey timeframe is broken into (roughly) three groups – late March to mid-April, late April to mid-May and late May to early June. Surveyors are encouraged to do at least four different site surveys within those three options, so it's not too demanding.

The methods, however, might be considered somewhat controversial compared to normal birding “protocols”. Since these birds often don't show themselves willingly, a recording is provided to each surveyor, along with a speaker and a rangefinder. The recording consists of five minutes of silence, followed by one minute each of sounds of the Rail, Sora, Bittern, Green Heron and Grebe. There is no recording of the Marsh Wren because they tend to be vocal anyway and aren't afraid to announce their presence or to comment on your violation of their territory. The surveyor plays the recording through twice at each “pin”, making note of hearing, or possibly seeing, each species. The rangefinder is used to estimate how far in the wetland the bird might be. I don't know if using a recording is seriously bad birding etiquette or not, but I have to agree that it can be difficult to experience a chance sighting of at least some of these species.

You are also asked to record other bird species seen or heard at each location, though that information is supplemental to the project goals.

Lisa and I have done two surveys in the Willapa Bay area and have two more to do, up in the Grayland area. How did the first ones go? Well, it wasn't very “birdy”, at least not for the species we were looking for. The first site at the south end of Willapa didn't result in any sightings or sounds of the target species. The second – two locations along the Marth Jordan Birding Trail – picked up a Virginia Rail in the wetland behind us! But it still counted and so it wasn't a total bust. We also heard a Marsh Wren but I would have expected to hear more of them at all locations considering where we were and our experience with them in the past. And we did hear/see a variety of other species so overall it was a satisfying morning of birding from my perspective. Lisa, however, might not agree!

What did we learn? Even though we didn't have much luck with the target species, we do have a much better understanding of the sounds they make and their typical behaviors. We also learned that when birding near wetlands in the spring, bring insect repellent! The mosquitoes at the Jordan Trail were unbelievable, from the moment we parked the car until we left. I've never encountered them like that before, anywhere. At the first site they weren't an issue at all. So, in general, it's good to have some bug spray along in case you need it. And overall, this exercise was simply another way to get better at birding and to appreciate focusing on a specific habitat for specific species. The biggest issue was really the almost two hour drive to the wetlands for what ended up being about an hour of birding. Unfortunately, it's unlikely they'll expand further into wetlands in SW Washington that are closer to Longview. We are shocked at the work that's already been done on the wetlands already on the list – that was a LOT of work! And I wouldn't be surprised if we volunteer again next year.

## Birds of the 4/26 Fieldtrip to Oysterville West Approach and Leadbetter State Park

By Dave Slater

The weather was a beautiful 59-62 degrees with little wind, mostly sunny and a falling tide, just after high tide. Mosquitos were happy to see us arrive in the parking lot, but we were prepared for them. Weather and timing contributed to spectacular birding. Not every trip is so successful. There were thousands of birds.

We started at the far west end of Oysterville road, then traveled the 15 min to Leadbetter Point State Park, then

- |                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Western Sandpiper      | 10. Black-capped       |
| 2. Least Sandpiper        | Chickadee              |
| 3. Black-bellied Plover   | 11. Common Loon        |
| 4. Long-billed Dowitcher  | 12. Killdeer           |
| 5. Short-billed Dowitcher | 13. Brewer's Blackbird |
| 6. Greater Yellowlegs     | 14. Barn Swallow       |
| 7. Caspian Tern           | 15. Song Sparrow       |
| 8. Whimbrel               | 16. Wilson's Warbler   |
| 9. Chestnut-backed        | 17. Great Blue Heron   |
| Chickadee                 | 18. Green-winged Teal  |

Nachotta marina. It was worth the 3 extra trips I made to make sure we were arriving at the locations at an excellent time, so we didn't have to hike in the mud to find the birds (which we would have had to do at the later start time) and so that birds were numerous and actively feeding.

Here is our bird list:

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 19. Pintail Duck        | 28. American Crow        |
| 20. Western Gull        | 29. Canada Geese         |
| 21. Semipalmated Plover | 30. Brant                |
| 22. Snowy Plover        | 31. Ring-billed Gull     |
| 23. Savannah Sparrow    | 32. House Sparrow        |
| 24. Belted Kingfisher   | 33. Northern Flicker     |
| 25. Double-crested      | 34. American Robin       |
| Cormorant               | 35. European Starling    |
| 26. Mallard             | 36. Tree Swallow         |
| 27. Rock Pigeon         | 37. Violet-green Swallow |

- |                           |                            |                          |                        |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 38. Brown Pelican         | 40. Dark-eyed Junco        | 42. Glaucous-winged Gull | 45. Eurasian Collared- |
| 39. White-crowned Sparrow | 41. Red-breasted Merganser | 43. Spotted Towhee       | Dove                   |
|                           |                            | 44. Bald Eagle           | 46. California Gull    |

## The Forest's Construction Crew: Woodpeckers

By Dave Slater

Walk into a lowland forest of the Pacific Northwest, and it does not take long to notice that something is under construction. There is no crane, no sawmill, and no hard hats in sight—but the trees tell the story. Dead trunks are pocked with fresh holes. Bark flakes scatter like sawdust. And somewhere above, a steady, rhythmic tapping echoes through the canopy.

The builders are woodpeckers—some of the most specialized and industrious birds in our forests. Far from being simple drummers of trees, they are engineers, excavators, and, unintentionally, some of the most important housing developers in the entire ecosystem.

Start with one of the most familiar species, the Downy Woodpecker. Small, energetic, and often found right in backyard trees, the Downy is the precision carpenter of the group. It picks at bark and twigs with a fine, careful touch, searching for insects hidden just beneath the surface. The smallest of our common species, the Downy Woodpecker, is often seen in suburban yards, orchards, and riparian woodlands. Barely larger than a sparrow, the Downy is easy to recognize by its tiny bill and black-and-white checkered appearance. They frequently cling to thin branches that larger woodpeckers cannot use. Their drumming is softer and less forceful than that of larger species, but they are agile insect hunters and regular visitors to suet feeders.

In winter, Downy Woodpeckers—will sometimes turn their attention to plant “buildings” as well, pecking open goldenrod galls to reach the hidden insect larvae inside.

Its larger cousin, the Hairy Woodpecker, plays a similar role but with more power behind every strike. Where the Downy is delicate, the Hairy is deliberate. It tackles thicker bark and deeper insect galleries, chiseling into wood with the confidence of a professional contractor who knows exactly where the load-bearing beams are.

Then there is the unmistakable Northern Flicker, a woodpecker that seems to have ignored the job description entirely. Instead of staying in trees, flickers spend much of their time on the ground probing for ants. They move with a strange elegance—hopping, pausing, and then suddenly tilting forward to dig with surprising intensity.

No discussion of forest construction crews would be complete without the dramatic Pileated Woodpecker. Nearly

crow-sized, with a flaming red crest, this bird leaves behind some of the most striking signs of its work: large, rectangular excavations that can make a dead tree look as if it has been attacked by a bear. These cavities are not random damage—they are carefully carved search zones for carpenter ants, their preferred food. A pileated at work can reduce a standing snag to something resembling modern art.

Equally important, though less conspicuous, is the Red-breasted Sapsucker. This species does not excavate deep into wood. Instead, it drills neat rows of shallow holes, returning repeatedly to feed on sap that oozes out. These sap wells are

more than just a food source for the sapsucker. They become accidental feeding stations for hummingbirds, insects, and other wildlife. Rufous Hummingbirds often depend on sap before flowers bloom. In a very real sense, the sapsucker runs a small, unintentional café in the forest.

What makes all of these birds remarkable is not just what they do, but how they

survive doing it. Woodpeckers hammer trees at incredible speed and force, yet they avoid injury thanks to a suite of specialized adaptations. Their skulls are reinforced with spongy bone that absorbs impact. Their brains are tightly secured, limiting movement during strikes. Even their tongues are extraordinary—so long that in some species they wrap around the skull like a biological safety harness before extending forward to probe deep into wood.

Woodpeckers are more than colorful forest residents. They are ecosystem engineers. Their abandoned nest cavities provide homes for chickadees, swallows, owls, bats, and other wildlife that cannot excavate their own nesting holes. When we hear drumming in the woods or spot a flicker bouncing across a lawn, we are witnessing species that help shape the entire forest community.

The next time you hear tapping overhead, pause for a moment and remember - the forest is always being built, and woodpeckers are some of its most tireless workers.



*Pileated Woodpecker, Photo: Gary Leavens*

## 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 June 19th, 2026, at 9:30am**

Old Fort Stevens Bird Hike, meet at Historic Area

**Friday, June 26th, 2026, at 9:30am**

Battery Russel Bird Hike at Fort Stevens State Park, meet at Batter Russel

### 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>

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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

**Send in your stories & photos**

**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.

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