

WILLAPA WHISTLER

A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society

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Cooper's Hawk – Image Dave Cordero

Gathering On the Wires

By Steve Puddicombe, President

It's a hallmark of late summer to see legions of swallows gather on our power lines and telephone wires as a way, not only to better survive the gauntlet of predation and dangers of migration, but to thrive and prosper by fully embracing an advantage afforded as an adaptation to modern human convenience.

It's always a joy to see the strings of small figures weighing down the wires, often 2 or 3 strands, one above the other, like a chorus, sometimes swaying slightly in the breeze, the nearby airdscape alive with the swooping, skittering, bug-hunting, sweepers of the skies.

A bunch of Davids can still fight back against a few Goliaths.

This behavior is common for Barn, Violet-green, Tree and sometimes Cliff swallows, whether they nest in colonies or pairs, as they prepare for their southbound migration to Mexico and Central America. **Birds flock for protection — the more eyes watching, the greater the chance of noticing predators and the harder it is for predators to single out any one bird. Also, birds flock to share information about where to find food.** And wires, unlike tree branches, afford a 360-degree view.

I think this is a good analogy for conservation-minded folks like WHAS members, and a reminder that there is method to the madness of all that squeaky chattering on the wires.

These days that communication is mostly wire-less, as they say, with board meetings often conducted via zoom and voting "on-line" via email. Now we can communicate easily with other groups and each other with near immediacy. Just this morning I forwarded a conservation alert from a National Forest watchdog about the retraction of the "roadless rule" policy that has protected some 45 million acres of public land from often rapacious development. The comment period for that change is only until September 21 so time is of the essence.

Our chapter also has an alert list for all kinds of pertinent announcements, not just for conservation issues. This is important: even as you scroll through such messages and more often than not delete them out of hand, still, you will see that one to stimulate action. That's what all the chattering is about.

You can get on the WHAS alert list by going to our website at www.willapahillsaudubon.org and signing up. Happy birding!

Willapa Hills Needs a Treasurer

By Steve Puddicombe

We have need for a **Treasurer** as **Sherry Hawkins**, who has served for 10 years, is stepping down at year's end.

Please consider taking on this important role in WHAS, no experience necessary. You'd be taking on a turnkey operation and plenty of help getting started. You don't have to be a current member to qualify.

Contact any board member or our newsletter email address for more information.

Thanks, Sherry, for your dedication!

WHAS in the Columbia River Reader!

What messages might we want to give the public through the Reader? Send your ideas to

secretary@willapahillsaudubon.org

...more info on page four

In this issue of the Whistler:

- Membership Form
- NW Birding Events
- Impressions from the WHAS picnic
- Board Notes
- Field Trips and Programs
- Wahkiakum Wild Bird Fest 2027
- WHAS and the Columbia River Reader
- Fun Facts About the Fall Coastal Migration

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

OFFICERS

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 360-423-7004 webmaster@willapahillsaudubon.org

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 \$ _____**

Christmas Bird Counts 2026

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. We will have all the details on our website and in the Winter Whistler - published in early December.

- Leadbetter (Pacific County) – tbd, check back later
- Wahkiakum – tbd (week 52) Coordinator: Andrew Emlen
- Cowlitz-Columbia – December 27 Coordinator: Becky Kent

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. They celebrate the Sandhill Crane returning to the Refuge, a huge stately bird that is endangered in Washington State, and celebrate everything the Refuge is and what it brings to the community.

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

Board Notes

By Steve Puddicombe

The WHAS board has been busy lately with several initiatives aimed at widening Audubon's visibility and relevance in the lower Columbia region with the ultimate aim of recruiting new members: First, **Ann Kastberg, WHAS secretary**, is leading an effort to create a new column to be published in the Columbia River Reader, the complimentary arts and cultural magazine printed monthly.

The board, at a recent special meeting, also gave the go-ahead for participation in the nascent **Wahkiakum Wild Bird Fest**, appointing **Sandra Staples-Bortner** as our representative in that enterprise and as a member of our board as a Director-at-Large (for more info see elsewhere in this edition).

We welcome other new members of our board: **Anne Williams, as our Publicity Chair**, by way of Long Beach where she works for the Chinook Observer and Daily Astorian; and **David Slater, our new field trip chair**, also of Long Beach. We

are very happy to have representation from the coastal part of our territory.

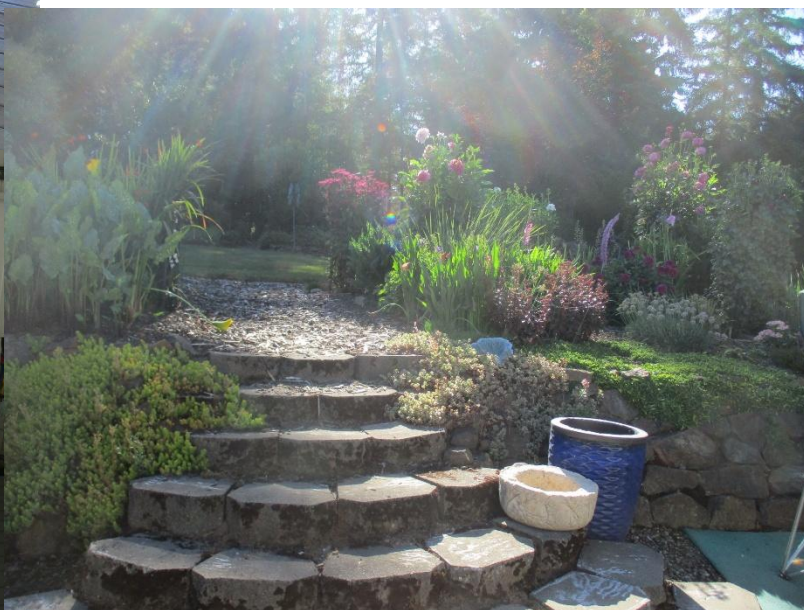
In the meantime **we have need of a Treasurer** as **Sherry Hawkins**, who has served for 10 years, is stepping down at year's end. Please consider taking on this important role in WHAS, no experience necessary. You'd be taking on a turnkey operation and plenty of help getting started. You don't have to be a current member to qualify. Contact any board member or our newsletter email address for more information. Thanks, Sherry, for your dedication!

If any of these initiatives interest you please get involved. As some of you will recall, just a year ago we celebrated all our accomplishments in our 50th anniversary as a chapter, and we're continuing that tradition of activism.

Impressions from the WHAS picnic, August 8, 2026

By Ann Cordero

A lovely home and native plant garden in the country. A porch welcoming us with tables filled with excellently balanced potluck. A pleasant sunny day with a most comfortable temperature, and shade for all. Views of hummingbirds and goldfinches; a cedar waxwing picked up on Merlin. Delicious food and ice cream to go with the dessert. Conversation among WHAS members Larry and Joanne Turner, Russ and Ann Kastberg, Sherry Hawkins, Gloria Nichols, and Ann Cordero. A call on a wristwatch phone. Descriptions of labors of love in remote locations. Tales of cats taken camping in RV's. Bats mentioned as research subjects, friendly neighbors, and carriers of rabies. Word of travels in exotic places. Talk of how to distribute Audubon backpacks and how to bring WHAS younger and more active members. A tour of the grounds and a flower to take home. Camaraderie. Satisfaction. Would you like to have been there?



Wahkiakum Wild Bird Fest 2027

By Sandra Staples-Bortner

Wahkiakum in Winter is Wild with Birds!

Mark your calendars! Willapa Hills Audubon Society, along with many collaborators, will host a first-time birding festival in Wahkiakum County, WA on **February 19-21, 2027**. The goal of the festival is to showcase the amazing abundance of ducks, swans, and geese that winter on the lower Columbia River and the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbia White-tailed Deer. The festival is expected to bring lovers of birds from across the state and the Portland metro area to riverside Cathlamet, Washington to see magnificent Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, threatened Dusky Canada Geese, a wide variety of dabbling and diving ducks, and many other birds.

Why winter? The festival is timed to coincide with peak waterfowl abundance on the JBH Refuge. It also is a time when spring migrants from further south, including songbirds and shorebirds, are beginning to arrive. The days are getting longer with sunrise forecast at 7:08 a.m. and sunset at 5:47 p.m. in Cathlamet on February 20.

Something for everyone! The festival will include field trips (both self-guided and expert-led), workshops, and musical entertainment by local-favorite Skamokawa Swamp Opera. The event is ideal for both novice and experienced birders. After a day of birding on Saturday, festival attendees are welcome to attend the popular Crab and Oyster Feed and enjoy fresh

Dungeness crab elbow-to-elbow with the locals. Buy your ticket early as this community dinner always sells out! The festival will be centered in charming Cathlamet and at the nearby JBH Refuge—both situated on the Columbia River. Visitors will have ample opportunities to explore this friendly town and beautiful ecosystem.

A surprising variety of lodging choices await you!

Select from historic hotels, comfortable bed & breakfasts, rustic cabins, and riverside RV camping.

Who is involved in organizing the festival?

Wahkiakum Wild Bird Fest is hosted by Willapa Hills Audubon Society, in partnership with Wahkiakum County Marine Resources Committee, Wahkiakum Chamber of Commerce, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Other collaborators include Columbia Land Trust, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wahkiakum Port District #1 (Elochoman Marina), and Wahkiakum Port District #2 (Vista Park). Local businesses, birders, and outdoor enthusiasts also are active on the planning team.

For more information or to volunteer: Contact Sandra Staples-Bortner, chair, Wahkiakum Wild Bird Fest Committee, (360) 931-0037, sstaplesbortner@msn.com.

WHAS and the Columbia River Reader

By Ann Kastberg

WHAS has an opportunity to significantly broaden our audience through The Columbia River Reader. According to their website, “The publication's 15,000-copy distribution encompasses the area on both sides of the river, throughout Longview-Kelso-Rainier and from Clatskanie to Scappoose, Oregon, and Ilwaco to Woodland, Washington.”

We hope to encourage community participation by announcing our events in *The Reader*, and to broaden an appreciation for and interest in birds and nature through short articles. Please look for our first blurb in the September issue, where I will write about crows.

Would you please help? Tentatively, I would like to submit a blurb for the October Reader called “*The Good Guys and the Pretty: Bats, spiders and mushrooms.*” What messages might we want to give the public through the Reader? Send your ideas to Ann Kastberg at secretary@willapahillsaudubon.org for article suggestions and Anne Williams, Publicity Chair, at roromisds@yahoo.com with events and happenings.

More information about the Columbia River Reader can be found at their website: <https://www.crrreader.com>



Crow – Image by Jan Gano

Fun Facts About the Fall Coastal Migration

By Dave Slater

When does fall migration begin along the Washington coast? September? August? Try June.

Fall migration is a season of movement that begins as soon as birds finish breeding. By July, Arctic-breeding shorebirds are already arriving along the Washington coast, while some of our smallest breeding birds are beginning their own southbound journeys. Here are some fun facts about one of the Pacific Northwest's most remarkable natural spectacles.

1. Fall migration begins surprisingly early.

By late June and July, adults of species such as Least Sandpipers and Short-billed Dowitchers are already heading south from their Arctic breeding grounds. Adult and juvenile shorebirds move south at different times, so fall migration is spread over a much longer period than the concentrated spring movement. For many shorebird species, young birds undertake migration without their parents. Some birds migrate directly to their wintering destinations, while others—including Dunlin—remain along the Washington coast for the winter.

2. Our Rufous Hummingbird is a migration champion.

Rufous Hummingbirds traveling between Alaska and Mexico may cover nearly 4,000 miles one way. These “hummers” don't simply retrace their spring route. They generally move northward along the Pacific Coast in spring, reaching Washington and British Columbia by May. In late summer and fall, they shift eastward and head south, primarily through the Rocky Mountain region. Some begin their southbound journey as early as July.

There is a fascinating reason for this apparently odd route. The birds are following the flowers. In spring, coastal California and the Pacific Northwest warm earlier and provide abundant flowering plants while the interior mountains may still be snow-covered. By summer, the mountain meadows are blooming, providing nectar along the southbound route.

3. Sooty Shearwaters come from the other side of the world.

As of my writing of this article on August 19, we are seeing tens of thousands of dark birds streaming low over Long Beach, Washington beaches. These are not local birds making a short commute. Sooty Shearwaters breed in the Southern Hemisphere, including around Australia and New Zealand. During our Washington summer, they move north into the Pacific, where enormous numbers gather to feed in the productive waters off the North American coast.

They are superbly adapted to this oceanic lifestyle. Their long, narrow wings allow them to glide efficiently on ocean winds, while their powerful wings can propel them underwater in pursuit of fish and squid. They can dive to more than 200 feet, and like other tube-nosed seabirds, they have a salt-excreting gland that allows them to live for months at sea.

4. Much of migration happens while we sleep.

Many of the songbirds and other landbirds that pass through Washington migrate at night. Darkness offers protection from some predators, while nighttime conditions can provide favorable flying conditions. Hawks, falcons, swallows and some other migrants, however, make substantial movements during daylight.

On some autumn nights, enormous numbers of birds are moving overhead even though the landscape below appears completely quiet.

5. Fall can be a terrific time to learn shorebirds.

Spring shorebird migration gets much of our birding attention because birds are often wearing colorful breeding

plumage and migration can be spectacularly concentrated. Fall offers a different opportunity.

Adult feathers may be worn, while juveniles appear fresh and crisp. Different species—and different age groups within a species—move at different times. A flock of “peeps” on a Washington mudflat can therefore become an excellent classroom for studying plumage, structure, behavior and age.

6. Migration makes ordinary places extraordinary.

To a migrating bird, a beach may be a restaurant, rest stop and airport terminal all rolled into one. Birds spend more time eating than flying. Migration is not primarily about being in the air. Stopover habitat is critical because birds need to refuel.

That is especially true along the Long Beach Peninsula. The outer beach provides important habitat for migrating and resting shorebirds, while the adjacent bay, mudflats, dunes, wetlands and coastal forests provide additional resources for birds making their way along the Pacific Flyway.

So this fall, take a walk along the beach. Scan the wrack line. Check the mudflats. Watch the treeline for warblers and sparrows. And every now and then, turn your eyes toward the ocean. If thousands of dark shapes come streaming past just above the waves, stop and watch.

You're watching one of the world's great migrations—and here in southwest Washington, you have a front-row seat.



Sooty Shearwaters - Brian Rusnica / Macaulay Library

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.

Saturday October 17th, 2026

WHAS Board Meeting

Check with any board member from page 2 for more information

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
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 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.

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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