

The Avalanche



North Cascades Audubon Society Newsletter

www.northcascadesaudubon.org

Volume 52 Issue 1

January 2020

General Membership Meeting with Dr. Trina Bayard and Teri Anderson Survival by Degrees: 389 Species on the Brink

A new climate report by National Audubon shows that 65% (389 out of 604) of North American bird species are at risk of extinction from climate change. The good news is that our science also shows that if we take action now, we can help improve the chances for 76% of species at risk. Dr. Trina Bayard and Teri Anderson of Audubon Washington will dive into the details of the report, talk about how Washington's birds will be impacted, and outline concrete actions we can take to ensure that the birds we love to see now will still be around in the future.

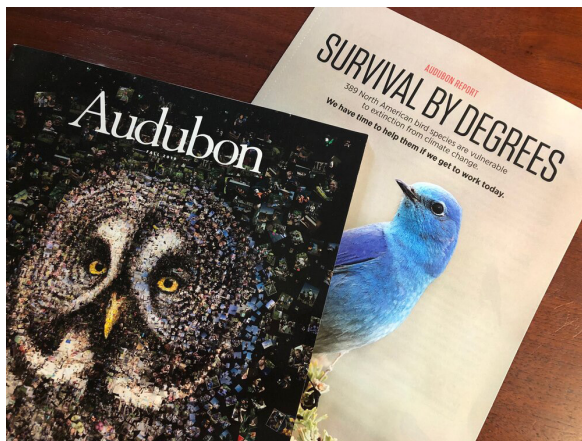


Photo: Dr. Trina Bayard, courtesy of Audubon Washington



Photo: Teri Anderson, courtesy of Audubon Washington

*Always on the 4th Tuesday of the month:
January 28, 7pm
Whatcom Museum Rotunda Room
free & open to the public!*

In this issue...

Topic	Page
Hospitality Volunteer Needed!	2
November Board Mtg. Summary	2
NCAS 2019 Contributions	3
Audubon at the Museum	3
The Butcher Watchman	3
January Field Trips	4 - 5
Hawk Watching with Sue Cottrell	6
Fir Island Fireworks	6
Deming Homestead Eagle Park	7

Mission Statement

The purpose of this society is to promote the study and conservation of birds and other wildlife, their habitat, and the environment; to increase public appreciation of the values of wildlife, plants, and the natural environment; and to stimulate action to protect and preserve them for the future.

Avalanche Staff

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If you are interested in contributing, the deadline for the February 2020 issue is...

January 15.

Send materials to:

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NCAS Board Members

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Education	Chris Brewer
Field Trips	Paul Woodcock
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Scholarships	Nicole Huson
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Member at Large	Rae Edwards
Scholarships	Don Burgess

If you are interested in volunteering with our Audubon chapter, please contact the President at president@northcascadesaudubon.org

Hospitality Volunteer Needed!

NCAS needs a volunteer to:

- Provide refreshments at the monthly membership meetings
- Meet and greet newcomers at Audubon meetings
- Help with other Audubon events

If you're interested please contact Pam Borso at

pborso@northcascadesaudubon.org

Summary of November 4, 2019 NCAS Board Meeting

The Board met at the Whatcom Land Trust on November 4th from 7 to 9 pm and took the following actions and/or discussed the following issues:

- The Board voted unanimously to give their support to the selection of Robert Kaye as our NW1 Regional Representative to the Audubon Washington Board.
- The Board reviewed the draft guidelines for selecting non-profit organizations to receive community grants and agreed to select recipients at the December Board meeting. A total of \$1,500 is budgeted for this purpose.
- The Board agreed to prioritize reaching out to members of National Audubon who are not current members of NCAS to encourage them to join our chapter.

Month of Giving

All through January

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*Some Restrictions Will Apply

NCAS 2019 Contributions to Community Organizations

The Board of Directors of NCAS selected six not-for-profit organizations to receive contributions in 2019, totalling \$1,500.

The recipients are as follows:

\$400	Whatcom Humane Society, Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
\$400	Wild Whatcom
\$200	Sardis Wildlife Center
\$200	Vancouver Avian Research Center
\$200	Washington Wild
\$100	Shifting Gears

The NCAS Board considers organizations that contribute to the shared vision of protecting, preserving and increasing public appreciation and knowledge of birds and other wildlife, their habitat and the environment. The Board supports organizations that engage in activities and services that NCAS does not or cannot do and/or further enhance the activities and mission of NCAS.

We at North Cascades Audubon will do what we can locally, and hope you will join us. Birds need us in new ways now more than ever before.

The generosity and support from NCAS members help to make these small contributions possible.

Audubon at the Museum

Please join an Audubon member at our monthly feature *Audubon at the Museum* every 4th Sunday from 1:30 to 3:30PM at Old City Hall (121 Prospect Street). We invite museum goers to explore our wonderful John M. Edson Hall of Birds. Be sure to invite friends and family to this wonderful exhibit.



Photo: Northern shrike on Fir Island, courtesy of Thomas Bancroft

The Butcher Watchman

By Thomas Bancroft

Movement caught my eye, and I glanced up through the windshield. The flight seemed labored, heavy, something a little different, unusual in this robin-sized bird. The individual was 15 feet above the ground and flew across the grass field along Rawlins Road. It came right over the car. Maybe it was headed for a large bush behind me. I stopped in the middle of this dead-end road on Fir Island, jumping out.

Sitting on top of the bare bush was the unmistakable silhouette of a northern shrike, a plump body, a big head, upward stance. It glared out across the fields, moving its head back and forth. Last week, my birding group had found a juvenile individual along the dikes, not a quarter-mile from this location. I moseyed back along the road, keeping my eyes averted.

Sure enough, dark eye mask, the bill with a stout hook and a large tooth, black wings, scalloped cream breast feathers, this was a perfect plumage juvenile. It was alert, hunting, but seemed to be ignoring me. This was my fifth trip to the Skagit in two weeks, and on each trip, we had spotted a northern shrike. On one trip, it was at Wiley Slough, on another at Hayton Reserve, once in the Samish Flats, and then here. These were probably four different individuals, and all had been juvenile birds. Possibly, this was turning into an irruptive year for shrikes.

These birds nest across Northern Canada and Alaska, coming south in winter. Most winters a few can be found in Washington, but in some years, vast numbers will come south. Perhaps, this happens when they have had an exceptionally successful nesting year or when northern winters become particularly hard, or food supplies low.

These are voracious predators, capable of taking small birds and mammals. They store prey by sticking it on thorns or barbed wire, coming back later to eat more of it. Often, they sit and wait for a prey item to show itself before darting off the perch. This species occurs in Europe and Asia, too.

The bird bolted from the branch, dropping down to just above the field and flying rapidly away from me. I couldn't tell if it was chasing something or just heading to another hunting spot. It probably makes the rounds of a series of good lookouts. Their scientific name is *Lanius excubitor*, which translates as "Butcher Watchman."

January Field Trips

Paul Woodcock, Field Trip Chair

Welcome to a new year and to winter in the northwest. This season also brings a new set of challenges to birders and other outdoor enthusiasts. The cold, wind and rain can be discouraging but the rewards of winter birding in our area can definitely be more than worth the effort. Sitting at home and watching the feeder birds can be fun, but winter in the field and by the water can deliver special rewards. It is a joy to locate a purple finch among the house finches or a white-throated sparrow among the white-crowns and golden-crowns. But the harder you search the greater become the prizes. You could even find a falcated or Baikal teal in a flock of wigeon or a slaty-backed gull hiding among the various glaucous-winged gulls and their hybrid kin. It does happen! Winter provides birders special benefits here in the northwest. Dress for the weather and go out and enjoy the birding.

Information you should know about NCAS field trips:

- Our field trips are free and open to anyone who is interested. Bring your friends!
- Beginning birders are very welcome.
- Carpooling is encouraged and even required for some sites with limited parking.
- Preregistration is often required to limit numbers and reduce disturbance.
- Dress for the weather, in layers, and wear waterproof clothing and footgear as needed.
- Severe weather may cancel a trip; contact your leader if concerned or if you cancel.
- Bring binoculars, scope, field guide or a necessary parking pass if you have them.
- Pets are not allowed on field trips.
- Like most organizations, NCAS now requires participants to sign a waiver to participate.
- We are always looking for trip leaders or assistants. If you're interested, please contact us.

Saturday, January 4: Semiahmoo Spit

Time: 9 AM - Noon

Trip Leader: Paul Woodcock

No registration required.

Meet at Semiahmoo County Park parking lot.

Though birding at Semiahmoo is always a worthwhile experience, the winter months are definitely outstanding. We often find three species each of loons, grebes, scoters and shorebirds, plus scaups, goldeneyes, kingfishers, eagles and a bunch of passerines. If you don't know our water birds, this is a great place to come and make their acquaintance. If you already know them come out to enjoy them or to share them with others. There is always an amiable group of birders present willing to share what they know or eager to learn. This trip is cosponsored by Whatcom County Parks.

Saturday, January 11: Samish Flats

Time: 8 AM - Noon

Trip Leader: John Horner

Trip Limit: 15 participants

Registration Required: Contact John 360-599-6849.

Meet at South Bellingham Park & Ride (east side of I-5) corner of Connelly Ave. and 33rd St.

Owls that float like moths and raptors overhead and all around. Our winter visitors have returned! Please join us on a half-day caravan through the lovely Samish Flats. Since car parking is limited throughout the Flats, we will carpool. Fortify yourself with warm wind/rain-proof clothing, hearty snacks and a hot beverage. If you have a spotting scope, a valid Discovery Pass and/or a multi-passenger vehicle you are willing to share, please mention this when you call to register.

Sunday, January 19: Tennant Lake & Hovander Park

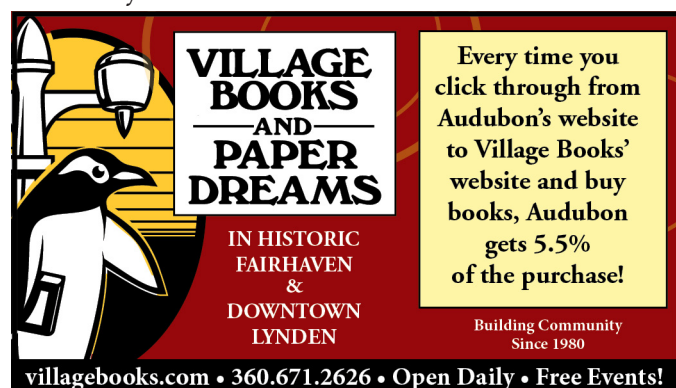
Time: 8:30 - 11:30 AM

Trip Leader: Pauline Sterin

Registration Required: Contact Pauline at notesps@icloud.com or 410-353-7116.

Meet at the Tennant Lake Interpretive Center parking lot, 5236 Nielsen Ave, Ferndale.

(continued on page 5)



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Tennant and Hovander provide excellent habitat for a variety of resident and wintering migrant birds during the fall and winter. On these public lands, managed by Whatcom County Parks and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, you can anticipate finding common resident species foraging in mixed flocks in wooded areas, and, though the boardwalk is closed for hunting season, you should see ducks and geese in the area. Enjoy relaxed birding on the trails between Tennant and Hovander, and along the Nook-sack River. The walking is relatively easy, the total distance should be less than two miles, and park facilities are close by. This is an excellent trip for beginners but birders of all skill levels are welcome. Expect to see woodpeckers, wrens, chickadees, juncos, sparrows, among others, and probably a few raptors.

Tuesday, January 21: Lake Padden, Padden Lagoon & Mud Bay

Time: 8:30 - 11 AM

Trip Leader: Bob Myhr

Registration Required: Contact Bob at romyhr@comcast.net or 360-933-4352.

Meet at Fairhaven Park to carpool to Lake Padden and other destinations in Fairhaven.

Lake Padden can host impressive groups of waterfowl in winter, and a variety of resident and migratory passerines are always present in the woodlands around the lake. Join Bob to carpool to the lake and other excellent birding locations in the Fairhaven area. Among other species, expect to find sparrows, wrens, woodpeckers, herons and winter waterfowl on the lake as well and around the wetlands and marine waters of Fairhaven. Be sure to dress for the weather. Everyone is welcome.

Sunday, January 26: Lake Padden

Time: 9 AM - Noon

Trip Leader: Ken Salzman

Registration Required: Contact Ken at 360-756-0347 or kpsalzman@comcast.net.

Winter is a great time for waterfowl at Lake Padden. You can expect to find mallards, American wigeons, ring-necked ducks and buffleheads among others. In past years, more uncommon species such as Eurasian wigeon and redhead have been present. And there are always a few woodpeckers and an abundance of passerines, such as sparrows, juncos, chickadees, wrens, nuthatches and brown creepers to search for on the trails surrounding the lake.

Saturday, February 1: Semiahmoo Spit

Time: 9 AM - Noon

Trip Leader: Paul Woodcock

No registration required.

Meet at Semiahmoo County Park parking lot.

You can return on the first Saturday of every month and join this field trip to enjoy the winter waterfowl, and other birds, at the only designated Important Bird Area in Whatcom County. Every month is a different experience.

Sunday, February 2: Skagit Lowlands Birding

Time: 8:30 AM - 2:30 PM

Trip Leader: Steven Harper

Trip Limit: 11 participants

Registration Required: Contact Steven at stevenharper2@msn.com or 360-650-9065.

On this trip we will be searching the Skagit County lowlands for whatever interesting birds have been spotted lately. We will hopefully see trumpeter swans, snow geese, bald eagles, rough-legged hawks, northern harriers, red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, short-eared owls, and search for the other, less common raptors such as peregrines, gyrfalcons and merlins. The trip will begin and end at the Alger Park & Ride, I-5 Exit 240. We will carpool in three cars while we search for birds. Bring water, hot beverages, snacks and lunch to eat on the run. Dress to keep dry and warm and bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you happen to have one.

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Hawk Watching in Western Washington with Sue Cottrell

Tuesdays, January 7 - February 4, 7-9 PM at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Thursdays, January 9 - February 6, 7-9 PM at Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship

Join Sue Cottrell in one of these five-session classes where you'll learn about different kinds of raptors, emphasizing field identification and the particularly fascinating element of winter behavior. Instructor Sue Cottrell has studied raptors and guided outdoor trips for over 25 years and has a vast knowledge of local populations.

In addition to the evening sessions, the class will be broken down into smaller groups for a daylong field trip on the Skagit Flats. This area is nationally recognized for its hundreds of wintering birds of prey. The field trip is a great opportunity to practice identifying raptors with Sue's expertise and assistance. People often comment that the field trip alone is worth the price of the class.

These classes are sponsored by Whatcom Land Trust, Falcon Research Group, Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and North Cascades Audubon Society. The class fee is \$175 per person. To complete your registration, send a check, along with email address, phone number and your class location choice, to Raptor Research NW, P.O. Box 85, Bow, WA 98232.

Email raptorresearchnw@gmail.com for questions or more information.



Photo: Sue Cottrell, courtesy of Becky Rosencrans

Fir Island Fireworks

By Alison Henshaw

"Ooh... ahh... wow!" Were these spectators at a 4th of July celebration? It may have sounded like it, but we were twelve birders on Fir Island watching nature's own fireworks on November 21. There were no explosions, smoke or debris; just the incredible spectacle of a murmuration of dunlin. While European starlings are more well-known for this behavior, these shorebirds gather in the hundreds, evading predators by swooping high, then low, splitting into smaller groups, then reforming their largest flock, all the while turning and twisting, the sun flashing on their white feathers. The spectacle was enhanced by the cerulean sky and bright sunshine.

We enjoyed watching northern harriers gliding low to the ground, hunting for hapless small birds and mammals. They were soon joined by short-eared owls, whose faces look quite similar but move their wings at a greater angle when flying.

Hundreds of trumpeter swans rested and foraged for food in the fields while thousands of snow geese honked overhead in their distinctive, v-shaped formations. Mew gulls also made several appearances. These mostly white birds were so different from the colorful male wood duck and green-winged teal found among the reeds and the redheaded hairy woodpecker pecking at a tree trunk. The greater and lesser yellowlegs tiptoeing in the mud made a very good vocal impression of the ubiquitous bald eagle, while the multi-morphed red-tailed hawks perched high up in the leafless trees.

Driving home via the Skagit Flats, we were treated to a peregrine falcon sitting on a tree, an American kestrel hovering and diving while it hunted, and American pipits in the fields.

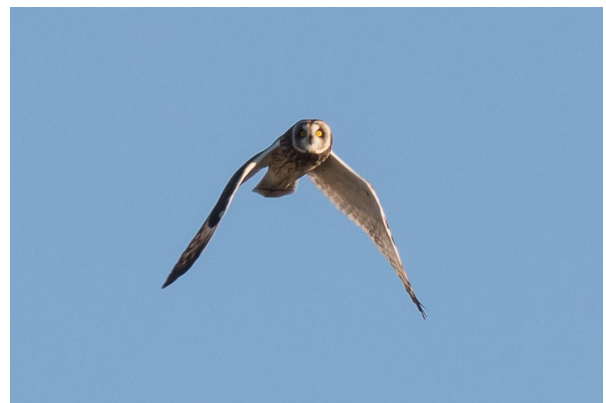


Photo: Short-eared owl, courtesy of Annie Huang

Deming Homestead Eagle Park

By Lorraine Wilde (writing on behalf of the Whatcom Land Trust)

We are so fortunate that some of the best birding of the year can be had during our somber northwest winters. If you haven't yet had your fill of eagles, Deming Homestead Eagle Park is an excellent stop along the Nooksack River where viewing is best this time of year. This park is among the 14 Whatcom County Parks that have been formed with Whatcom Land Trust's involvement.

The "Homestead" in the park's name is due to the fact that this narrow valley bottom property was originally homesteaded by Peter and Martha Rensick as a dairy farm. The land was later inherited by their son Hank and his wife Lorrell Rensick. The Rensicks gifted the property to the Trust in 2000. In 2002, Whatcom County Parks then assumed management and ownership in exchange for a 33-acre conservation easement that protects this park forever as eagle and elk habitat and for erosion control.

The Nooksack is a moving, living river so it has twisted and turned over the years through areas that were once used as farmland. Grassy banks line braided channels that meander through wetland sloughs lined by alders and cedars.

From December through March, many bald eagles gather here to feed on spawned out salmon carcasses that wash up on the sandbars created by the channels of the river. As you might suspect, eagle numbers are better in years where there are strong salmon runs. In general, the best viewing is in the early morning and on cloudy days.

The mixture of forested and meadow areas offer a variety of habitat for birds that appreciate the river's edge. In spring, look for spotted sandpipers, yellow-rumped warblers and harlequin ducks. Any time of year you are likely to see spotted towhees, bushtits, American dippers, Steller's jays, dark-eyed juncos, and house finches.

From the parking area a 0.2-mile gravel trail extends to open picnic areas to the east. A 0.1-mile gravel trail also heads to the west from the parking area crossing a bridge and connecting with a 0.4-mile mowed loop trail.

Interpretive signs along the trail provide information about the eagles and their place in the river ecology. Spaced along the present edge of the river are seven large debris structures made of boulders and large logs bolted and chained together. As the river undercuts them, they sink in and form naturalistic habitat for salmon and slow the erosion process.

Getting There

The park is only a tiny detour off the Mt. Baker Highway. Head east on Hwy-542 past the Highway 9 South intersection and turn right on Truck Road. A parking area is just ahead on the right.

After stopping here, you can head another mile east on Mt. Baker Highway to Mosquito Lake Road for additional viewing.

As you enjoy the park, try to imagine the Rensicks tending their pioneer dairy farm, fishing salmon, and watching the eagles each winter. Send them a mental thank you for placing this land in conservation for future generations of humans and wildlife to appreciate forever.



Photo: Bald eagle on Nooksack River, courtesy of Eric Ellingson

CAUTION: Bird feeding makes you happy!

Mon-Fri 10-5:30
Sat 10-4

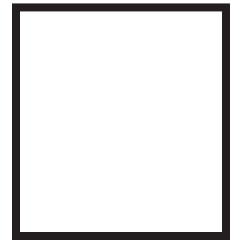
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North Cascades Audubon Society Membership

We hope you will support North Cascades Audubon by joining the chapter locally. Our chapter is locally funded, and we do not receive any portion of donations you make to National Audubon. Your commitment to Audubon is important to us. We will continue to provide you with information regarding local chapter activities through our website and all activities will remain FREE and open to the public.

We are encouraging members to receive newsletters by email but if you prefer, a paper newsletter is provided to current, paid members. Help support us by joining the local chapter at any of the levels to your right. The newsletter is published monthly between September and May, including a double issue for November/December. All issues are also available online. If you currently receive a paper copy please check your mailing label for accuracy, including the expiration date. To make any changes or to switch from a paper copy to an email copy please email:
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