OPAS Summer Activities

[We, as is our custom, will not meet nor present programs in July and August. Please plan to attend our summer field trips, which are shown in this newsletter and on our website.

We will be back on the 20th of September with an event celebrating our 50th year of working for birds on the Olympic Peninsula. Members will receive a mailed invitation to the event with an RSVP request. If you wish to attend, please reply, as we’ll have to limit attendance to the capacity of Rainshadow Hall. We’re planning to offer food and beverages as part of a celebratory program featuring John Gussman’s photos and snippets of OPAS history.

Our September - October newsletter will have a full agenda for the celebration, and a reminder to RSVP. Our regular programs will resume in October.

A message from the field trip chair

by Marie Grad, Field Trip Coordinator

Recently I had a meeting with individuals that are interested in leading field trips. We were able to plan trips for July and August, with one person agreeing to do a monthly trip to different birding areas.

Summer is a slow season for birding with the breeding season wrapping up and birds going through a seasonal molt. The exception is the annual shorebird migration, which starts in the next few weeks. I am pleased to announce that our first trip will be led by Bob Boekelheide and John Gatchet July 9th at 7am meeting at 3 Crabs WDFW parking lot.

Kathy McCoy has agreed to lead a monthly field trip that will be on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. Her first trip to 3 Crabs and Dungeness Landing will take place on August 8th. The details of these trips and all future trips will be posted on the Events Calendar page of the OPAS website. If you wish to participate in any of these trips, click on the specific field trip to sign up.

Liability Form: We are asking for field trip participants to sign a liability release form on or before the day of the trip. This signed form will be good for future field trips. You can review, download, and print the form in advance by visiting the Field Trips page on the OPAS website at olympicpeninsulaaudubon.org or by clicking here. You can also eSign the liability release form by clicking here.

I am still looking for people to lead or assist with field trips. I can be contacted through the website or at mlgrad53@gmail.com

Wednesday Morning Bird Walks

Date and Time: Every Wednesday morning at 8:30 a.m.
Meeting Place: Outside Dungeness River Nature Center
Features: Easy guided bird walk through Railroad Bridge Park to see birds of the Dungeness River riparian area and adjacent fields and open areas.
Bring: Binoculars, scope, water, snacks, and appropriate clothing for the weather.
Cost: Free

Dungeness Bay – Returning Shorebirds and Lovely Gulls

Leaders: Bob Boekelheide and John Gatchet

(Continued on page three)
Harlequin Happenings

President’s Notes
by Ken Wiersema

Summer is here
So once again our days get shorter and the bird songs recede as songbird breeding season slips away. Be on the lookout for our shorebirds as they arrive back from their breeding grounds. Please note that our new array of OPAS summer field trips are scheduled; watch for them in this edition and on our website as we add a few over the summer. Thanks to Marie and Bob B for preparing the schedules and getting the announcements out, and big thanks to those of our members who have agreed to lead trips. We missed the opportunity to socialize during the intense COVID years and welcome the times to get together with our fellow birders and renew our knowledge of our local avian beings. If you want to learn more about leading or helping lead a field trip to one of your favorite birding spots, or to one you’d like to explore please reach out to Marie or Bob; they would welcome your comments. One or both of them are leading our Wednesday morning bird walks starting at the Center at 8:30 a.m.

Reminder
There will not be regular OPAS meetings in July and August. We’ll resume meetings and programs on September 20th when we’ll celebrate OPAS’s 50th year. Watch for your invitation—coming soon! And, our Backyard Birding programs will restart in October.

OPAS leaders retreat
Every summer, your Board assembles and plans activities, programs, and resourcing for our upcoming year. This year we’ll be meeting on the 17th of August at the Center. We invite members who have activities, programs, and projects you would want us to include, modify, or discontinue; please contact any of the officers or board members listed in this newsletter and let them know. We would also invite members who would consider volunteering for an OPAS board position or to be on one of our committees to join us, for part or all of our retreat. Watch for a draft agenda on the website.

River Center Education planning
On 29 June Bob Boekelheide, Katja Bridwell, and I represented OPAS at the first in 4 years, River Center education planning meeting. We went through the results of a recent poll that many of you took part in, and considered how we can provide a full, high-quality series of programs. We scheduled follow-on sessions to flesh out resourcing and scheduling. With the new Cedar Hat classroom now open for use, you can look forward to classes and projects for every age. Here again, if you have skills in instruction or natural science and would be interested in joining our volunteer instructor team, please make yourself known. Or, if you’d want to learn a new skill, we need you too. It’s fun and you get to interact with some great folks.

Board and officer Changes
July brings changes to our OPAS board and officer team. Katja Bridwell, a new board member, has been elected to become a Co-Vice President with Tom Butler. Tom will concentrate on speakers and programs for our meetings. Katja will be carving out a new office to work on operational matters and environmental education programs. We’ll also bid farewell to Vince Thrutchley, who has been a valued member of our board for 2 years. We’ll miss his spirit and thoughtful counsel. Vince plans to stay active on our Conservation Committee and as part of our Purple Martin team. Thanks to each of you for your role in OPAS.

Please be aware!
The Hurricane Coffee Bar in the Dungeness River Nature Center will be open at 6:30 p.m. on the nights of OPAS programs. So, come a bit early, enjoy a refreshing coffee or tea, and check out the new programs coming to the Center.
OPAS Field Trips (Continued from page one)

Date and Time: Sunday, July 9, 2023. Meet at Three Crabs WDFW parking lot at 7 a.m.
Limited to 20 participants.
Cost: Free
Meeting Place: Start at Three Crabs WDFW parking lot (at west end of Three Crabs Rd) at 7 a.m.
After surveying Three Crabs birds, we will travel to Dungeness Landing County Park, on Oysterhouse Rd off Marine Drive.
Features: The calendar might say early summer, but post-breeding migration is here. Late June and early July bring adult shorebirds, already finished with nesting in the Arctic, taiga, and prairies. Many still have flashy breeding plumages. We will also scan bay and mudflats for waterfowl and lovely gulls.
Special Requirements: We’ll have to hop a few beach logs to access Three Crabs beach. Dungeness Landing Park is accessible to all.
Further information, if needed: Contact Bob Boekelheide at bboek@olympus.net.
Registration required. Click on the field trip on the OPAS website’s Events Calendar to register.

Gardiner Beach and Diamond Point

Leader: John Gatchet
Date and Time: Sunday, August 6, 2023 (8:00-10:30 a.m.)
Number of Participants: 16 - Registration is required.
Cost: Free
Meeting Place: Gardiner Beach Boat Ramp parking area at 8:00 a.m. After covering Gardiner Beach and vicinity we will drive to Diamond Point via Gardiner Beach Road and Diamond Point Road.
Features: This time of year is productive for post-breeding migration. A variety of species can be present in the diverse habitats we will be covering.
Special Requirements: We will be walking short distances on pavement, in the grass and on gravel. Bring clothes that are appropriate for weather conditions. A spotting scope, while not needed would be helpful in observing some species.
Further information: Contact John Gatchet at jfgatchet@gmail.com or at (503) 781-5043
Registration required. Click on the field trip on the OPAS website’s Events Calendar to register.

Dungeness Bay – Exploring the wetlands

Leader: Kathy Barker McCoy
Date and Time: Tuesday, August 8, 2023. Meet at Three Crabs WDFW parking lot at 7 a.m.
Limited to 15 participants.
Cost: Free
Meeting Place: Start at Three Crabs WDFW parking lot (at west end of Three Crabs Rd) at 7 a.m. After surveying Three Crabs birds, we will travel to Dungeness Landing County Park, on Oysterhouse Rd off Marine Drive.
Features: This is the first trip I will lead here on the peninsula: join me for a collaborative visit to this great shorebird spot. While I have only been here for a year, I have been birding a long time. If I can’t tell you what something is, we will probably be able to figure it out. This is considered fall migration, with some challenges to our ID skills. The low tide will give shorebirds an expanse of feeding flats; hopefully we will see some interesting things. There will also be ducks, geese, and mysterious gulls. This is sleuthing time. Check out the eBird bar charts for Three Crabs in August by clicking here.
Special Requirements: We’ll have to hop a few beach logs to access Three Crabs beach. Dungeness Landing Park is accessible to all.
Further information, if needed: Contact Kathy McCoy at kbarkermcy@gmail.com.
Registration required. Click on the field trip on the OPAS website’s Events Calendar to register.

Conservation Matters—How and Why we watch Pigeon Guillemots

by Robert Phreaner, Conservation Co-Chair

Pigeon Guillemots (Cephus columba) aka PIGU are considered an indicator species of the health of coastal ecosystems in the Salish Sea.

In 2004 Whidbey Audubon community scientists started monitoring PIGU breeding and population numbers.
(Continued on next page)
Harlequin Happenings

Ed Bowlby and Mary Sue Brancato started a pilot monitoring effort at Port Williams bluff in 2015 that was successful enough to engage Clallam County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) and OPAS in Clallam PIGU surveys in 2016. Many of the OPAS volunteers have been monitoring the same locations for eight years. In 2022 Jefferson County joined the survey which now includes most of Puget Sound.

Every Tuesday morning from June through late August, about a dozen trained volunteers meet at Port Williams ramp at 6:45 a.m. to walk as a group heading north along the bluff deploying an observer at locations with PIGU burrows until the beach is totally covered to monitor PIGU activity between 7 and 8:00 a.m.

The observer remains quiet and motionless on their beach chair positioned so that they can observe the bluff and the surf. We study the behavior of the near shore PIGUs with binoculars and note if the birds are carrying fish like gunnels in their beaks. The location of each burrow is mapped and a record of PIGU visits to burrows is kept by each observer. The records are entered into the data system weekly and the regional monitoring data are being utilized by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the University of Washington, and individual counties. Here is a link to the Salish Sea Guillemot Network (SSGN) pigeonguillemot.org, to learn why we study PIGUs.

Here is the latest report from Scott Pearson at WDFW on Puget Sound Indicators, Abundance of Marine Bird Populations, which includes Pigeon Guillemots as one of four Marine Bird Vital Sign Species. This is based on population estimates from aerial surveys and also considers population data obtained from SSGN.

https://www.pugetsoundinfo.wa.gov/Indicator/Detail/3/VitalSigns

In June, most of the visits of the birds to the burrows will be to change partners sitting on eggs. By July we record an increase in the number of PIGU carrying fish to their growing chicks. After eight years as an observer at Port Williams I can testify that watching the charismatic red-footed PIGU ranges from relaxing to comical to hectic. Some mornings early in the season have little activity and you can photograph the PIGU court ing and mating. Later in the summer your head is on a swivel to record every food delivery by multiple birds to different burrows simultaneously. This experience of watching the behavior of PIGU at short range has increased my interest for close up observation of other seabirds like Tufted Puffins and Rhinoceros Auklets, if only there were such an opportunity in Clallam County. I can dream.

Maria Mudd Ruth, who spoke to OPAS about her book Rare Bird: Pursuing the Mystery of the Marbled Murrelet, is writing a full natural history of guillemots from multiple perspectives now scheduled to be released by Mountaineers Books next Spring, which will be essential reading for PIGU observers.

Contribute to Science through Birding

by Toby Ross, Puget Sound Bird Observatory

The Puget Sound Seabird Survey is looking for birders on the Olympic Peninsula to join this established Community Science program. Volunteers are asked to conduct 7 surveys with a small team of fellow surveyors at specific locations throughout the Sound. In particular, we need birders prepared to travel west of Port Townsend. All surveys are synchronized to take place once per month on the first Saturday, October – April. You will be provided training in the survey technique, and ideally will have good seabird identification skills. However, there are roles on the survey teams for birders of all levels. Now in its 15th season, you’ll be contributing to valuable science that monitors wintering seabirds across Puget Sound and informs important management decisions. Previously, the project was part of Birds Connect Seattle’s (formerly Seattle Audubon) science program but transitioned to its new home at Puget Sound Bird Observatory in 2022.

More information can be found on our website and if interested in taking part, please reach out to Program Manager Toby Ross at t_ross@pugetsoundbirds.org

2023 Conservation Award

by Ken Wiersema and John Acklen

Each year we recognize and thank those in our community who have made meaningful contributions to birds. Each, in their own special way, took noteworthy actions to save, protect, teach, and advocate for the birds that live among us. Our conservation awards are recommended by our Conservation Committee and can go to deserving people and organizations.
in our community. We presented the award at our June 21st meeting.

This year our Conservation Award was presented to Mike Hill, Engineering Manager, and the line crews of the Clallam County Public Utilities District #1.

OPAS Harlequin Award 2023
by Ken Wiersema

Annually, past Harlequin awardees who have remained active as OPAS leaders, solicit nominees from our board and membership for a member or members who have made outstanding contributions to our programs and mission. This year, Dow Lambert was the recipient of the Harlequin Award, presented at our June 21st meeting. Dow was recognized for his outstanding and generous contributions of time, talent and effort toward the conservation of birds and birding habitat on the Olympic Peninsula. Dow’s accomplishments in more than 10 years include:

- Led Purple Martin nest box projects at 3 Crabs, Morse Creek, Port Angeles Yacht Harbor, and Protection Island NWR.
- Designed a layout and took wildlife photos for an information panel at top of trail down to the Spit; helped build the outdoor display case and assist in its annual maintenance.
- Observer with Puget Sound Sea bird study -- 3 years.
- BirdFest Field trip leader since 2012.
- Excellent photographer, who generously shares his photos for River Center and OPAS education and fundraising programs.
- Nest box building class assistant 10 years. Superb recruiter for OPAS nest box fabrication work.
- Key member of the OPAS Vaux Swift artificial chimney project.
- Prepared and edited instructional video for OPAS-designed Purple Martin nest box fabrication, used by WDFW and by Sequim HS students. Also adopted by nest box builders in British Columbia and Oregon.

(Continued on next page)
The results are in for the 2023 International Migratory Bird Count and Clallam County Birdathon, held on May 13, 2023. Overall, we had a very high number of people participating in the count, but unfortunately low numbers of birds and bird species.

In total, 102 participants in 74 parties counted 12,161 individual birds of 161 species. Click here to see the accompanying table. The number of participants is the second highest for the last 30 years, so lots of people were out counting birds. Despite the extra observers, however, the number of individual birds was one of the lowest for the last 30 years, and the number of species tied for the lowest number. The counts didn’t come close to our record number of species (203 in 2012) or record number of individuals (33,537 in 2010).

Why such low numbers and species of birds this year? First, we did not have offshore boats or repositioning cruise ships passing through Clallam that day, which are usually good for several pelagic species and possibly a few thousand gulls, murres, auklets, and shearwaters. Second, Hurricane Ridge was closed, so we missed several mountain species often seen there. Third, it was bright and sunny on count day, reaching 80 degrees F some places in Clallam. Warm and clear weather also occurred several days prior to the count, which may have encouraged migrants to depart our area before count day. Nesting birds are also less likely to sing longer in the day when it is bright and sunny, making it more difficult for us to find them.

Lastly, even though there were lots of counters this year, quite a few people only counted for brief periods. Very few people put in a whole day counting birds, or traveled to new and different areas. As an interesting testament to this, this year the average number of hours counted per party was the lowest for the last 30 years. I suspect this trend may also be the result of using eBird, which focuses on specific sites and times, rather than covering larger areas.

The following species had low counts compared with the prior 30 years: Brant, Greater Scaup, Common Merganser, Rock Pigeon, Vaux’s Swift, Semipalmated Plover, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Barn Owl, American Crow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Tree Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Marsh Wren, American Dipper, European Starling, Varied Thrush, American Robin, Pine Siskin, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, and Brewer’s Blackbird. Should we be concerned about these species?

Every species has a unique story, of course, but some of these species appear to be having a genuinely low year. For example, Pine Siskins are having one of their lowest years on record in western WA. This goes back to last fall, when they also scored very low on regional Christmas Bird Counts. It appears that siskins remained north last year, fueled by a substantial cone crop in the Canadian taiga forest. Spring
weather was quite fickle for aerial insectivores like swallows, cold and rainy one week then record high temperatures the next. It appears that some species really skedaddled out of here before the count, such as Brant and various shorebird species. Could avian influenza also have affected some populations? There is no way to tell, but counts in future years will see if these trends continue.

In the opposite direction, a few species scored high counts, such as Purple Martins, Western Bluebirds, and Chipping Sparrows. Why are Purple Martins doing relatively well in comparison to several other swallow species? Maybe not coincidentally, OPAS’s conservation programs for martins and bluebirds might be helping, although it is also possible that martins and bluebirds gained extra attention during the count. There are so few martins and bluebirds to start with that any increase seems like a big deal.

What species did we miss? The easiest way to answer this question is to look at “count week” birds, which includes species seen in Clallam County during the three days before or after the count, but not on count day. What a list! Long-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Red Phalarope, Ancient Murrelet, Tufted Puffin, Sabine’s Gull, Heermann’s Gull, Black-footed Albatross, Sooty Shearwater, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Golden Eagle, Broad-winged Hawk, Cassin’s Vireo, California Scrub-Jay, Sage Thrasher, Western Meadowlark, and Common Grackle. Some of these we should have seen, particularly if we had an offshore boat, but others, such as the thrasher and grackle, are genuinely rare birds in Clallam County. To put it another way, if we had seen all 17 of these count-week birds on count day, we would have tallied 178 species instead of 161, putting the count right at the average number of species for the last 30 years.

As always, next year’s Birdathon coincides with International Migratory Bird Day, which always occurs on the second Saturday in May. Put next year’s count on your calendar right now, on May 11, 2024.

And many thanks to everyone who reported birds in Clallam County on Birdathon day:


If you are interested in local bird sightings, check out eBird at https://ebird.org/explore, then under “Explore Regions” enter Clallam or Jefferson County. Please join eBird and add your own sightings, as well.
Results of OPAS Clallam Co. Birdathon/International Migratory Bird Count, May 13, 2023

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<td>Rufous Hummingbird</td>
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cw = species observed during the three days before or after Birdathon, but not on count day
Underlined species = unusual species, recorded infrequently on Clallam Co. Spring Bird Count
Underlined numbers = record or near record number of individuals for Clallam Co. Spring Bird Count
L = low number compared with previous 30 years of Birdathon data

Number of field parties: 74
Number of participants: 102
Hours on foot: 116.7
Miles on foot: 82.8
Hours by car: 27.1
Miles by car: 161.25 L
Hours by boat: 0.5
Miles by boat: 7.8
Hours owling: 2.3
Feeder hours: 58.9
Total Party Hours: 205.4

TOTAL INDIVIDUAL BIRDS: 12181 L
NUMBER OF SPECIES: 161 L
Northern Pygmy Owl
Photo: Bob Boekelheide

Barrow’s Goldeneye
Photo: Robert Hutchison

American Bittern
Photo: Dow Lambert

Virginia Rail
Photo: Doris Clausey
Local OPAS Membership, includes subscription to the Harlequin Happenings bi-monthly newsletter and other programs and birding trips. For more information see our website at http://www.olybird.org. To join, complete application below and mail to address above.

___ Annual Membership ($20.00)            ___ 3 Year Membership ($50.00)
___ 6 Year Membership ($90.00, saves $30) ___ Lifetime Membership ($250.00)

Name ___________________________________________ Home Phone (_____) _______________________

Street ___________________________________________ Cell Phone (_____) _________________________

City___________________________ State _____ Zip ____________   Email ___________________________________________

Harlequin Happenings Newsletter: You will receive an e-mail notice when posted in full color on our website. If you wish a black and white printed copy instead, check box here: □ Send printed copy

Payment Options:
1. Credit Card   Master Card or Visa Payment
   Card Number: ___________________________________________ Expiration Date __________
   Authorized Signature ___________________________________ Amount Paid $__________
   Three digit Security Code from back of card ________

2. For Checks: Make payable to OPAS and mail with this form to address above

OPAS is an Internal Revenue Service Section 501(c)(3) organization (membership gifts are tax deductible)

For OFFICE USE ONLY   Process Date ____________ Record ID ____________ Forms Note ID ____________