



HARLEQUIN HAPPENINGS

Newsletter of the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society (OPAS)

www.olympicpeninsulaudubon.org (www.olybird.org)

Clallam County, Washington

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Issue 2 Mar-Apr, 2018

"Volunteer educators and stewards for birds and habitat conservation"

OPAS Programs for March and April

by Bob Boekelheide

March 21, 2018 Program

Dungeness River Audubon Center, 2151 Hendrickson Road, Sequim, WA at 7 p.m.

"Swallows—Acrobats of our spring and summer skies", presented by Ken Wiersema

Each year's first sighting of Swallows means that the renewal of spring, warmth, and growth brought by summer are on their way. Swallows can devour flying insects, nest in our yards, and be fun to observe. Come and enjoy an illustrated program, presented by Ken Wiersema, concentrating on our local Swallow species,



their identification, and how we can conserve and help protect the environment they need to flourish.



Cliff Swallow
Photo by Chris Perry



Ken Wiersema
on the job

When Ken moved to Clallam Co in 1994, Swallows peaked his engineering interest, with the need to build and install nest boxes for the birds as they returned to his pasture and pond each spring. He has committed to learning about Swallows, building boxes that meet their needs, and collecting photos and sounds of their actions. Ken is a past OPAS president, past member of the Audubon Washington State Board, 40+ year member of National Audubon, and a volunteer instructor at the Dungeness River Audubon Center. He is currently OPAS's Education Chair.

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Harlequin Happenings is published six times a year. Consider "going green". Receive your newsletter electronically, in living color, by contacting the OPAS Membership Chair, Audrey Gift, at 360-681-2989, or email agift@olypen.com. The *Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society* meets monthly (except July, August, and December) on the third Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the Dungeness River Audubon Center, 2151 Hendrickson Road, Sequim, WA, (360) 681-4076. The public is welcome.

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President's Notes

By Bob Phreaner



Kudos to Christina Heliker and the other photographers for presenting the annual OPAS members picture show. We had an entertaining and informative evening in spite of an afternoon snowstorm that reduced attendance.

Let's look forward to Spring. Around here, Spring means the Olympic Peninsula BirdFest which will be held April 10th through 17th this year. Beginning with a San Juan Island Cruise and culminating with a Neah Bay trip, it is a week packed with birding adventures!

The BirdFest banquet will be held April 14th in the beautiful JST Red Cedar Hall and be catered by Kokopelli Grill. Our BirdFest banquet speaker, Claudio Vidal, is coming all the way from Punta Arenas, Chile to inspire, enlighten and entertain us with his photos and knowledge of birds and mammals of Patagonia and Chile. Claudio is an internationally recognized birder, naturalist, author and photographer. My wife and I had the good fortune to have Claudio as a guide in Patagonia (2015) and Chiloe Island (2016), and I know you will enjoy his company as much as we did.

I was most impressed with Claudio's advocacy for conservation and ecotourism in Chile. You may have heard that Chile recently added 10 million acres of land to their national park system. Chile is finding that for every dollar they spend in national parks, they receive ten back, which is more of a return than even copper extraction. ("The Guardian", 18 March, 2017). Like Chile, Clallam County could benefit economically and environmentally from increased ecotourism. Birding is arguably the fastest growing hobby in the US and could augment the local extractive industries of the past. We need to promote ecotourism in Clallam County and our BirdFest is a great start. With the coming flock of birding enthusiasts, we could soon need a Boekelheide and Van Horn publication "Birds of the Blue Hole"!

In other news, the OPAS Board recently voted unanimously to update our tagline and Mission Statement. You will soon begin seeing the tagline "Volunteers, educators and stewards for birds and habitat conservation" on communications. It was decided "The Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society promotes birding and habitat conservation through science-based education, advocacy, and stewardship. We are a volunteer chapter of the National Audubon Society and founding partner and supporter of the Dungeness River Audubon Center" better reflected our mission in 2018.

I will close by reminding everyone that Earth Day is April 22, and while other countries like Chile, China and Papua New Guinea are increasing their conserved lands, the US is decreasing them. Critical Federal agencies are inexplicably under assault by decreased budgets and loss of personnel. If you are concerned that nationally laws such as the century old Migratory Bird Treaty Act is under assault, you can "think globally and act locally" by joining the OPAS Conservation Committee and participating in our various citizen science projects.

Let's make Clallam County a national and international birding destination!

Hear Ye!

Olympic Birdfest!
April 10-17, 2018
Register online at
www.olympicbirdfest.org

OPAS Programs

(Continued from page one)

April 18, 2018 Program

Dungeness River Audubon Center, 2151 Hendrickson Road, Sequim, WA at 7 p.m.

"Birds of the Southern Oceans and Antarctica", presented by Bruce Fryxell

The southern oceans are home to albatrosses and petrels, some of the most spectacular flying birds on Earth. They are renowned for riding the winds over turbulent oceans, well adapted to spending their entire lives at sea and only coming ashore for nesting. At the April OPAS meeting, we are excited that Bruce Fryxell is presenting photos of these fascinating birds that he took over several trips to Antarctica, New Zealand, South Georgia, and the Falkland Islands.



Bruce Fryxell

Bruce recently retired from his career in physics, with research interests into astronomy, aerospace applications, and climate modeling. He moved here from Michigan and has since become an active participant in OPAS activities. He is an avid traveler and nature photographer, whose photos have been featured in several books, magazines, and TV shows. Please join us as Bruce teaches us about these "most legendary of birds."

OPAS Field Trips in March and April

by Denny AMFJ Van Horn

Gray skies! Rain! And more gray skies and more rain; and a few inches of snow. The past few months have not been nice - weather wise. But March is here; and the swallows are back. We've kept several of our regular outings for March and April; we've added a unique Hawk Watch outing; and, of course, we'll go chasing shorebirds one afternoon. And oh yes, BirdFest happens, as well. For all trips, bring scopes, binoculars, and personal items, as desired.



Wednesday Bird Walks

Date: Every Wed. morning, 8:30 a.m.

Meeting Place: Outside the Dungeness River Audubon Center

Features: Easy guided bird walk through Railroad Bridge Park to see birds of the Dungeness River riparian area.

Pitship Pocket to Port Williams

Date & Time: Saturday, March 10, 9 a.m.

Leader: The Grasshopper (a.k.a., Gary Bullock)

Meeting place: South parking lot at John Wayne Marina

Features: Late Winter residents and early Spring migrants. One never knows what will be found on this outing - an easy onshore scoping of Sequim Bay and the open waters looking off towards Discovery Bay and Protection Island always brings a bit of feathered enlightenment. And we'll also check-out what might be lingering along Schmuck road.

Further Information Contact: Gary Bullock <gbullockak@hotmail.com> / 360 797-4556.

Neah Bay Bahokus Peak Hawk Watch

Date & Time: Saturday, March 24; 8:30 a.m.

Leader: Denny AFMJ Van Horn

Meeting place: Washburn's Market Parking Lot

Features: This outing is totally weather dependent. If no fog, low clouds, or nasty winds, we'll head up Bahokus Peak to spend the day watching and waiting for raptors, Sandhill cranes, and other Spring migrants. This is a stand-around, sit-down, sky-watch waiting for birds to come flying by, as they stage to cross the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Vancouver Island. If the weather is not conducive to raptor watching - there's always the possibility of just birding out-and-about around Neah Bay. In addition to the usual, camp chairs are a boon.

Further Information Contact: Denny Van Horn <dennyvanhorn@gmail.com> / 360 406-1584.

Carrie Blake Park

Date & Time: Saturday, April 7; 8-10 a.m.

Leader: Cindy Fullwiler

Meeting place: South parking lot near the dog pen

Features: A walk around and through Carrie Blake Park. This outing will be about early spring migrants and lingering wintering residents.

Further Information Contact: Cindy Fullwiler <cfullwiler@hotmail.com> / 951 501-9257.

Dungeness Landing Shorebirds

Date & Time: Saturday, April 21; 1 – 4 p.m.

Leader: Jackie OneTree

(Continued on next page)

Harlequin Happenings

Meeting place: Dungeness Landing

Features: Today's low tide is a -0.5 at 2:20. So we'll spend the time searching the expanse of tide flats for over-wintering shorebirds, along with the first of our spring migrants; and just possibly, something totally off the wall.

Further Information Contact: Denny Van Horn
<dennyvanhorn@gmail.com> / 360 406-1584.

Neah Bay Bahokus Peak Hawk Watch

Date & Time: Saturday, April 28; 8:30 a.m.

Leader: Denny AFMJ Van Horn

Meeting place: Washburn's Market Parking Lot

Features: This 2nd outing up Bahokus Peak is totally weather dependent. If no fog, low clouds, or nasty winds, we'll head up Bahokus to spend the day watching for raptors, Sandhill cranes, and other Spring migrants. This is a stand-around, sit-down, sky watching event waiting for birds to come by, as they stage to cross the Strait of Juan de Fuca over to Vancouver Island. If the weather is crappy up on the peak, I think Neah Bay has a few other places to go out-and-about to bird, eh? In addition to the usual, camp chairs are a boon.

Further Information Contact: Denny Van Horn
<dennyvanhorn@gmail.com> / 360 406-1584.

Other Events

Backyard Birder programs for March and April

by Jane Stewart

Backyard Birding is a series of classes hosted by members of the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, and is intended for residents of the area who are interested in knowing more about birds seen locally each season of the year, and in learning how to develop good habitats for wild birds. All sessions are at the Dungeness River Audubon Center in Railroad Bridge Park from 10 am until noon. The public is invited to attend any or all of the sessions. **Backyard Birding** can be taken either as individual classes or in a series. The cost of each session is \$5, and is free for anyone under 18. After the completion of five sessions, participants will be offered free membership in OPAS for one year.

March 3rd Class -- Saturday, 10a.m. to noon
"Birdscaping – Inviting birds to your yard"

March brings a new program to our Backyard Birding Series. Carolyn Wilcox, owner and guide for Experience Olympic Tours on the Olympic Peninsula, has a small urban/forest edge lot in Port Angeles.

Some of the 20+ species of wintering birds that have accepted an invitation to her yard are the Downy Woodpecker,



Wilson's Warbler
Photo by John Gatchet

Northern Flicker, Bewick's Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Varied Thrush, Townsend's Warbler, and Fox Sparrow. New this winter, a large brush pile enticed a Pacific Wren to her yard. Carolyn is working to improve breeding spaces to her small property by introducing nest boxes. She will discuss bird habitat: composting, dead wood (snags, nurse logs, brush piles), hedges, native plants, feeders, nest boxes, and water features. Included will be ideas on how to improve the safe movement of birds through your home's surroundings. Come and bring your ideas and questions. Be ready for spring birds!

April 7th Class -- Saturday, 10 am to noon.
Spring Sounds 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, April 7th

Our **April** class in the series brings 'Sounds of Spring' to you a month earlier than last year, and will help tune up your ear for BirdFest. Dow Lambert and Ken Wiersema will present one of the most popular and well-attended programs, at the Dungeness River Audubon Center, Railroad Bridge Park. Their presentation includes new and re-edited slides, videos, and sound recordings of our local birds. Each year, polishing your listening skills will help you recognize neighborhood birds by their songs and their calls. Come and learn to improve your knowledge and enjoyment of the birds in our backyards, fields, and shores.

The remaining programs for this year's series include **"Migration"** by a new speaker Tomás Setubal on May 5th; **"Birds out of the nest"** by Ken Wiersema on June 9th; and **"Gulls"** by Bob Boekelheide on July 7th. •••• Watch for further details!

Focus On

Note the new and revised *"Focus On"* bird programs offered by the Dungeness River Audubon Center. We have expanded

our bird and wildlife offerings, in a way that fits well with our successful Backyard Birding programs. So for the first 6 months of 2018, we will have Backyard Birding in the 1st Saturday of each month, and the **Focus On** programs on the 3rd Saturday. The remaining dates and topics are:

- March 17th Ducks
- April 21st Hummingbirds
- May 19th Swallows

All classes will be held at the Dungeness River Audubon Center from 10a.m. - 12p.m. Classes will be taught by Powell Jones, Jenna Ziogas, and Ken Wiersema. Registration is not required; however, \$10 for non-members, or \$5 for all members paid at the door. For more information, contact Jenna at rceducation@olympus.net or 360-681-4076.

SAVE THE DATE: 15th Annual Olympic Birdfest April 10-17, 2018.

If you have already registered, thank you for your support and we look forward to having a great weekend with you. We pride ourselves in having birding experiences that are personal and fun to attend. Just like in years past, we have many options for you to view our local bird specialties with knowledgeable local guides that know the lay of the land.

Along with birding, our banquet will be held at the spectacular Jamestown S'Klallam Tribal Center on Sequim Bay, and will feature Chilean nature guide & photographer Claudio Vidal. The topic will be "Patagonia & Chile: Birds & Mammals at the End of the Americas".

If you like to get out on the water of our beautiful Salish Sea and Strait of Juan de Fuca, you have the option of a 3-day cruise to the San Juan Islands, a 3-hour cruise to Protection Island, or a 6-hour tour off the coast of Neah Bay.

New this year a Birding by Bike tour. Join River Center director Powell Jones on this fossil-fuel free journey by bike to tour and view birds in the Sequim Dungeness Valley.

Back by popular demand is the Dry Creek Water Fowl Breeding Sanctuary. At this site, 14 species of waterfowl commonly known as sea ducks are raised, all of which are rarely seen up close in the wild. It's a great tour for photographers.

The Roadshow of 2017's Best National Avian Photographs, as awarded by the National Audubon Society, will be on exhibit in the lobby of the Sequim Civic Center, located at 152 West Cedar Street, from April 6 to April 30, 2018.

The twelve winning photographs were selected from more than 5,500 entries, the winning photos were published in the Sum-

mer 2017 issue of Audubon Magazine, and show birdlife at its most vivid, vulnerable, formidable, and elegant. Photographers from 49 states and eight Canadian provinces submitted images in three categories: professional, amateur, and youth. A panel of five judges had the daunting task of sifting through the stunning images and grading them, based on technical quality, originality, and artistic merit. Join us on at the Civic Center for the show opening night, on April 6, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m., for First Friday Art Walk, and for BirdFest BirdQuest.

If you would like more information about these and other 2018 Birdfest activities, please visit and register at www.olympicbirdfest.org. The proceeds of Olympic Birdfest benefit the educational programs of the Dungeness River Audubon Center. We appreciate your support.

In Memorium—Dr. Virginia Clark, 1928-2018

by Bob Boekelheide and Ken Wiersema

Dr. Virginia Clark, one of the "Giants" of Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, passed away on January 24, 2018.

Virginia and Welden Clark retired to Sequim in the 1980s, becoming members and generous supporters of Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society. Virginia served as OPAS treasurer for many years and regularly edited Harlequin Happenings. Together with Welden, she provided the OPAS mailing service in the 1990s. For their accomplishments, Virginia and Welden received OPAS's highest honor, the Harlequin Award, in 1991.



Virginia & Weldon Clark installing River Center audio-visual system

In the 1990s and beyond, Virginia and Welden became prime advocates and designers of the Dungeness River Audubon (Continued on next page)

Harlequin Happenings

Center, particularly supporting and creating the center's state-of-the-art audiovisual system. Through this entire time, they played an important role in the formation and operation of the Dungeness River Management Team and the Dungeness Clean Water Work Group, even preparing a scholarly work "The Keys to an Understanding of the Natural History of the Dungeness River System." Virginia also donated many hours as a member of the Clallam County Public Health Board.

In her professional life, Virginia was a bio-medical statistician, with many academic accolades over a long career. She graduated with high honors in mathematics from the University of Michigan and began working as a statistician for the Atomic Energy Commission at Hanford, WA. There she met and married young Welden Clark. Eventually, Virginia earned her master's degree at Harvard and her PhD in Bio-medical Statistics at UCLA. Staying at UCLA, she became a faculty member and eventually a dean at UCLA Medical School, where she wrote and edited many textbooks and papers.

For the bird world, Virginia and Welden were prime facilitators of the Raptor Watch at Bahokus Peak near Neah Bay in the 1990s, in cooperation with the Falcon Research Group and HawkWatch International. Virginia and Welden hosted many OPAS gatherings at their self-designed and self-built home in Happy Valley, particularly our annual Christmas Bird Count compilations before the Audubon Center existed. To those of us in OPAS, Virginia may be remembered for her delicious "Virginia" ham that she brought to potluck dinners over the years.

There will be a celebration of Virginia Clark's life at the Dungeness River Audubon Center on Thursday, March 8, 2018, at 1 p.m. Donations may be made in Virginia's name to the Dungeness River Audubon Center at Railroad Bridge Park.

Bird Sightings

by Bob Boekelheide

Winter 2018 continues to pummel the north Olympic Peninsula, bringing occasional snow and gusty winds to the lowlands through February, and lots of snow in the mountains. This is what La Ninas are supposed to do, right? Mountain snow depths are above average for this date with about 10 ft at Hurricane Ridge, hopefully making salmon happy later this summer when they need water in the rivers.

This has been the winter of repeat birds, with several unusual species making repeat visits, or hanging around for weeks or months after first being seen. One good example is the female Redhead still at the pond on Simdars Rd near Hwy 101,

right where Pete Walker, John Acklen, and Juanice Reyes found it on the Sequim-Dungeness CBC. A male Redhead also appeared at the Kirner Pond in late December, staying well into January.



*Female Redhead
Found at Simdars Rd. pond by
Pete Walker, John Acklen, and Juanice Reyes*

In late January, Carolyn and Bob Iddins discovered a Rough-legged Hawk at the exact place where one hung out two years ago, along Keeler Road east of Sequim. The bird showed up again about a week later, spotted by Gary Bullock on 2/2. Could it be the same bird as the one seen in the winter 2015-16?

Other unusual species keep coming back year after year, possibly the same individuals. For the ninth winter in a row there are Black-crowned Night Herons spending the winter in Dungeness, roosting in thick conifers along Palmer Street and flying out at dusk to haunt local marshes. Denny Van Horn, a noted Human in the Dung, named the two birds "Gale" and "Storm," perhaps because he used to watch My Little Margie.



*Willet & Godwit
Photo by Dow Lambert*

For the third winter in a row, one Willet is wintering-over in Dungeness Bay, hanging out with the 20 or so Marbled Godwits also there. Until fairly recently, both these species were very scarce this far north during winter. In the 25 years between 1975 and 2000, Marbled Godwits only occurred four times on the Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count, mostly single birds, and a single Willet only occurred once. Now flocks of Marbled Godwits have wintered here five of the last six years and one Willet has stayed for the last three winters. Are these birds indicators of warming climates, staying further north in winter?

For the second winter in a row, a Pacific Golden-Plover is spending the winter hanging out with Black-bellied Plovers in the corn stubble along Schmuck Rd, first discovered this year by Pete Walker on 12/27. This species normally winters in Hawaii and other Pacific Islands, although stray individuals occasionally remain through winter in California and Oregon. But two years in a row?

Among other shorebirds, Patti Gotz photographed a large flock of 71 Black Oystercatchers roosting at Cape Flattery on 1/4. They've been missing from local bays this winter, so it's good to know they're out there somewhere. A Red Knot, first found by Dan Waggoner at Fort Flagler on 1/12, is still there in late Feb. Ruddy Turnstones have been hard to find with the Black Turnstones at Ediz Hook this winter, with only two reports -- 3 on 1/28 by Iris Winslow and 2 on 2/11 by Judy Collins.

It's been a good winter to spot Spotted Sandpipers, which aren't spotted in winter. Judy Mullally spotted one Spotted near the mouth of Lee's Creek on 12/27, and spotted it again on 1/7. Judy spotted another Spotted in Sequim Bay on 1/3. Ivy Doak spotted one Spotted at Freshwater Bay on 2/16. So all you spotters, get out there and spot more Spotted Sandpipers.

Spring has sprung! The coveted First Turkey Vulture award goes to Zeke Smith, who found one TV soaring over Port Hadlock on 2/7. The first Clallam County TV award goes to Dave Manson, who watched a TV soaring near the Elwha River on 2/13.

There are hundreds, maybe thousands of Anna's Hummingbirds around Sequim this winter, but how about Rufous Hummingbirds? Bob Bagwell reported a male Rufous Hummingbird at his home in Blue Ribbon Farms on 1/29, too early for spring migration. Curiously, another eBird record of a Rufous showed up not too far away at Monterra on 2/4, reported by an anonymous observer. Normally

first Rufouses don't show up until March, so could a Rufous have stayed north this winter? Bob Bagwell also reported an unusual winter Osprey flying over his yard on 1/28.

High counts of Trumpeter Swans by OPAS volunteers this winter have never reached the lofty levels seen last year, peaking at 183 swans in January. Complicating the counts, swans are much more spread out this winter and have occupied some new locations. They'll likely be gone by the end of March, so enjoy them while you can.



Trumpeter Swan Family

Yellow-billed Loons are around this winter, including one found north of Protection Island by the Protection Island Aquatic Reserve survey on 2/15, and another found by Alexander Patia from the overlook at the Dungeness Rec Area on 1/27. Sumner Collins reported a very unusual Clark's Grebe at Dungeness NWR on 1/6.

(Continued on next page)



Yellow-billed Loon

Harlequin Happenings

Another bird sticking around for the winter is the White-winged Dove first seen by Alexander Patia in Neah Bay on 12/15. It continues through Feb, often hanging out with collared-doves in the middle of town. One and sometimes two Short-eared Owls have been frequenting 3 Crabs this winter, along with occasional sightings at other locations. One also flew around Keeler Road near Hwy 101 on 2/17.



White-winged Dove
Photo by Robert Hutchison

A Barn Owl hunting on a bright sunny day is a very uncommon sight, as one was doing 2/19 at 3 Crabs, photographed by Bruce Paige.

A remarkable wave of swallows passed through the north Olympic Peninsula in January, mostly Barn Swallows along with a few Tree Swallows. The first sighting was 4 Barn Swallows seen by Lee Bowen at 3 Crabs on 1/4, then over

the next several days many observers reported small flocks all over the north Olympic Peninsula, from Chima-cum to Neah Bay. The peak number reported was 17 by Leslie and Bob Bagwell at 3 Crabs on 1/6; the last ones reported were 2 seen by Zeke Smith near Chima-cum on 1/20. Tree Swallows showed up briefly on 1/16, with 2 reported by Denny Van Horn in Dungeness and one reported by Bruce Paige at 3 Crabs. These sightings continue the trend of more swallows in winter, particularly Barn Swallows. Are they possibly finding aerial insects in the cold winter skies?

The Neah Bay area, from Sekiu to Hobuck Beach, experienced a nice wave of White-winged Crossbills mixed with Red Crossbills this winter. The high count was 6 White-wingeds on Christmas Day, seen by Paula Flores in Sekiu. The last report was at least 3 White-wingeds in a flock at Hobuck Campground, seen by Adianne Akmajian. Bill Tweit reported the only lowland Pine Grosbeaks of the period, with 2 at Neah Bay on 1/6.

Common Redpolls continue their winter irruption, seen many places from Forks to Discovery Bay in the last two months, sometimes with siskins and sometimes by themselves. The high count of redpolls goes to Alexander Patia, who reported a pure flock of 50 redpolls near the mouth of the Dungeness River on 1/28. The last report I know about was 7 redpolls at the Port Angeles waterfront on 2/13, seen by Astrid Padilla, but they might still be around.

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"The craziest bird ever identified on a COASST Survey" (as described by Charlie Wright), was a Purple Gallinule literally unearthed by Nancy Messmer at Hobuck Beach on 12/14/17. She found the remains of a right wing barely sticking out of the sand, which amazingly could be identified as a Purple Gallinule. Purple Gallinules are typically found around the Gulf of Mexico down to South America, but they have a tendency to stray outside their range, even as far as Iceland and Europe. It may have been just a matter of time before one showed up here as well. The closest other records to WA are live birds in California and Utah. The moral is: next time you walk a beach, don't ignore strange wings sticking out of the sand.

Another crazy past sighting worth mentioning is an immature Brown Booby found by Stephanie Lotze at 3 Crabs on 11/15/17. While walking the beach, Stephanie spotted a strange bird perched on a log. At first she walked right by it, but on the way back she thought it was so unusual that she took its picture. Sure enough, a Brown Booby! The moral is: next time you walk a beach, don't ignore strange birds perched on logs.

Even though it feels like winter, the nesting season has already begun. Great Horned Owls are likely sitting on eggs right now, maybe feeding chicks. Anna's Hummingbirds are building nests and getting ready to lay eggs. Established Bald Eagle pairs may have started laying eggs by the time you receive this newsletter, so go check your local eagle nest to see if the female has started incubating. Birdsong is in the air and spring migration has begun. Don't let the nesting season slip away without experiencing the full intensity and grandeur of spring -- go birding!

Thank you very much for your sightings! If you see anything noteworthy, please call Bob Boekelheide (360-808-0196) or email to bboek@olympus.net.

Education Notes

by Ken Wiersema

Nest Boxes -- Our annual nest box class, on 24 Feb, was successful for the few hardy folks who braved the sleet and forecasted snow. We took advantage of the small class size to assemble pre-cut kits inside the Center and build excellent boxes that attendees took home to install. Many thanks to Gary Bullock, Dan Stahler, Carl Siver, and Bob Phreaner for their patience, tool skills, and for pre-cutting & packaging the box kits. We offer this class in the last Saturday in Feb each year to help our community get ready for the arrival of migrating songbirds. We have a few non-

assembled box kits at the Center that you can purchase at the gift shop. Fully assembled boxes are also available.

Focus Series -- Powell, Jenna, and I have put together a series of in depth classes on bird specific bird species. The first three programs on Corvids, Owls, and Woodpeckers have been well attended. The upcoming classes on Ducks, Hummingbirds, and Swallows will complete the initial series. Our intent is to add several new programs in the next series, possibly Raptors, Shorebirds, Rodents, Coyotes, Salmon, and Bears? Notice how a few non-avian species will edge into the mix. If you have a particular life form you'd want to see and learn about, please let us know. We're looking for skilled subject matter presenters to expand our instructor team. If you're one or know one, please let us know.

Dungeness River Audubon Center classes. - I won't repeat what is presented on the Center's web site, but ask you to look it over. A new Beginning Birds class will be taking enrollment soon; Birding by Ear is also taking signups. Keep a close watch on what is happening....

Spring is nearly upon us. Our classes and programs give you some basic information, but to increase your skills and enjoyment, get out and go birding. The OPAS-led Wednesday Morning Birdwalk is a great start; look over and join the many field trips this spring. And of course, BirdFest is coming; please join us.

Slurping Trumpeter Swans

by Tom Bankroft, Audubon Washington

Eight trumpeter swans stood in the muddy water, their necks bent in an "S" shape curve, and their bills half submerged in the mucky mess. A thin layer of water covered the fallow field, and the temperature hung in the high 30s. Their heads moved sideways, in quick even movements, and their mouths opened and shut rapidly. Four bright white adults fed not more than fifty yards from me, as well as four equally large, grayish-white young of the year. Their elephantine legs held their bodies above the muddy water as they crept through the quagmire, gradually approaching where I froze, transfixed by their size.

The slurp-slurp-slurp, followed by a pause, then more slurping put me into a trance. I was standing on the side of Wylie Slough Road with headsets over my ears and a directional microphone pointing across the road.

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Trumpeter Swans "Slurping"
Photo by Tom Bancroft

My digital recorder was capturing every nuance, and the headphones emphasized the mesmerizing sound. Go to the link below to hear these recordings:

<https://soundcloud.com/tom-bancroft-2/trumpeter-swans-feeding1>

These swans are huge, weighing as much as a beagle. In spite of their weight, they are graceful, strong fliers that return each winter to the Skagit from breeding grounds in the north. Two pairs -- each with their two full-grown young -- were having breakfast. These two families probably had flown together from an Alaska wilderness to winter in these agricultural fields.

These swans were pumping the slurry through their mouths, filtering out plant material. The back and forth motion of their heads moved the bills through the brown suspension, continuing to churn up the water. Their bill lamellae acted like a sieve, and occasionally, a green stem or white root disappeared into a mouth. I had watched Trumpeter Swans dig potatoes and graze on grass or growing grains, but never filter plant material from the dirty ooze.

When the cygnets first hatch, the parents take them to good feeding areas, often stirring up the water to make aquatic plants and animals more readily available. The young must eat on their own; the parents don't feed them. Swans learn to exploit novel foods that weren't part of the environment before Europeans arrived.

It is hard to imagine that the known Trumpeter Swan population was only 69 individuals in 1935. A few additional

unrecorded flocks, however, were hiding at the time in Canada and Alaska. Shooting them for their feathers, skin, and meat had decimated the once widespread species. Protection and reintroductions have allowed these swans to recover. In 2005, ornithologists estimated that their numbers had climbed to more than 34,000. Two families, perhaps sisters with their spouses and children, traveling together were right across from me.



Swans Becoming Alert

The adults started to honk sporadically and softly. Go to the link below to hear these sounds:

<https://soundcloud.com/tom-bancroft-2/trumpeter-swans-feeding2>

It was a nervous gesture, so I grabbed my gear to leave them in peace.

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