



# HARLEQUIN HAPPENINGS

Newsletter of the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society (OPAS)

[www.olympicpeninsulaudubon.org](http://www.olympicpeninsulaudubon.org) ([www.olybird.org](http://www.olybird.org))

Clallam County, Washington

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Issue 6 Nov-Dec, 2020

*"Volunteer educators and stewards for birds and habitat conservation"*

*[Editor's Note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all in-person OPAS activities have been postponed or canceled until further notice.]*

## OPAS Program for November

By Tom Butler

**"The Black Guillemot's Dilemma: Evolve or Go Extinct", presented by George Divoky, November 18 at 7:00 p.m.**

Meeting held via Zoom. OPAS will address a few updates, with the presentation to follow. This promises to be an exceptional program. See insert later in this newsletter for instructions, or [register online](#). No OPAS Program in December, but see Bob B's article on Xmas Bird Counts for birding activities.



George Divoky

Studying the Black Guillemots of Cooper Island in the Alaska Arctic has largely been a solitary venture for George Divoky. While the discovery and initial years of the study were part of governmental research related to oil development in northern Alaska, for the past four decades the work has been conducted with occasional grants and much personal dedication.

Long-term studies, such as George's, rarely can be conducted by the government, which typically focuses on immediate agency needs, while the duration of most academic research

is insufficient to allow real understanding of multi-decadal trends. Yet it is precisely this type of extended data set that is needed to monitor the long-term cycles and trends related to climate change and other atmospheric variation.

George has been studying seabirds in Arctic Alaska since 1970, and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. This kind of sustained scientific observation is almost unheard for polar ecosystems.

Register for the "The Black Guillemot Dilemma: Evolve or Go Extinct" virtual meeting by [clicking here](#). Scroll down in your confirmation email from Eventbrite to the "Additional information" for Zoom instructions.

## OPAS Field Trips: A Message from the Field Trip Coordinator

By Marie Grad



Due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, in-person Field Trips are still not being scheduled. We are hoping that we can start Field Trips sometime in the New Year; however, this shouldn't keep anyone from grabbing their binoculars and spotting scope and getting outside.

The birding in the fall shifts to the shores and fields where wintering waterfowl and some shorebirds are abundant. Our past fall field trip locations included Dungeness Landing County Park, the Three Crabs area, Ediz Hook, and the areas around Sequim Bay. The fields along Schmuck Road are a great place to see migrating geese, swans and the occasional Northern Strike. For other inspiration, you can check out the Field Trip section of past Harlequin Happenings on the OPAS website.

*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@olyopen.com](mailto:agift@olyopen.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.

### OPAS Board of Directors

#### Officers:

*Interim President*, Ken Wiersema  
*Vice-Pres/Program Chair*, Tom Butler  
*Treasurer*, Wendy Hirota  
*Interim Secretary*, Audrey Gift

#### Board-at-Large:

Kendra Donelson  
Allyson Simons

#### Committees:

*Bird Counts*, Bob Boekelheide  
*Conservation Co-Chairs*, Bob Phreaner and Joyce Volmut  
*Education*, Ken Wiersema (Interim)  
*Membership*, Audrey Gift  
*Field Trips*, Marie Grad  
*Hospitality*, Clare Hatler  
*Newsletter*, Rob Hutchison  
*Publicity*, Sara Ellen Peterson  
*Webmaster*, Mary Porter-Solberg  
*Social Media Support*: Mary Porter-Solberg

Contact E-mail:

[president](mailto:president@olympicpeninsulaudubon.org)

[@olympicpeninsulaudubon.org](mailto:president@olympicpeninsulaudubon.org)

## Interim President's Notes

by Ken Wiersema



As some of you may have heard, your OPAS leadership is going through a transition. Please look over the revised listing of our leaders on page two of this newsletter. I personally THANK (and you should too) those stalwart folks who have agreed to remain in OPAS leadership roles, and I also send our thanks to those who have resigned for their past, positive contributions to OPAS. I wish you to know that I've reluctantly agreed to be an interim President, with the endorsement of our remaining board members. I did so because I believe in you -- our members, and the important contributions OPAS will continue to make to our partners at the Dungeness River Audubon Center, and our community.

So, we have new (and in some cases, recycled) leadership in several key positions. Audrey Gift, while stepping in to help out as our interim Secretary, wants to return to being our Membership Chair. We urgently ask another member to come forth and volunteer to serve as OPAS Secretary. We'd also ask members to consider stepping forward to be a Co-Vice President with Tom Butler. In OPAS the VP is the program chair, and is responsible for lining up speakers, and programs for our membership meetings. We've found over the years that it works well to share this job, providing a wider array of both contacts and interests in bringing high quality programs to our members. Pandemic constraints add complexities to our meeting planning, while also adding the advantage of having speakers not faced with travel, and other scheduling conflicts. When Bob Boekelheide was our VP, he treated our speakers to dinner, arranged for overnight accommodations [as needed], and provided them an OPAS stipend to cover travel. Thanks Bob! In COVID times we no longer have that expense.

In addition, I offer our most heartfelt thanks to Bob Boekelheide for preparing 25 years of the Bird Sightings column for the newsletter. We'll miss 'em. I really encourage folks to read through Bob's Sep-Oct column and follow his recommendations/tutorial on the use and value of *eBird*. If an old curmudgeon like me can muddle thru *eBird*, any of you surely can!

OPAS is on the cusp of expanding opportunities. Together with our partners in the Center, we'll have the facilities to enhance programs to serve our members better. We can expand our bird education programs, and offer fun social gatherings and collaboration that our members expect. We'll improve BirdFest, and offer multiple field trips that make our festival popular and unique. Of course, we have to get through the COVID-19 pandemic. With the right safeguards, hopefully by next fall when the expanded Center reopens, we'll have COVID-19 behind us and be ready to enjoy better bird habitat and outdoor birding events. Have the best Holiday Season you can in these challenging times. As Bob Boekelheide encourages us ... Let's go Birding!

### Donate to OPAS on-line!!

Click on our website at:

[https://  
olympicpeninsulaudubon.org/  
donate](https://olympicpeninsulaudubon.org/donate).

## Education Notes

By Ken Wiersema

### Backyard Birder programs for '20-'21

Because of COVID-19 meeting size limitations; loss of meeting space and instruction specimens due to remodeling and expansion of the River Center's facilities; health of our members and presenters; our Backyard Birder programs remain on hiatus. We may offer a few virtual online programs in 2021, I'm considering the - "*Birds: The inside story*" - on bird biology that Shirley and I enjoy doing. Also in the mix might be "*Spring Sounds*" with Dow Lambert.

So, in the interim, please take advantage of these other virtual educational offerings: **Jim Karr's** Ascent of Birds series; our OPAS meetings; our Nature Book discussion group, and the array of programs offered by the Dungeness River Audubon Center (which are also on our OPAS calendar). Please click on the event you want to "Zoom" into and fill out a brief registration form. Your confirmed registration will be returned to you along with a Zoom link for the program. You'll also get a reminder the day of the program.

## Conservation Matters

### Project BirdSafe

By Dee Renee Ericks

In the Pacific Northwest, many of us rejoice when the sun comes streaming through our windows, especially after many long days of gray skies. We enjoy our windows for the light they bring, and the views we experience gazing out upon our neighborhood. Did you know that those very same windows are a serious hazard to our avian friends? Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society has a new addition to our olybird.org web-

site, called Project BirdSafe. [Click here](#) to find helpful information for the homeowner or business owner on how to minimize the risks of windows to birds.

Did you know that birds do not see glass as a solid object? Glass is a confusing problem for birds because it is reflective, and invisible. During daylight, birds collide with reflective surfaces thinking that it is a continuation of their habitat, and something they should be able to fly right on through. Glass collisions are most often fatal, killing the healthiest birds as well as the weakest. At least a billion birds die annually across the United States in glass collisions, the majority on home windows.

Steps can be taken to minimize this hazard by:

- >> Creating markings in patterns on reflective glass, about 2-4" apart.
- >> Installing exterior screens on windows.
- >> Closing blinds or curtains.
- >> Moving interior plants away from windows.
- >> Placing bird feeders directly on windows.
- >> Using tape and window film.
- >> Attaching ultraviolet decals.
- >> Making your own Acopian BirdSavers™.

This doesn't have to be an expensive project. Some temporary methods of marking windows include use of Tempera paint (free hand or use stencils), marking glass with soap, posting family artwork or using Post-It notes. Netting, roll down sun shades, ribbons, and shiny streamers can also work.



Yellow-rumped Warbler (Stunned)  
Photo by Bob Phreaner



Marker tape—Inside

Marker tape—Outside

For a homeowner interested in applying markers to the outside of a problem window, Do-It-Yourself Feather Friendly® Bird Collision Deterrent Marker Tape is relatively easy to install. (Continued on next page)



## Harlequin Happenings

For a window measuring 27" X 56", it took about 1.5 hours to clean the window, secure measuring tapes on either side of the window, apply the marker tape at 2" horizontal intervals, run a card over the tapes securing the markers to the glass, peeling the tape off, and clean up. A 100-foot roll of tape costs \$15.99 each, or less depending on the number of rolls purchased. The markers are made of cast vinyl for durability and longevity. While the markers are somewhat noticeable from the outside, from the inside looking out they remain unobtrusive. This tape is endorsed by a number of bird conservation organizations including FLAP (Fatal Light Awareness Program) and the American Bird Conservancy.

Just as windows are a threat to birds during the day, lights can threaten a bird's safety at night. Lights that point upward, or illuminate a large area, are an attractant, especially for migrating birds. Did you know that 80% of North American bird species migrate, and 70% of migrants travel at night? Navigating by moon and starlight, light disorients migrants, causing them to wander off course. Not knowing how to escape from beams of light, birds exhaust themselves, circling, and can crash into buildings, towers, and windows.

Turning off lights dramatically reduces hazards, and allows birds to safely proceed with their journey. You can help birds by:

- >> Turning off unnecessary lights especially during fall and spring migration.
- >> Making sure that your outdoor lights are aimed downward and shielded.
- >> Choosing a warm color tone bulb.
- >> Switching to motion sensor lights.
- >> Dropping shades or pulling your drapes closed at night.

Check out the Lights Out Initiative in Project BirdSafe!

## A Swift's Tale

By Ken Wiersema

In 2018, the Margison family, new to the Pacific Northwest, purchased a home in the foothills south of US 101. They found a breeding group of Vaux's Swifts (pronounced Vox) residing in their home's chimney. The new homeowners called the Dungeness River Audubon Center for assistance. While the family didn't want to disturb the birds during their nesting season; they also did want the birds out of their chimney.

Fortunately for the Swifts, the folks wanted to keep the birds on their property and provide another nesting site. So, who did the River Center call? – OPAS nest box builders, of course! We discussed with the homeowners a plan from the Texas Wildlife Department that was designed for Chimney Swifts. It



*Installation team in action  
Photo by Jennifer Margison*

involved concrete, steel, sheets of plywood, and protection from fire ants. We estimated the bill for such an installation at several thousand dollars. And, we had low confidence that Vaux's Swifts would use it. So, we proposed an alternative structure. It involved fabricating a 12 ft. tall "chimney" out of 4 each, 12" wide, 1" thick, 12 ft. long, rough cut cedar boards. This type of Vaux's Swift faux chimney had had some success in National Forests in NE Oregon. The homeowners offered to pay for the materials, and make a donation to the Center.

We were able to get the boards cut by the mill that cuts cedar boards for our swallow nest boxes. We began fabricating the chimney in late September, with an objective of getting the chimney installed before mid-Oct. We consulted with Larry Schwitters, the lead guy for Vaux's Swift roosts in WA, and read various studies on Swift's nesting in NE Oregon. We did a site recon and found a suitable tree stump to support the new chimney. After several days of design, cutting boards, and assembly, we had the chimney together. We then scheduled an installation date with the homeowners.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, we did the installation. We used several ladders, tie-down ratchets, ropes, a few Navy & Coast Guard profanities, and some steel banding to get 'er done. Our team included Dow Lambert, his brother Steve, Dan Wilson, and the homeowner. Since this chimney is on private property, the site is not open to the public. The owners have requested privacy. We will be able to schedule some guided site visits next spring, with a limited number of folks participating. I'll put a notice on our web site, so watch for it if you'd wish to see both the chimney and hopefully the Vaux's Swifts!



*Finished Installation and Team  
Photo by Jennifer Margison*

The preliminary work is done. Now the birds have to find and use this new chimney. We've gone to this effort because many

of the older snags and trees with hollowed out centers that Vaux's Swifts use to nest and roost are gone. This faux chimney is our attempt to provide safe, suitable nesting and roosting habitat for these insectivores, who's numbers are in decline. We'll have to see if it works? Many thanks to the team that contributed their time and skills, and the homeowners who underwrote the project.

### Interested in attending an OPAS virtual event?

All events can be found on the [OPAS website](#) under Events, Event Calendar. Click on the event you're interested in attending, and a Register button will appear. That's easy! A registration message will be sent to you, with information on how to log in to Zoom for the event. It's a good idea to register at least a day before the event.

If you are not sure how to use Zoom or are uncomfortable with how to get started, please contact us ([president@olympicpeninsulaudubon.org](mailto:president@olympicpeninsulaudubon.org)). We can walk you through the steps and send you a practice invite, where we can work out the "kinks" before the meeting. This is a good opportunity to learn about Zoom in a friendly environment; we are here to help you fly into the modern communication era.

We usually have 30 or so "Field Parties" that cover specific regions of the count circle, but these parties will likely be smaller this year. If you live within the circle and know birds, you can also become a "Feeder Watcher" by tallying up the birds you see in your yards and neighborhoods during count day. No matter where you count, we ask that you keep close track of your times and distances, to allow us to make comparisons with other counts and years.

If you wish to participate in the SDCBC, please contact Bob Boekelheide at [bboek@olympus.net](mailto:bboek@olympus.net) or call 360-808-0196. Bob will provide you with information about the count, along with tally sheets to record the birds. If you see any unusual birds in the days before the CBC, please let Bob know.

Other CBCs on the north Olympic Peninsula include Port Townsend (Dec 19) and Port Angeles (Jan 2). The compiler for the Port Angeles CBC is Barb Blackie ([blackieb@olypen.com](mailto:blackieb@olypen.com), 360-477-8028). The compiler for Port Townsend is Monica Fletcher ([monicaflet@gmail.com](mailto:monicaflet@gmail.com), 360-821-8482). Please contact Barb or Monica if you can help with these counts. Unfortunately it looks like there will not be a Neah Bay CBC this year, because the Makah Reservation is closed to non-residents as a COVID-19 precaution.

Despite this year's challenges, the grand tradition of Christmas Bird Counts will continue.

### Book Discussion Group—November Title

Ordinarily, the OPAS Book Discussion Group meets monthly to discuss a bird- or nature-related title in a friendly and congenial atmosphere. However, in accordance with the recommendations of the National Audubon Society on in-person gatherings during the COVID-19 outbreak, we will meet via Zoom at least through the end of 2020, with a reassessment of the COVID-19 situation for the coming year.

#### November Book Selection

By Ken Wiersema

Several months ago, I was asked to moderate this November's discussion of Bernd Heinrich's 1999 book, *Mind of the Raven*. I agreed to do it as it was certainly one of my personal favorite birds to study. I own two copies of this book; I've read and reread it more than a few times; it was a reference for classes and programs I've presented to OPAS and the River Center for numerous years. The book is a follow-on to Bernd Heinrich's 1989 book *Ravens in Winter*, and relates to the several books written by John and Collen Marzluff on Ravens and other Corvids, and their research work with Heinrich in the Maine woods. (Continued on next page)

## Other Events

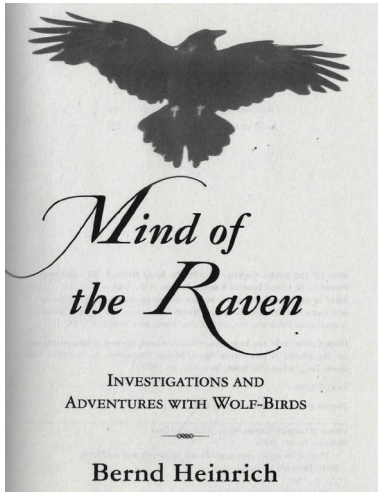
### Christmas Bird Counts

by Bob Boekelheide

Like everything else, Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) this year will not be the same. National Audubon Society has announced that we can run our CBCs as long as we follow local COVID-19 guidelines. For local CBCs this means wearing masks, no carpooling, smaller counting groups, and no compilation get-together at the end of the day. Before the count we must watch closely for possible Covid-19 surges that might trigger greater county restrictions.

This year, the Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count (SDCBC) occurs on Monday, Dec. 14. The SDCBC covers a 15-mile diameter circle centered just NNE of downtown Sequim, so its area includes the "towns" of Sequim, Gardiner, Blyn, Diamond Point, Dungeness, and Carlsborg, along with all the habitats from nearshore Strait of Juan de Fuca to the Olympic foothills.

## Harlequin Happenings



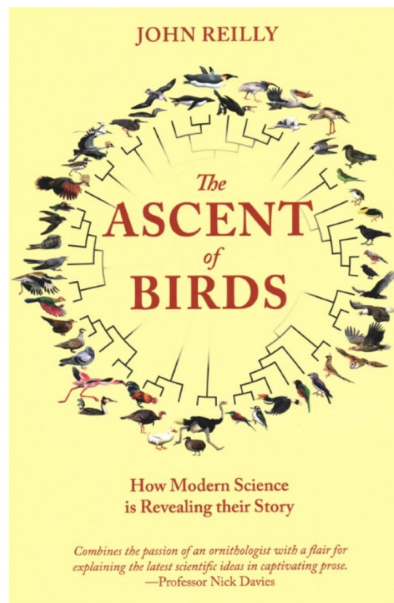
The cognitive capabilities of Ravens are a captivating subject. Please join us for a discussion of this book and related writings on Ravens and Corvids, in a **virtual** get together on Tuesday, November 24<sup>th</sup>, at 4 p.m. In order to read the book, you can try the Sequim Library (which did have a copy), try ordering a copy from the DRAC online gift shop, make

arrangements to borrow one of my copies, or of course find it either on-line or in e-book form. No need to read the book either, just join us for an informal, collegial exchange of ideas on this fascinating species of birds.

There will not be an OPAS Book Discussion Group meeting in December, and we've not selected a book to discuss in January 2021. We also need someone to step forward and offer to schedule and organize future book discussions. You would not have to read or purchase every book discussed, just lay out a schedule of books to discuss and arrange for a person to moderate the discussion in a given month. Please consider volunteering for such an opportunity. Email me at [president@olympicpeninsulaudubon.org](mailto:president@olympicpeninsulaudubon.org) ... Thanks!

## The Ascent of Birds: An Invitation to the Spectacular Diversity of Birds

Join Jim Karr, University of Washington Professor Emeritus, for a lecture and discussion series based on John Reilly's pioneering book *The Ascent of Birds: How Modern Science Is Revealing Their Story* (2018). Each session will explore key concepts in bird evolution, biogeography, and special adaptations of a bird species or group. Recent scientific advances, coupled with a long history of bird study, has given us new insights about the elegance of birds, their family trees, and keys to their survival.



All discussions are illustrated with photos, maps, and other visuals. They will take place on the second Tuesday of each month from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. Sessions are free, and will be held via Zoom until further notice. Please see [OPAS website](#) under Events to register.

Optional: Read one or two of the book's chapters (about 10 pages) for each session. The discussion for November will focus on one of the chapters.

**November 10, 2020, virtual discussion, 4—5:30 p.m. :**

- “The Parrot’s Story: Vicariance and Dispersal” (unexpected kinships): Ch. 13

There will be no lecture in the month of December. The series will begin again in January, 2021. See you next year.

## Purple Martin (PUMA) Breeding Report for 2020

By Ken Wiersema

The following is a short summary of PUMA breeding activity for 2020:

- 1. 3 Crabs**  
18 Boxes on the tide flats - Active nests found in 14 of the boxes; estimate up to 59 fledged birds  
4 Boxes on shore - Active nests found in 3 of 4 boxes; estimate up to 12 fledged birds.  
4 Boxes Dungeness Farms - Active nests found in 4 of 4 boxes; estimate 15 fledged birds
- 2. Protection Island NWR**  
7 Boxes on pilings in harbor - Active nests in 5 of 7 boxes; estimate 18-22 fledged birds
- 3. Morse Creek**  
5 Boxes on shore on timber posts [private property] - 3 of 5 Boxes had active nests; estimate 10 -12 fledged birds
- 4. Port Angeles Harbor**  
4 Boxes on Port of PA pilings - Active nests found in 3 of 4 Boxes. 3 eggs found in boxes; estimate no fledged birds
- 5. Diamond Point**  
12 Manufactured plastic gourds on poles on private property. 7 of 12 gourds had active nests; estimate 19 fledged birds.

In summary, we had a fairly successful year. Given our estimates are valid, we added some 139 young PUMA to the western sub-species population. It will be revealing to see the return of these birds in





*PUMA team removing nest boxes in PA harbor. Dow Lambert on bowsprit; Tom Butler (underneath Dow, holding Chris Duff's sailboat against the piling). Photo by Ken Wiersema*

2021, because they migrated south through the worst fires and smoke conditions in recorded history in Oregon and California. For birds that depend on insects to fuel their migration, many of them were in peril. Because of COVID-19 constraints, we were limited in our ability to monitor boxes on PINWR, and were able to install just 7 of the planned 9 boxes. At 3 Crabs, we had about an average year. With the addition of the Dungeness Farms boxes, there were 21 active nests in our 26 boxes. The boxes on private lands at Morse Creek and Diamond Point had a successful year. The new boxes for 2020 in the Port Angeles harbor had a better than expected nesting; fully expect that site to fledge birds next year. Many thanks again to the team that helped design, build, install, monitor, and document our PUMA project for 2020. We've removed the OPAS PUMA nest boxes for 2020 season; they are cleaned, repaired, and stored in my barn till spring of 2021.

Please contact me if you are interested or know someone who would want to join our team, [wiersema@olympus.net](mailto:wiersema@olympus.net)

## Three Crabs Bird Surveys, 2014-2018

*by Bob Boekelheide*

Remember the old Three Crabs Restaurant? Torn down in 2013, the restaurant's removal was part of the Three Crabs Nearshore and Estuarine Restoration Project, spearheaded by the North Olympic Salmon Coalition (NOSC). The project's main goal was to open up the Meadowbrook Creek estuary, allowing improved access to coastal habitat for young salmon.

As part of the project, NOSC asked OPAS if we could provide surveys of birds before and after the project. From 2014 to 2018, a valiant crew of OPAS volunteers counted birds at three locations each month. The project ended up providing an exceptional look at the bird populations using both the estuary and Dungeness Bay.



*3 Crabs Bird Survey Team: Gary Bullock, Bob Phreaner, and Michael Barry Photo by Bob Boekelheide*

Many thanks go to the OPAS volunteers who participated in multiple surveys during the project: Stacey Fradkin, Marie Grad, Dow Lambert, Bob Kiernan, Michael Barry, Gary Bullock, Mike Crim, Bob Phreaner, Bruce Paige, Denny Van Horn, and Bob Boekelheide. In total, this group carried out an amazing 352 surveys totaling 788 volunteer hours in the field. The surveys tallied a grand total of 430,297 birds of 181 species.

Thanks to Mary Porter-Solberg, OPAS Webmaster, our report is now available on the [OPAS website](#). If you want to know more about the birds using the Three Crabs area, this is for you.

## Dungeness Data

By Bob Boekelheide

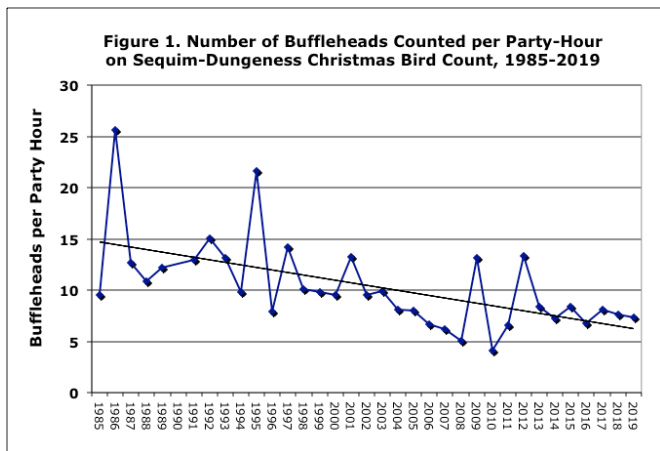
(As stated in the last issue of Harlequin Happenings, the usual Bird Sightings column is on hiatus. In its place, Bob is exploring data from OPAS Community-Science Projects, presenting the first installment here. If you are interested in local bird sightings, check out eBird at <https://ebird.org/explore>.)



Do you know which species consistently ranks as the most abundant "diving duck" on the Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count (SDCBC)? Is it Surf Scoter? Common Goldeneye? Red-breasted Merganser? Nope. The most abundant diving duck on our Christmas Count is the humble little Bufflehead. It's time to pay homage to this wonderful little duck, which arrives for the winter right now in October and November.

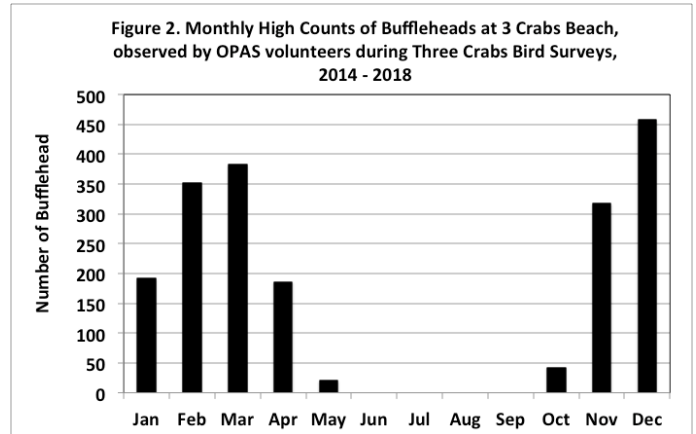
Our record SDCBC Bufflehead count is 3362, tallied in 2001. Last year, on the 2019 SDCBC we counted 1757 Buffleheads, which turns out to be slightly below our 35-year average of 1895. There are likely many more Bufflehead out there that don't get counted. The SDCBC Bufflehead count almost always scores in the top five counts in Washington State, competing with places like Olympia, Padilla Bay, and the San Juan Islands for highest number. The highest count for North American CBCs often goes to Point Reyes, CA, where they sometimes tally over 10,000 Bufflehead.

How consistent is our Bufflehead CBC count from year to year? Figure 1 shows a graph of the number of Buffleheads counted per party-hour on the SDCBC over the last 35 years. I used the number of Bufflehead counted per party hour rather than the actual counts, to standardize our count effort between years.



From Figure 1, it looks like our Bufflehead counts may have declined slightly over time, but even so Buffleheads ranked as our most abundant diving duck in 33 out of the 35 years. In the two years when Bufflehead was not the most abundant diving duck, the top scoring diving duck species was none other than Surf Scoter.

When do Buffleheads occur around here? Figure 2 shows the annual cycle of Buffleheads in Dungeness Bay, based on data collected by OPAS volunteers as part of the Three Crabs Bird Study from 2014 to 2018.



To gather these data, we counted birds three times each month between 2014 and 2018, viewing a designated area of outer Dungeness Bay from the beach at Three Crabs. Figure 2 shows the highest monthly counts rather than average counts, to illustrate the peak numbers we saw in the count area within each month.

First, notice that we didn't record any Buffleheads between June and September, when they nest by ponds and lakes in the taiga forests of Canada and Alaska. Buffleheads are cavity nesters, using tree holes made by Northern Flickers to lay their eggs. It is thought that Buffleheads are almost entirely dependent on flickers to provide their nest holes.

Buffleheads consistently arrive here for the fall in mid-October. They arrive in mass, so their numbers in Dungeness Bay quickly go from zero birds to a few thousand birds by early November. In the spring they trickle away a little more slowly, likely because different-aged birds return to breeding areas at different times, with younger birds possibly hanging out longer before heading north.

It seems curious that we recorded fewer Buffleheads in January compared to the other winter months. Their annual cycle graph (Fig. 2) looks bimodal, or two-peaked, showing one peak in December and one peak in March, with a



noticeable dip in January. Are there really fewer Buffleheads here in January? One explanation is that maybe Buffleheads gather here first in fall, then keep going south to Oregon and California (like Point Reyes?) in early winter, then return to Dungeness Bay on their way north in February and March. Another possibility is that these birds move around Dungeness Bay depending on tides and other factors. During winter, daytime tides are mostly high, so it is possible that these diving ducks move elsewhere inside Dungeness Bay to feed where depths are more shallow at high tide. Of course another possibility is we just missed the birds. Likely the only way to answer the question is to put transmitters on individual birds and see where they go during winter.

Bufflehead feed on the bottom in fairly shallow water, so nearshore areas of the Pacific Northwest are perfect for these little ducks. They feed on a variety of crustaceans, mollusks, and some fish and fish eggs. Apparently one of their favorite foods is shrimp. Picture in your mind all those little Buffleheads swimming around the bottom in Dungeness Bay picking juicy little shrimps off the sandy substrate.

One interesting finding is that Buffleheads may be faithful to both their nesting sites and their wintering sites. Banded bird studies show that females return annually to the same nest hole or close nearby. Other banding studies show that some birds migrate to the same exact location every winter. Those little Buffleheads you see this winter by John Wayne Marina could very well be the same ones you saw there last winter.

How long do Buffleheads live? On average, not very long. Calculations with birds banded as adults show that the average male Bufflehead lives only 2.5 years and the average female lives 2.3 years. But some individuals live a surprisingly long time. The oldest female on record was at least 11.5 years old and the oldest male was 18.7 years old.

Finally, one of the most impressive items I discovered while researching this report is that the city of Sidney, British Columbia, has male Buffleheads on its coat of arms. They selected Buffleheads because of their "vivacity and boundless energy." Buffleheads are also known as "Spirit Ducks," possibly because they have an amazing ability to quickly dive out of sight when someone shoots at them. Poof - they're gone.

This winter go closely watch a flock of Buffleheads and appreciate this wonderful little diving duck.



The Sidney, British Columbia, Coat of Arms showing a male Bufflehead on each side

### Dungeness River Audubon Center: Addition and Remodeling Status

As this HH edition goes to press the concrete footings for the new addition should be in place. Much of the site grading is done and the south front of the existing Center has been removed. Check the River Center's web site for updates as the project moves forward. In the next few weeks, as we work with the construction schedules of the various subcontractors, we'll be putting out a call for volunteers to step forward and contribute "sweat equity" to parts of the work. Fence building, landscaping, site cleanup, and a number of cabinet installation jobs have been identified for volunteer work. Please be ready to offer your various skills and hours to help us control costs and get us into a useable building sooner.

# Harlequin Happenings

Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 502  
Sequim, WA 98382-0502



## Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society

P.O. Box 502  
Sequim, WA 98382-0502

NAS Code Y08

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**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, saves \$10.00)  
\_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_