



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 6 November-December 2021

"Volunteer educators and stewards for birds and habitat conservation"

[Editor's Note: There will be no membership meeting in December. The next meeting will be on January 19, 2022.]

OPAS Program for November

by Tom Butler, Vice President

"Passive Acoustic Bird Monitoring"

Presented by Dr. Teodora Minkova,
 November 17, 2021, 7.00 p.m.

Meeting held by Zoom. Register on [Events Calendar](#) to receive Zoom information. OPAS will address a few updates, with the presentation to follow.

Although forest harvest is an essential component of economies worldwide, different harvest practices can have considerably different impacts on habitat function. This presentation introduces an acoustic monitoring project currently being conducted on the Olympic peninsula. The study will measure the response of ten indicator bird species to habitat changes caused by forest management. This study uses substantial involvement by citizen scientists, and opportunities for participation will also be discussed.



Dr. Teodora Minkova is a wildlife ecologist and Research and Monitoring Manager for the Olympic Experimental State Forest. She leads, participates in, and coordinates applied research and monitoring projects focused on integration of habitat conservation and revenue production in managed forests. She received her BS and MS degree in Zoology at Sofia University in Bulgaria,

her PhD in Ecology and Environmental Protection at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and has worked for the Washington Department of Natural Resources since 2004.

Conservation Matters – Reduce Window Strikes: What works and what doesn't

by Dee Renee Ericks



Here are some practical, do-it-yourself tips for limiting bird collisions on your home windows. Many of these suggestions can be applied at little or no cost. We know that birds strike windows for several reasons, primarily the transparent and reflective qualities of glass. Other reasons include:

- Birds believe they are on a safe flight path, because they see the landscape around them reflected from the glass.

(Continued on page three)

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. 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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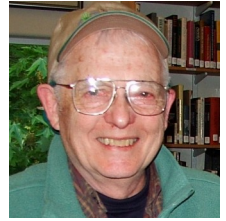
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President's Notes

by Ken Wiersema



Well, we have dodged the brunt of that big storm this past weekend. While walking with my dog this morning and watching a Northern Harrier hunting the fields and marshes against the backdrop of the fresh snow on the Olympics, I'm reminded to be thankful that we live in the midst of birds, nature, and grand vistas.

Membership meetings

We appreciate the support of the folks who joined our virtual membership meeting on Oct 20th. We pulled it together from within OPAS talent to fill a speaker shuffle. Shout out to John Acklen and Dee Renee Ericks! They were our featured speakers, who authored two interesting programs in short order.

It's apparent that our November 17 meeting will again be virtual. We'll strive to return to an in-person meeting in January, given the Dungeness River Nature Center is ready and the COVID-19 conditions in our County permit it. We'll ask attendees to every OPAS event to be vaccinated and wear masks while indoors. That will likely be the rule well into 2022. Please plan for it.

The Center's expansion project is moving toward completion. The new parking lot is paved and its lights are being installed. Staff is planning to occupy their office space in November, as soon as the new doors are installed, water for the restrooms is on, and the heating system works. Watch the River Center's website for status info over the next 2 months.

Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs)

Please note, in this edition, the information and dates of our annual bird counts. Plan to help as part of a small team or by monitoring your own feeder. Regrettably, we won't host our traditional compilation chili feed; hopefully it will return in Dec 2022!

These CBCs in addition to being an enjoyable, local bird census, provide valuable bird data over many years. CBCs are accepted science, and are used as baseline data for many more comprehensive studies. Please plan to help this year. Thanks!

BirdFest 2022

OPAS folks with the Center's staff have held our initial planning meetings, and have set the dates for BirdFest to be 22-24 April, 2022. For next year, the classes, bird talks, and the banquet will be held in the River Center's new facilities. For our new members, this usually annual event was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19. We intend to resume it next year, as a major fund raiser for the operation of the Center. *(Continued on next page)*



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It's a bird-centered event, led by Vanessa Fuller from the Center's staff, and relies on our OPAS volunteers to provide the field trip leaders, and other volunteers. You can look on the website <https://olympicbirdfest.org/> for the 2020 BirdFest's planned activities, to get an idea what BirdFest is. We plan to have the new events, schedule, and registration info on that site by Jan 1st 2022. Watch for it.

Thanks to those hardy stalwarts who have already agreed to help next year. So, mark your calendars and watch both our website, newsletter, and those of the Center, as plans jell.

And from Me and our OPAS leaders ●●● Y'all enjoy a Happy Holiday Season with your family and friends. Will look forward to see you out birding soon!

Conservation Matters

(Continued from page one)

- They see through the window to habitat, either inside your home or through to the other side, and don't perceive the glass as a barrier.
- They see their own reflection in the glass and attack the window. Territorial aggression can result in bill injuries.

Here are some simple modifications you can easily make to minimize injury to birds:

- Move feeders close to your windows (1.5 to 3 feet), or use window feeders. From that distance the birds can't build up enough momentum to hurt themselves if they hit the glass. Otherwise, feeders should be placed at least 30 feet away.
- Close blinds, curtains, or shades to break up window reflections of habitat, or the illusion of a clear passage.
- Move houseplants away from windows.
- Create markings on the EXTERIOR portion of windows to eliminate or break up window reflections. Make the openings so small that birds think they can't fly through.

What Works

Any portion of a window reflection, larger than 4" wide or 2" high, presents a possible flight path. FLAP Canada recommends that marker spacing be no more than 2" X 2". Window

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). 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.

markings need to stand out in contrast to the glass in varying light conditions. Markers should be no less than 1/4" thick. The entire exterior glass surface should be covered. Examples:

- Markings with a soap bar
- Tempera paint designs (using stencils are fun!)
- Artwork or designs using a broad tipped oil based Sharpie pen in white. It's removable with acetone on a cotton ball or pad. Lightly dab the affected surface to dissolve the paint marking. Also, isopropyl alcohol, or rubbing alcohol works too.
- Feather Friendly Markers (<https://www.featherfriendly.com/residential>)
- Accopian BirdSaver cords (<https://www.birdsavers.com/make-your-own>)
- Window film treatment (<https://www.decorativefilm.com/specialty-bird-safety>)
- Window tape (<https://www.collidescape.org/tapes>)
- Exterior screens

What does NOT work:

- Falcon Silhouettes
- Bird decals
- Netting (entanglement issues)

(Continued on next page)

Harlequin Happenings

- Plastic Owls

Remove Unnecessary Lighting

To minimize nighttime bird collisions with glass or buildings, reduce nighttime lighting! Ideally, turn off all light sources between dusk and dawn, especially during migration season from mid-February to the end of May, and from mid-August to the end of November.

Control when and where light shines by:

- Using light fixtures that are shielded, instead of globe-type models that spew light everywhere.
- Choosing downlighting over uplighting to keep from directing light into the night sky.
- Using motion sensors to avoid steady-burning lights, and timers to ensure that lights aren't left on longer than necessary.
- Controlling the color of the light.
When it comes to the effects of light on birds, not all wavelengths are created equal. Red light and white light disrupt birds' geomagnetic orientation. Blue and green contain less long-wavelength radiation and are much less disorienting.
- Closing shades, drapes, and blinds.

For further information, check out OPAS' Project BirdSafe at: <https://olympicpeninsulaudubon.org/project-birdsafe>

Read the New Blog Page on the OPAS Website

The OPAS website has a new Blog page that replaced the News page.

Each Blog post tells a story in more detail and with photos to enhance your enjoyment. Be sure to visit the [Blog](#) page today so that you don't miss out on the latest OPAS updates and news.

You can also view a preview of each Blog post on the [Home](#) page of the website. Once you read the selected story, be sure to "like" it at the bottom of the story.

2021 Christmas Bird Count

by Bob Boekelheide



The Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count (SDCBC) occurs this year on Monday, Dec. 20. We have a great CBC covering a wide variety of habitats between the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Olympic foothills. Within its 15-mile diameter circle, the SDCBC includes the "towns" of Sequim, Gardiner, Blyn, Diamond Point, Dungeness, and Carlsborg, plus all the habitats between. Despite COVID, last year the SDCBC recorded the highest number of species of any count in the Pacific Northwest.

The SDCBC will follow National Audubon Society and Clallam County COVID guidelines. For local CBCs this means encouraging vaccinations, smaller counting groups, discouraging car-pools, and wearing masks when indoors or in vehicles with non-family members. Once again this year we will not have a compilation get-together at the end of the day, although we may have a "Zoom" compilation for counters sometime after the count.

The SDCBC usually has 30 or so "Field Parties" that cover specific regions of the count circle. Or, if you live within the circle and know backyard birds, you can also be a "Feeder Watcher," tallying up the birds you see in your yards and neighborhoods during count day. Or do both. No matter where you count, we ask that you keep close track of your times and distances, to help make comparisons with other counts and years.

If you wish to participate in the SDCBC, please contact Bob Boekelheide at bboek@olympus.net or call 360-808-0196. Bob will send you information about the count, along with tally sheets to record the birds. If you spot any unusual birds in the days before the CBC, please let Bob know so we can look for these birds during the count.

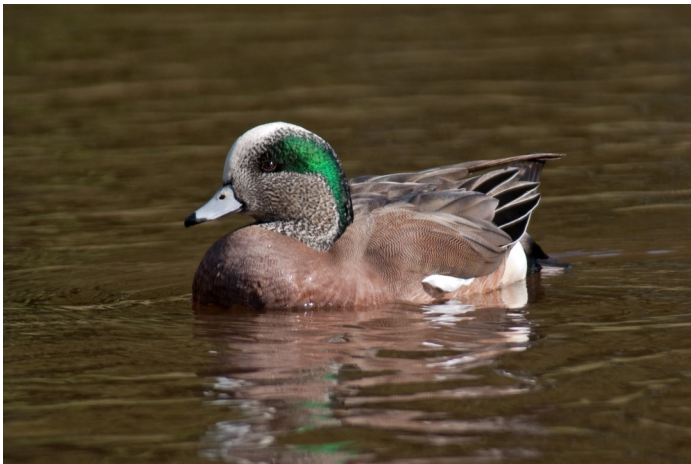
Other CBCs on the north Olympic Peninsula include Port Townsend (Dec 18) and Port Angeles (Jan 2). The compiler for the Port Angeles CBC is Barb Blackie (blackieb@olypen.com, 360-477-8028). The compiler for Port Townsend is Monica Fletcher (monicaflet@gmail.com, 360-821-8482). Please contact Barb or Monica if you can help with these counts. Unfortunately, there will not be a Neah Bay CBC again this year, because the Makah Reservation is still closed to non-residents as a COVID precaution.

Dungeness Data: Tribute to the American Wigeon

by Bob Boekelheide

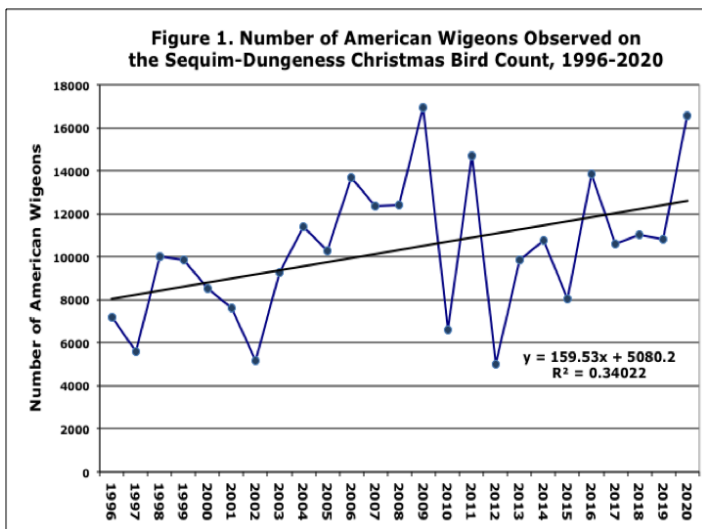
In place of the former Bird Sightings column, Bob is exploring data from OPAS Community-Science Projects. If you are interested in local bird sightings, check out eBird at <https://ebird.org/explore>, then under "Explore Regions" enter Clallam or Jefferson County. Please join eBird and add your own sightings, as well.

This month we give tribute to the humble American Wigeon, typically the most abundant species on the Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count (SDCBC, coming up on Dec. 20, 2021). For 37 of the 45 SDCBCs since the count started in 1975, American Wigeon has outnumbered all other species. This is no small feat, considering that wigeons compete for high count with species such as Mallard, Dunlin, and Glaucous-winged Gull, all abundant powerhouses in their own right.



Male American Wigeon
Photo by Dow Lambert

The graph in Figure 1 shows the number of American Wigeons observed on the SDCBC over the last 25 years.



Several interesting things pop out from the graph:

1. It appears that wigeons may have increased on the SDCBC over the last 25 years, since the slope of the regression line is positive.
2. The number of wigeons varies a lot between years. This was particularly true between 2009 and 2012, when the count ranged between its highest count (16,929 in 2009) and lowest count (4,994 in 2012) within just three years.
3. Because of this variability, the points on the graph don't fit the regression line very well, as indicated by its fairly low coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.34. Remember your basic statistics -- the coefficient of determination approaches 1.0 when a set of points closely fits its regression line, whereas the coefficient of determination approaches 0.0 if the set of points is random and doesn't fit its regression line very well.

Could wigeons in our area possibly vary that much from year to year? Maybe, maybe not. Anyone who has tried to count wigeons on our CBC knows that they are not easy to count. They often occur in large flocks of hundreds or thousands of birds, which requires close attention and much patience to get accurate estimates. We often partition the flocks into smaller groups, counting them by tens or hundreds, to estimate total flock sizes. Stormy, windy weather on CBC day makes it even less likely that we get accurate numbers.

Hunting season may also disperse wigeons, so active hunters on CBC days (and hunting Bald Eagles, too) often cause flocks to take flight and move around. This could lead to multiple CBC parties counting the same group of wigeons, particularly in Dungeness Bay. Conversely, hunting also causes the birds to gather into tighter flocks, which might actually make them easier to estimate. It is my job as CBC compiler to sort out the discrepancies and determine where overlapping counts might occur.

Lastly, weather has a huge influence on wigeon distribution during the SDCBC, particularly freezing weather. If it is below freezing for a few days before our count, freshwater ponds in our area may be frozen solid. All the wigeons consequently gather on saltwater, particularly Dungeness Bay, where we can estimate the large flocks. Conversely, when temperatures stay above freezing and freshwater ponds are open, wigeons scatter all over the Sequim-Dungeness Valley. We do our very best to count the most important ponds, but we certainly do not get to every pond to count every single wigeon.

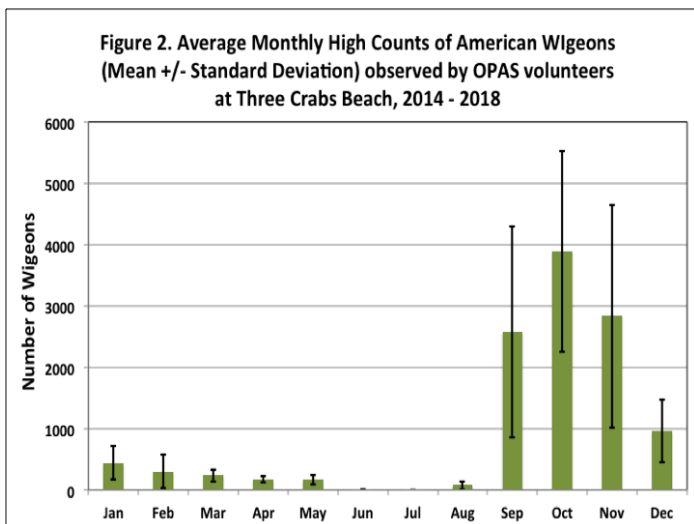
Anyone walking in winter at Carrie Blake Park in Sequim might witness this. When daytime temperatures consistently stay above freezing, a couple thousand wigeons sometimes hang out in the park, grazing on the playing field and escaping to nearby ponds when chased by dogs or when eagles fly over. In contrast, when we have really cold weather and the Carrie Blake ponds are frozen over, relatively few wigeons remain in the park.

Regardless, American Wigeons averaged about 10,000 birds per SDCBC during the last 25 years. I suspect this number is a fairly good ballpark figure for the number of wigeons found in the Sequim-Dungeness Valley in mid-December. (Continued on next page)

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What is the annual cycle of American Wigeons in our area? To answer this question, we go to another OPAS community-science project. Between 2014 and 2018, OPAS volunteers assisted North Olympic Salmon Coalition and WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife by counting birds during the Three Crabs Nearshore Habitat Restoration Project, to see if the project changed bird use in the Three Crabs Area. One of the survey areas was Three Crabs Beach, where we counted birds within a defined area during every ten-day period between 2014 to 2018.

The Figure 2 shows the annual cycle of wigeons within our Three Crabs Beach study area, as shown by the average monthly high counts. The highest number of wigeons at Three Crabs occurred during fall migration, peaking at several thousand in October. Their numbers steadily declined through winter and spring, then dwindled to almost zero during the nesting season in June and July, when wigeons go north to breed.



Mind you, this graph only shows our wigeon counts in a small section of nearshore Dungeness Bay. There are many more wigeons elsewhere in the Sequim-Dungeness Valley not included in this graph. Wigeons may graze in fields and parks somewhere during the day, then roost together in marshes or offshore during the night. After hunting season starts in mid-October, lots of wigeons go somewhere other than Three Crabs. They might stay offshore in other sections of Dungeness Bay, they might go inland to freshwater ponds, or they might even migrate somewhere else for the winter.

Where else do they go in winter? The highest numbers on Washington CBCs often occur at Padilla Bay, sometimes double or triple the numbers we count at Sequim-Dungeness. Even Padilla Bay numbers don't compare, however, with wigeon numbers further south, particularly in the Sacramento Valley in Northern California. The highest winter counts in the Pacific Flyway occur at refuges and wildlife areas around the Sutter Buttes, like Delevan, Colusa, Sutter, Sacramento, Butte Sink, and Graylodge, where they sometimes tally more than a quarter million. Of interest, peak wigeon counts by the USFWS in the Sacramento Valley typically occur in November, whereas our peak counts occur in October. This suggests that some birds may use Washington as a migration stopover before eventually flying further south to spend the winter.

Fall and winter is the time when wigeons pair up for the next nesting season. Apparently population sex ratios are skewed to more males than females, so competition between males for female mates can be intense. Pairs stay together through the winter, so by the time they migrate north in spring the mates travel together to the nesting area of the female's choosing.



Flying American Wigeons
Photo by ow Lambert

Where do all these wigeons go in the nesting season? According to Birds of the World (the wonderful online resource from Cornell Lab of Ornithology), most American Wigeons nest in western Canada and Alaska. Some nest on the tundra, some nest in taiga forests, and some nest in prairie grasslands. The common denominator is that female wigeons place their nests in brushy and grassy areas near freshwater ponds and wetlands, where they eventually take their chicks after they hatch.

On average, wigeon females lay about 7 to 10 eggs in each clutch. The eggs' incubation takes about 25 to 28 days, all done by the female. The male stays near the female for a few days after she lays eggs, then he takes off to molting areas sometimes hundreds of miles away. Chicks leave the nest within 24 hours of hatching, waddling to water with their mother. If they survive, chicks begin flying about 6 to 7 weeks after hatching. Less than half of clutches typically result in fledged young, as most of the chicks are lost to predation and exposure each year.

Many female wigeons apparently nest when they are only one year old, but most males do not nest until their second year. According to banding studies, survival rates of adult wigeons are not great, as only about one-half to two-thirds of adults survive to nest again each year. The average adult wigeon probably only lives about two to three years, even though the oldest banded American Wigeon on record lived to 21 years old.

Like most dabbling ducks, wigeons are largely vegetarians, although females may eat higher amounts of insects, molluscs, and crustaceans before nesting. In Dungeness Bay, their diet appears to be mostly eelgrass and green algae, particularly *Ulva*, which grows in abundance on the mudflats and washes ashore in huge windrows during late summer and fall. In upland habitats, wigeons graze on

grasses, forbs, and aquatic plants. There is even an aquatic plant called "widgeon-grass," also known as "ditch-grass," usually found in shallow fresh or brackish water.

A description of wigeons would not be complete without some mention of their distinctive call note, which is often likened to a squeaky bath-tub toy. This call, known as the "slow whistle, is largely made by males. It has three descending notes, sounding like "whee, whee, whee." Females have a quiet quack that they make to their mate when taking flight, also known as the "flying call."

It is easy to say "they're just wigeons" when birding around here during fall and winter, since there are so many wigeons out there. I ask you to slow down and take the time to watch these little ducks, appreciating their wily ways and perky postures. Also look through the big flocks for Eurasian Wigeons, the red-headed cousins of the Americans.



*Male American Wigeon (left)
and Male Eurasian Wigeon (right)
Photo by Dow Lambert*

*Many of the interesting facts about wigeon contained in this story came from *Birds of the World*, an on-line resource available through Cornell Lab of Ornithology. I highly recommend that all bird aficionados subscribe to *Birds of the World*, both for the information and to support the Lab of Ornithology.*

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