



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 March-April 2022

“Volunteer educators and stewards for birds and habitat conservation”

OPAS Program for March

by Tom Butler, Vice President

“The Birds of Railroad Bridge Park: 20 years of Weekly Bird Walks on the Olympic Discovery Trail”

Presented by Bob Boekelheide

March 23, 2022 at 7:00 p.m., Rainshadow Hall at the Dungeness River Nature Center, 2099 W Hendrickson Rd, Sequim, Washington

When the Dungeness River Audubon Center opened in 2001, Bob Boekelheide began its first citizen-science program — Wednesday morning bird walks in Railroad Bridge Park. Twenty years and over 1100 bird walks later, the data provide one of the longest time series of weekly bird surveys in the Pacific Northwest. Bob will show how the walks have documented the waxing, waning, and resilience of a variety of bird

populations on the North Olympic Peninsula, from Anna’s Hummingbirds to Bald Eagles.

Bob Boekelheide’s lifelong interest has been in the ecology of marine vertebrates, particularly birds and mammals. With an M.S. in Ecology from UC Davis, Bob participated in several marine research projects to the Arctic, Antarctic, across the Pacific, in Washington and California, including seven years as biologist at the Farallon Islands off the coast of California. While in California, he coauthored the book *Seabirds of the Farallon Islands* and several papers about the marine ecology of nesting seabirds and marine mammals. A certificated teacher, Bob taught science and math in Wapato, Sequim, and Port Angeles public schools. He is the former director of the Dungeness River Nature Center in Sequim, WA. As Bird Count Chair for Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, he has compiled the annual Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count and the Clallam County Spring Migration Count for over 26 years, along with helping to organize several other citizen-science projects on the north Olympic Peninsula, including weekly Wednesday morning bird walks in Railroad Bridge Park.



We are absolutely thrilled to present the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society’s first in-person meeting since early 2020, and the first OPAS meeting in the new Nature Center. Even though the masking mandate will have been lifted, mask wearing is encouraged.

(Continued on page three)



Song Sparrow
 Photo by Bob Boekelheide

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, 2099 W. Hendrickson Road, Sequim, WA, (360) 681-4076. The public is welcome.

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President's Notes

by Ken Wiersema



.Membership Meetings

As you'll see in this edition, we're holding our March membership meeting, and those for the rest of the year -- in-person -- in the Rainshadow Hall (name of the main meeting room) of the remodeled and expanded Dungeness River Nature Center. We moved the meeting day and time to 7 p.m. on Mar 23rd, a week later than our regular 3rd Wed of the month. This allows folks to attend without masks if they choose, as the State's and Tribe's indoor mask requirement ends on the 21st of Mar.

We will set up the room to maintain social distancing, and those who wish to remain masked should do so. We are also working on either recording the programs or simulcasting them for our members, who for personal or health reasons want to forgo in-person events. We have not yet worked out the technical details on how to register for the hybrid event and how to distribute the video feed. Please watch our website for details.

We won't have the Center's new computer graphics system installed by March, so we'll make do with a projector and screen. For those who wish to come a bit early, say 6:30 or so, we'll offer a short tour of the new Center. Plan to park in the new lighted parking lot on the east side of the building, and enter through the new main entrance.

We ask attendees to every OPAS event to be vaccinated. Please plan for it. As we put together this newsletter, COVID Omicron cases seem to be on the decline in Clallam Co. Please watch our website and other "e" media, as we may have to change guidelines for our meetings and classes before the next Harlequin Happenings newsletter comes out.

BirdFest 2022

As most of you know, we decided to cancel BirdFest 2022. The uncertainty of COVID conditions in April, made planning, logistics, and scheduling of events nearly impossible. However, we've begun setting dates and planning for **BirdFest 2023**, which will be on 14-16 April 2023. Watch as our planning begins in earnest this fall.

Passing of Ally Simons.

On Feb 21st, I was very saddened to learn that Ally Simons had died. The cancer for which she was being treated finally took her from us. I'd been visiting her about once a month since her surgery and chemo. I last saw her in January. She was smiling and upbeat then, even looking forward to seeing the swallows return to her nest boxes. As a member of both the OPAS and the River Center Boards, Ally was a shining star. She was a gracious and thoughtful person who personified intelligence and commitment at every meeting. She was an excellent birder and wonderful lady. She last went on a Wed birdwalk with Bob B on Feb 2nd, and seemed in really good spirits. We each will treasure her friendship and her many contributions to OPAS and the Center. She will be greatly missed...

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OPAS Program for April

(continued from page one)

“Early-Successional and Non-Forested Bird Habitat on the Olympic Peninsula”

Presented by Scott Gremel, Wildlife Biologist

Rainshadow Hall at the Dungeness River Nature Center,
2099 W Hendrickson Rd, Sequim, Washington
Wednesday, April 20, 2022, 7:00 p.m.

Although the Olympic Peninsula is primarily a land of old conifer forests, disturbances of differing frequency and intensity create a diversity of habitats that in turn support a more diverse community of birds. Understanding the processes that create our unique bird habitats can help to inform the management of our protected areas, and allow for the creation and maintenance of these habitats into the future. Scott will discuss how fires, river flooding and channel migration, avalanches, and other seemingly disastrous events can actually create some of the richest bird habitats in our area.



Scott Gremel

Scott Gremel grew up birding in Indiana and did his undergraduate research on bird communities in clear-cuts in Indiana's only National Forest. For the last 25 years, Scott has worked as a wildlife biologist for Olympic National Park. His day job has always involved monitoring Spotted Owls, but he has also worked on bird communities in recent burns, the

Olympic pocket gopher in mountain meadows, and other projects that got him out of the trees.

OPAS Field Trips

by Marie Grad

A Message from the Field Trip Chair for March-April, 2022

I regret that I haven't any Field Trips scheduled for the New Year. One of the reasons is the continued high number of COVID-19 cases in Clallam County. The two people that were willing to lead trips are not comfortable leading trips in the current COVID-19 environment.

This brings me to the next issue I have been facing: the lack of people interested in leading field trips. If as a member of the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, the opportunity to

participate in organized field trips is important to you, consider becoming a field trip leader. The organization has many volunteer opportunities available to members, and this is one where we need help.

If you are interested or know someone who is, I can be reached through the OPAS website. I will be traveling January through early April, but I will still be available to answer any questions. It may take me a few days to get back to you due to limited internet in some of the areas where we will be staying.

I'm hoping that we can return to more normal activities in the new year. Remember the birds are still out there; you just have to get out there and look for them! Contact Marie through the [Contact Us page](#).

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@olympicpeninsulaaudubon.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.

Olympic Peninsula Birdfest 2022

by Marion Rutledge

The Olympic Peninsula BirdFest, three days of field trips and events held each April in Sequim, Washington, was recently canceled for 2022 because of COVID-related concerns. The Dungeness River Nature Center and Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society will instead celebrate birds for the entire month of April. While planning gets underway, the following events, originally scheduled to coincide with BirdFest, are still on offer:

- BirdQuest is a game played in downtown Sequim for the entire month of April. Fifteen-to-twenty bird-art pieces created by Sequim High Schoolers are hidden in various businesses. (Continued on next page)

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Find them and vote for your favorite. Prizes! Sponsored by The Sequim-Dungeness Valley Chamber of Commerce. Click [here](#) for additional information.

- 7 Cedars Resort Hotel, newly open in 2021, will offer special packages for visiting birders throughout April. The resort hotel is adjacent to the Olympic Discovery Trail at Blyn on the south end of Sequim Bay. Great birding here at low tide and in nearby woodlands. www.7cedars.com
- Current information and schedules will be posted in the next few months on the following websites:
www.dungenessrivercenter.org
www.olympicpeninsulaaudubon.org
www.birdfest.org

Next year's BirdFest will be held Fri.-Sun., April 14-16. Registration opens January 1, 2023.

Conservation Matters: Project Swan Safe Update

by Bob Phreaner .

Good news for swans roosting on Kirner Pond (aka, Gaskell Slough)! When OPAS commits to a conservation project, we like to have pre- and post-data to confirm that our efforts have been effective. With this article, I'd like to review the Swan Safe Project, and report what I am seeing, now that the utility lines are buried along Kirner Road. Between 2014 and 2021 there were at least nine mortalities reported to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife at this location. But the number of mortalities alone did

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.



not tell the complete story. Often birds would strike the power lines along the west side of Kirner Pond and limp off, or even fly off, only to die later from their injuries.

OPAS wanted to know the scale of the problem, so in November of 2017, I began frequent dawn observations. Soon, I witnessed swans altering their flight path as they tried to clear the power lines. I learned some patterns, like their tendency to take off into the wind to get airborne regardless of the threat of collision with the power lines. In December 2019, I started filming every flight to the west toward the wires. These videos revealed many close calls like a wing grazing a wire, which was only detectable by seeing the wire bounce on "instant replay" as the lucky bird flew on. Before the videos, we only knew about the dead or injured swans found near the power lines. You can see some of this footage in John Gussman's film "Sudden Impact" that he made to tell the swans' story. Following release of "Sudden Impact", OPAS started a GoFundMe campaign, and within several months 290 donors raised \$65,000.



*Trumpeter Swans
Photo by Bob Phreaner*

But it took more than money to make the line burial happen. John Acklen shared his expertise in avian protection devices with PUD engineer Mike Hill's crew, and WDFW biologist Shelly Ament worked with the property owners on the west side of Kirner Road. The power lines were successfully buried in August 2021. This season, with the help of Vince Thrushley, I have continued my daily roosting survey. I can report that we have recorded no swan deaths or injuries associated with Kirner Pond this year. When swans take off into the west wind, I no longer hold my breath for fear of catastrophe. The swans

now routinely fly at the height of the former wires. As they fly just fifteen-to-twenty feet over my head, I can hear their wingbeats and their trumpeting calls and feel thankful that we, as a community, have eliminated one obstacle to swan survival. I personally want to thank John Gussman, John Acklen, Shelly Ament, the PUD, the OPAS Swan Surveyors led by Laura Davis and Liam Antrim, the OPAS Conservation Committee and Board members, the property owners along Kirner Rd, and our indispensable Community of donors who have made the Dungeness Valley a little more "Swan Safe".

Audubon Collaborative Grant

by Dee Renee Ericks



On January 19, 2022, Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society (OPAS) was notified by National Audubon that we had been awarded a competitive Audubon Collaborative Grant in the amount of \$1000 to study and reduce bird window collisions at Peninsula College. For well over a year, our OPAS Project BirdSafe volunteers have walked through the beautifully landscaped college campus, with modern architecture and large reflective windows, to discover bodies of lifeless birds lying below them on the concrete. Students, faculty, and staff had also noted these bodies. Our team began to photograph the birds and document their locations. We entered a series of meetings with the college administration to jointly identify an array of procedures and actions that would reduce or eliminate the strikes.

As with any project, resources are needed to fully document which windows needed priority attention, and document how we could quantify the needs to implement the optimal science-based procedures. With grant money and matching funds from OPAS, our volunteer team will collaborate with the Peninsula College Biology Department to engage biology students in a supervised student monitoring project. Protocols are being developed for these students to gather and record incidents of bird strikes on the reflective, large banks of campus windows. Documentation of these hazards is required before college administrators can plan toward longer term solutions, such as landscaping changes, permanent window markers and window replacement.



A Pine Siskin lies dead following a window strike on reflective windows at Keegan Hall.

Photo by Dee Renee Ericks



Short Term Solution. PC Administrator Carie Edmiston and PC Biology Professor Barb Blackie place Bird Scare Tape on a reflective window in Ceramics Classroom.

Photo by Dee Renee Ericks

We plan to use our grant funding to purchase supplies for safe monitoring and collection of bird carcasses. Small stipend amounts will be available for students to oversee collection and compile data.

(Continued on next page)



An early morning view of Maier Hall's reflective windows.

Photo by Dee Renee Ericks

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We intend to raise Peninsula College student and faculty awareness of the lethal consequences of campus window collisions. Together with faculty, we'll develop scientific monitoring skills. Students will be able to identify strike zones, the potential causes of collisions, and apply short term solutions (such as window artwork and bird scare tape).

OPAS will introduce the benefits of creating an Audubon Campus Chapter at Peninsula College. This would be a student-led organization that will create meaningful conservation knowledge and awareness on and off campus. Students are often provided with opportunities to assume leadership roles, train in field skills, and initiate projects on campus and in their communities. This hands-on project has the potential to point students toward a career in conservation.

If other OPAS members would want to be a part of our Bird-Safe team, please contact Dee Renee Ericks through our OPAS website.

Oh, by the Way!

OPAS Bluebird/ Climate Watch Feb 2022

by Joyce Volmut



On February 15, 2022, Climate watch volunteers completed the winter survey. Seventy-three checklists were submitted with a total of sixty-three species. National Audubon Climate Watch target birds included:

- Western Bluebird - 8
- Spotted Towhee- 21
- Red-breasted Nuthatch - 7

This survey period, January 15 to February 15, is intended to capture the target birds that winter in our area. This is important data to capture, for it speaks to the suitability of food sources in the area, to habitat, and gives a trend on target bird population.

The winter survey is always a difficult one. We lose some Climate Watch volunteers who travel during this time period, and the climate of the North Olympic Peninsula doesn't always cooperate. This winter, however, we were able to pick up three new volunteers in the Port Angeles area.

Port Angeles CBC Results

by Barbara Blackie

Port Angeles 2021 CBC was held on Jan 2nd 2022 this year – a Sunday (compared to our usual Saturday tradition) due to the 1st being a holiday. This proved unfortunate for getting to Hurricane Ridge, because the threatening weather caused

Olympic National Park to close the Hurricane Ridge Road on Sunday (and thus keeping observers out of the higher country). Nonetheless, we pulled off a great count with at least 64 intrepid observers participating, despite the icy roads and threatening weather. Even the boat survey got in their water counts in the morning. Collectively, we observed 113 species on count day, and 117 species, including the count week observations that were not seen on count day. We missed a couple of “usual suspects,” perhaps due to the extreme cold weather that preceded the weekend, the noisy breeze, and that lack of access to the high country. Examples are our usually ubiquitous Barred Owls and the Gray Jays (although these were seen during count week). And we had some unusual species show up this year; here are the species that were added this year (not seen in previous years): Black-throated Blue Warbler (an unexpected visitor on count day!), Common Redpoll, Scrub Jay, and Tundra Swan (the last two only observed during count week). The most abundant species observed was the Pine Siskin, followed by Dark-eyed Junco, Canada Goose and European Starling. You can see our entire survey data at Audubon's CBC page. <https://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx>



Nest Boxes 2022

Our 20th year

A family event!



Learn why we build nest boxes
See how to build a box & then **you** build one!
Take home a new box to install in your yard
Materials, tools, and “expert” assistance provided!
includes short class plus hands-on assembly of your box

Saturday March 12th 2022 - 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Dungeness River Nature Center
Fee -- \$25 per nest box; Class size will be limited
(funds cover materials & support Center's programs)
Must pre-register Call 681-4076

Link to register on line :
<https://dungenessrivercenter.app.neoncrm.com/np/clients/dungenessrivercenter/eventRegistration.jsp?event=229&>

Our survey code is **WAPA**. Thanks to the amazing people who show up year after year to contribute to these important datasets!

Dungeness Data: Homage to Black-bellied Plovers

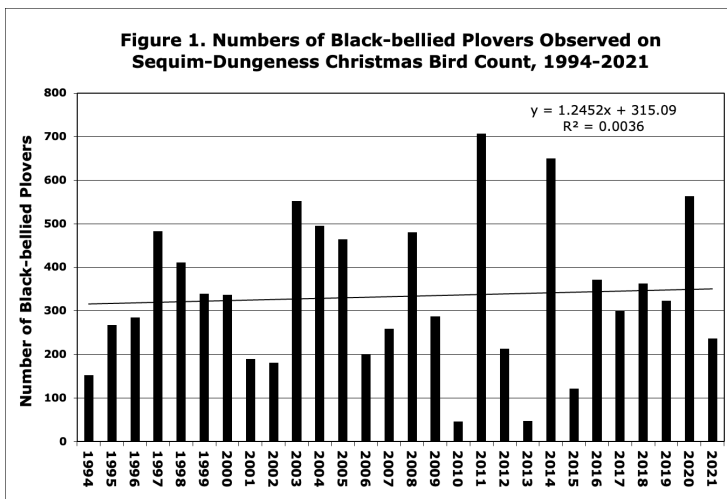
by Bob Boekelheide



(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 add your own sightings to *eBird* as well.)

The "Big Three" shorebird species found in Dungeness Bay during winter are Black-bellied Plovers, Sanderlings, and Dunlins. Without fail, these three species comprise the highest shorebird numbers during our Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count (SDCBC). There are smatterings of other shorebird species in winter such as Black Turnstones and Killdeers, but nothing as reliable or as numerous as the Big Three.

Christmas Bird Count data for Black-bellied Plovers show that we usually average over 300 Black-bellied Plovers on a typical SDCBC (Fig. 1). In reality, their numbers range far and wide.



For example, the count in 2010 had only 46 plovers, but a year later in 2011 the count was 707 plovers. Why so different? We hold our CBC in mid-December, when daytime tides unfortunately stay high all day long and usually no mudflats are visible. When there are no mudflats, plovers move inland to feed at pastures and harvested fields. We do our best to search the fields and pastures, but sometimes we just don't find the plovers. Other times their flocks might get counted more than once as they fly back and forth during the day, which could explain

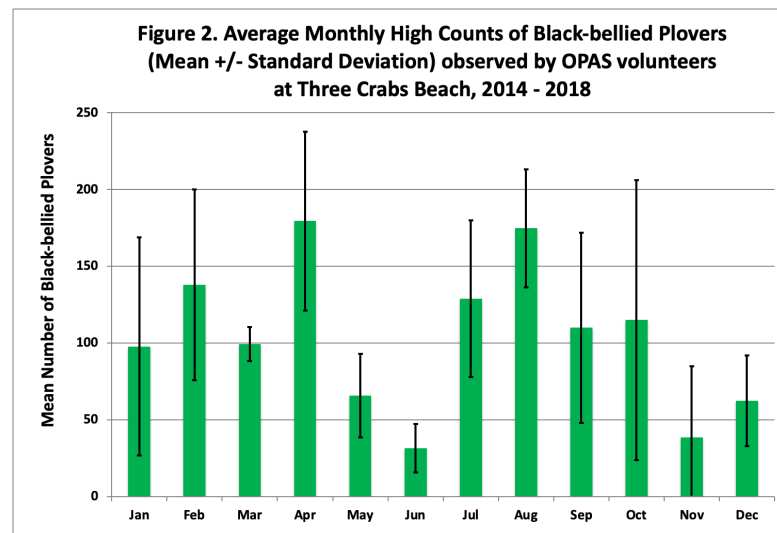
the sky-high counts as well. It's not a perfect world when counting birds.

During these counts, we often hear Black-bellied Plovers before we see them. BB Plovers have a lovely mournful flight call with three slurred notes descending and rising in a minor key, kind of a "Pee-oo-EE." It is one of the most distinctive sounds of Dungeness Bay.

Between 2014 and 2018, OPAS volunteers also counted birds at Three Crabs as part of the Three Crabs Estuarine Restoration Project, coordinated by the North Olympic Salmon Coalition and WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. During this study, OPAS volunteers observed birds at Three Crabs three times each month for five years, tallying all the shorebirds we could find on the mudflats and beaches.

Our data showed that Black-bellied Plover is the most ubiquitous of all shorebird species in Dungeness Bay, occurring year-round on 90 percent of our 151 surveys. Black-bellied Plovers ended up being present more than Dunlin, Sanderlings, and even locally-nesting Killdeer, which mostly migrate south in winter.

Black-bellied Plovers might be the heart and soul of Dungeness Bay's winter shorebird flocks, but their highest numbers actually occur during spring and fall migration, also revealed by the Three Crabs Bird Study (Fig. 2). Peak spring migration occurs



in April and peak fall migration occurs in August. Our highest count ever during the Three Crabs study occurred on 8/13/18, when we tallied 219 plovers. The average count was 75.2 plovers per survey for the entire five years.

What's the big attraction for Black-bellied Plovers in Dungeness Bay? Food. One of Black-bellied Plovers' favorite prey items is polychaete worms, which they hunt on the mudflats. (Continued on next page)

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It's not uncommon to see a plover yank up a big polychaete, then get chased across the mudflats by a gull trying to steal the worm. With those big eyes, plovers also hunt the mudflats at night.

Their hunting style is to walk a few steps, pause and look, walk a few more steps, then pause and look again, very different from the rapid pecking of sandpipers or the deep probing of dowitchers.



Black-bellied Plover (Basic Plumage)
Photo by Bob Boekelheide

In winter, Black-bellied Plovers in Dungeness Bay do not have black bellies, a conundrum that often confuses beginning birders. Shouldn't Black-bellied Plovers have black bellies? The "basic," or non-breeding plumage of Black-bellied Plovers, along with the juvenal plumage, is plain brownish-gray, without a black belly (see photo)

Many if not all of the Black-bellied Plovers that stay in Dungeness Bay in June and July do not have black bellies. These are pre-breeders, only one year old. Black-bellied Plovers do not breed until their second year, staying in their basic plumage through their first summer. Some one-year-olds migrate north, but many do not, staying here in Dungeness Bay.

After Black-bellied Plovers molt into their breeding plumage (aka "alternate plumage"), they are among the most spectacular birds on the mudflats (see photo). They start this molt during March, so now is the time to look for the start of black bellies on the Black-bellied Plovers. By April and May the breeding birds are striking in their blacks and whites, particularly adult males.



Black-bellied Plover (Alternate Plumage)
Photo by Bob Boekelheide

Along with Sanderlings and Dunlin, Black-bellied Plovers are a cosmopolitan species known as a "Holarctic breeder." This means that they nest all the way around the northern hemisphere, as far north as the northern limits of tundra. They nest from the North Slope of Alaska through northern Canada, then all across northern Russia. Their winter distribution is even more extensive – just about any suitable mudflat or bay in middle and tropical latitudes around the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia might have Black-bellied Plovers in winter. The British call them "Grey Plovers," which might be consistent with their basic plumage, but hardly respectful of their flashy alternate plumage.

Like many shorebirds, Black-bellied plovers waste no time with their nesting duties. After migrating to the Arctic, the males quickly create nest scrapes, likely to attract females. Females arrive, pair with males within a week or two, then lay four beautifully-camouflaged eggs, colored like the lichens found in their nesting material.

The combined mass of the four eggs equals about 16 percent of the female's body mass, a big energy investment for a bird that just migrated thousands of miles. Each egg develops over about a week inside the female, then the female lays the four eggs over about 36-hour intervals. Adults don't start continuously incubating the eggs until the last egg is laid, so the chicks hatch fairly synchronously. Both sexes incubate -- some studies showed that males actually incubated more than females. The eggs start to hatch after an incubation period as short as 23-24 days.

The chicks all hatch within a day or two, then within another day they're out of the nest walking around the tundra. The chicks find their own food, mostly insect larvae, while they're guided and protected by their parents. The chicks grow very quickly, becoming independent from their parents within only three to four weeks. Then the adults take off, leaving the juveniles behind to fend for themselves.

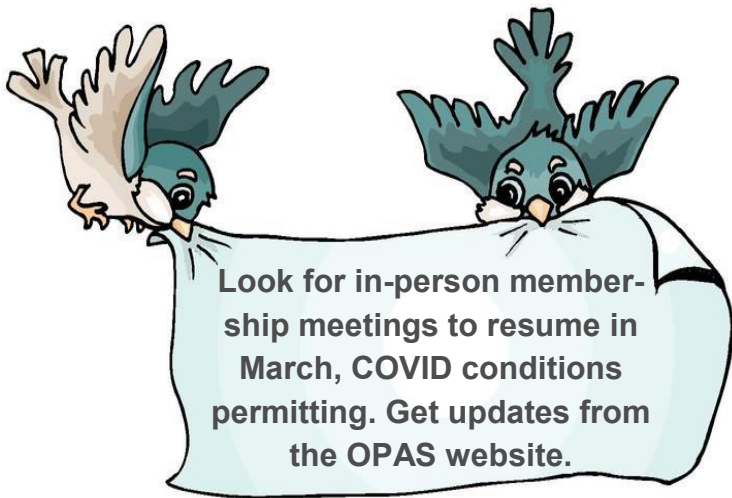
Did I mention it all happens very quickly? If all goes as planned, adults might only spend a couple months at their nesting areas, before quickly migrating south once again to spend the winter at places like Dungeness Bay.

The next three months, March through May, are intense spring migration months. Shorebirds move north very quickly, spending just a few days at each rest-over spot to fuel up for the next leg of their journey. The best places to see migrating shorebirds in Dungeness Bay are at Three Crabs beach, Dungeness Landing County Park, or walking out Dungeness Spit. Plan your shorebird viewing around incoming and outgoing tides at 2 to 5 feet, when the tides are neither too high nor too low. The viewing can be spectacular if you hit the right tide, with flocks of feeding shorebirds spread out around you, one of the greatest spectacles of nature.

Many of the interesting facts about Black-bellied Plovers 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.

Harlequin Happenings

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



Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society

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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**.

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