



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 Nov-Dec 2022

“Volunteer educators and stewards for birds and habitat conservation”

[Editor’s note: There will not be an OPAS meeting in December. Please join a Christmas Bird Count, and come to our Backyard Birding program on Dec 3rd.]

OPAS Program for November

“Swan Use of Lower Dungeness Habitats: The OPAS Swan Study”, November 16, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., presented by Laura Davis, co-leader of the OPAS Swan Study.

Dungeness River Nature Center 1943 W. Hendrickson Rd., Sequim WA 98382.



Trumpeter Swans overwinter in the Dungeness agricultural landscape every year. While local swan numbers are not as high as counties east of the Salish Sea, the OPAS swan team’s data offer a



Trumpeter and Tundra Swans
 Photo by John Gussman

high level of detail and consistency. Over 11 years of swan surveys, the team has extended the scope of this study beyond daytime counts of foraging swans to their use of habitats, including nighttime roosting. Laura Davis will present these data, illustrate the changes in population and habitats used by the swans across the season and from year to year, and provide insights into the winter sustenance and refuge these birds find here.

Laura Davis is a landscape architect with special focus on the enhancement of ecosystem services in our human landscapes. Laura has been co-leading the OPAS Swan Study program with Liam Antrim since October, 2018. Both Laura and Liam bring complementary interests in the conservation of habitat and rural landscape to their leadership approach and study questions.

OPAS Field Trips for November and December

by Marie Grad, Field Trip Coordinator



Wednesday Morning Bird Walk

Every Wednesday morning, OPAS and Dungeness River Nature Center volunteers survey birds on the Olympic Discovery Trail in Railroad Bridge Park. The survey meets at the Nature Center’s parking lot at 8:30 am.

Pre CBC Warm-up

Date: Saturday, Dec. 10

Time: 9:00 a.m. to Noon (roughly)

Location: Dungeness River Nature Center parking lot

Leader: Bob Boekelheide

(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, 1943 West Hendrickson Road, Sequim, WA, (360) 681-4076. The public is welcome.

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President's Notes

by Ken Wiersema



Fall

We're finally getting some wet stuff as rain and a bit of snow in the Olympics. Time to turn off your outside water faucets, and prepare your hummingbird feeders for subfreezing nights. If you plan to feed birds for the winter, make arrangements to keep your feeders clean and filled during times you will be away on holiday trips. When plants flower or are producing seeds in other seasons, natural feed is there for the birds. But, in winter many of our local birds and winter migrants that don't cache food as the Corvid family does, will habituate on your feeders. It's tough on them when feed stops abruptly. Consider attending our renewed Backyard Birding class on Nov 5th when Christie Lassen discusses winter feeding. You might also think about leaving your cleaned nest boxes up over the winter so mixed species of small birds will have protected night roosts.

Audubon Council of Washington (ACOW)

During the 1st weekend of October, OPAS and the other Chapters in our region hosted an in-person statewide meeting of Audubon leaders. Thanks to Powell Jones and the River Center staff for their help in making the meeting a success. And thanks to Bob Boekelheide, Skip Perkins, Joyce Volmut, Dee Renee Ericks, and Kendra Donelson for their help at the meetings. Also, a big thanks to our other OPAS birders who assisted Bob in leading the Sunday field trip. That was the largest turnout for a Sunday field trip that I've seen at ACOW since 2013. Well done! I received many rave comments from other Chapter leaders and Audubon WA staff for our hosting.

Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

Each December OPAS birders participate in a one-day census of birds in our region. Many of us will do the Sequim-Dungeness count on 19 December. This year I'd encourage you also to help with the counts in Port Angeles on 30 December, and in those of our adjoining Chapters. [See dates and compiler info in the OPAS Field Trips article]. It's fun and great to meet and bird with a different group. To get ready for CBCs, our Wednesday morning bird walks at the Center have restarted. Meet in the new parking lot at 8:30 a.m., and spend a few hours renewing your birding skills in the new habitats near the east end of the bridge. And to those of you that enjoy the bird walks, please consider responding to Marie Grad's appeal in this edition and become a trip leader! We need to rebuild our trip leaders' bench to pre-COVID times. BirdFest is coming in April 2023 and we'll need your help to make it succeed.

Nature Mart 2022

On Nov 19th and 20th the River Center will again be sponsoring a Holiday Nature Mart. There you can purchase a wide array of locally made and donated items from handicrafts to nest boxes. Get your holiday wreath made before your eyes or make one yourself. Homemade baked goods abound. The items sold at the event are donated by members and friends of the Center and the income supports the Center's operation. Please plan to attend.

Holidays

There will not be an OPAS meeting in December, so plan to join at least one of the CBCs. Please attend Laura Davis's Swan program on November 16. And, enjoy the holidays season with your families. Good Birding!

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OPAS Field trips

(Continued from page one)

Features: Warm-up for the CBC's coming later in December. We will view land birds at RR Bridge Park; then travel to Dungeness Bay to observe water birds. Do join us!

Christmas Bird Counts in December

Several CBCs are available in December:

Sequim-Dungeness CBC: Monday, Dec. 19, 12:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. Contact Bob Boekelheide (bboek@olympus.net)

Port Townsend CBC: Saturday, Dec. 17. Contact Monica Fletcher (monicaflet@gmail.com)

Port Angeles CBC: Friday, Dec. 30. Contact Barb Blackie (blackieb@olypen.com)

Neah Bay CBC: Tuesday, Dec. 20. Contact Charlie Wright (cwright770@gmail.com)

Now that the pandemic is moving into a new phase, Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society would like to restart our Field Trip program. Unfortunately, we don't have volunteers to lead them. Fall and winter trips normally are done along the water, looking at wintering waterfowl. Ediz Hook, Dungeness Landing, Three Crabs and Sequim Bay are typical locations for these trips.

Field trips typically last two to three hours, but can be longer depending on the location. Neah Bay trips are usually day long trips. Trips are organized through the OPAS website. The leader decides the location, hours, and the number of people permitted on the trip. Prospective trip leaders can look at back issues of the [Harlequin Happenings](#) to see the format that has been used for field trip descriptions. I would help do the write up for the trip and get it scheduled.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a field trip leader, please contact me at mlgrad53@gmail.com.

Conservation Matters: OPAS Swan Study

by Laura Davis and Liam Antrim

It's mid-autumn migration for birds – time to attune our ears and glimpse upwards then around the bend in the road, following the sounds and the line of trees into the field. The Trumpeter Swans, encouraged by nighttime freezes in the boreal forests of Alaska, are flying toward us – guided by their previous seasons' successes here. The Trumpeters won't travel further south than needed,



and we are at the southern edge of their core winter range. And in the end, it will be the healthy pairs returning to the breeding grounds that will win the survival contest. That means not going any further south than necessary. Last year, the swans had arrived in three distinct migration waves by mid-winter.

After their long journey, the swans look for carbohydrates and fats to replenish reserves and then continue to sustain them through the worst of winter. Every acre of forage is not nutritionally equivalent, and they look for sites that meet their caloric needs efficiently. Efficiency is fundamental for these large, flying birds. Even local movement from foraging to roosting grounds burns a lot of calories.

We have pairs of roosting and foraging sites that foster regular patterns of daily back and forth. Commutes typically occur shortly after sunrise and well after sunset. The latter is a challenging time for many of us at the darkest time of year. So too with the swans who in unfamiliar places or conditions run a risk of collisions with power lines. Throughout the season, there is reason to adjust foraging and roosting locations due to food and water availability, windy or icy weather, or feelings of safety or harassment. What circuit of sites will least exhaust their energy resources? The swans need enough water and grit to process their diet — both day and night — even if that means a lesser-quality food. Permanent water is also essential to nighttime safety. In making adjustments throughout the season, the life of a swan isn't so predictable. In other areas of their range, the swans might hop over to their roosting sites for a midday drink; thus far, our studies have not



Adult Trumpeter Swans find pools of water in pasture grasses along Schmuck Road.
Photo: John Gussman

seen that activity. Here, swans may find low areas where puddles of dew or drizzle accumulate and contribute fluids to their midday grazing. Learning about swan behavior in other areas helps us be alert to and observant of additional behavioral clues. *(Continued on next page)*

Harlequin Happenings

Our study is dynamic and observations lead to more questions. With over a decade of surveys, our OPAS swan team continues to ride the momentum of our amazing volunteers' efforts. We invite you to learn more. Attend the OPAS members' meeting on November 16 where you will learn about our insights into the swans' use of our area, see the population changes from year-by-year, and the usages of different food stuffs and sites throughout the winter. See the [Swan-Study](#) on the [OPAS webpage under Conservation](#) for our report and details on the 2021–22 season.

You may find that joining our team is the most engaging way to learn about the swans and the habitats that our agricultural landscapes provide. Please contact OPAS if you're interested. We survey weekly at midday for the five months the swans are here. In addition, once a month, some of our volunteers are out before dawn for a simultaneous count at the roosting sites. The more volunteers we have for our dawn surveys, the more we can learn.



Swan Team volunteers count swans as they fly from their Gierin Marsh roosting site. Photo: John Gussman

Backyard Birding Presentations for November & December

by Rhonda Marks-Coats

After a long hiatus due to COVID concerns and building construction, our OPAS Backyard Birding programs return for in-person instruction in the newly remodeled Dungeness River Nature Center in Sequim. The eight-part 2022-23 program series will feature information on wild bird identification, biology, feeding, nesting, and habitats of the Olympic Peninsula. The classes are developed for folks new to birding and to our region as well as for those who wish to hone their bird knowledge and skills.

November Presentation

“Winter Care and Feeding in Your Garden”

Presented by Christie Lassen, Co-owner Wild Birds Unlimited, Gardiner, WA
Saturday, November 5, 2022 from 10:00 a.m. to noon

First in the series, on November 5, Christie Lassen will discuss general bird feeding methods—including types of feeders and various foods formulated to attract specific birds. Find out about the special needs of the Anna’s Hummingbird and other species that make the Pacific Northwest a yearlong home. Learn how to promote healthy, thriving bird populations while discouraging unwelcome mammals! Christie will highlight some selected products from Wild Birds Unlimited that will be available for purchase at the conclusion of her program.



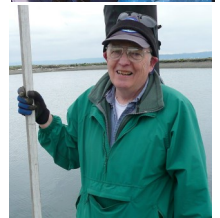
December Presentation

“Birds—The Inside Story”

Presented by Shirley Anderson & Ken Wiersema
Saturday, December 3, 2022 at 10:00 a.m. to noon

Second in the series, on December 3, Shirley Anderson and Ken Wiersema will present a seminar packed with information on the physical features and biology of birds—how they eat, digest, see, breathe, sing, reproduce, and fly. Participants will learn from a collection of bird skeletons, feathers, and feet along with new graphic illustrations and recorded sounds. Come and increase your understanding and enjoyment of our local feathered friends!

Admission to each seminar will be free. However, a donation of \$5.00 per person is suggested to support our ongoing education programs. Please note that current COVID 19 safety precautions as recommended by Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe and Clallam County Public Health will be followed for the protection of our attendees and volunteer staff.



Get Ready for the Christmas Bird Counts

by Bob Boekelheide

The annual Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count (SDCBC) occurs this year on Monday, Dec.19.



If you are interested in participating, please email Bob Boekelheide at bboek@olympus.net to sign up.

Other local CBCs include the Port Townsend, Neah Bay, and Port Angeles CBCs. If you are interested, contact information may be found in the OPAS Field Trips article.

Each Christmas Bird Count covers a 15-mile diameter count circle, so we need lots of participants to cover as much of the area as possible. Even if you can only count your backyards or stroll around your neighborhood for an hour or two (assuming you live within a 15-mile diameter count circle), you can help out. We also have field parties assigned to specific areas of the count circle. If you are an experienced counter, you may be able to help with areas not covered by others.

The center of the SDCBC circle is near the intersection of Brown and Port Williams Roads, so it includes Dungeness Spit, Dungeness and Sequim Bays, Protection Island, Diamond Point, and some of the Olympic foothills south of Sequim. The PACBC center is in the Olympic foothills south of Port Angeles, so it includes Port Angeles Harbor, several miles of the Elwha River on the west, Morse Creek on the east, and all the way up to Hurricane Ridge. If you live within either of these circles, and have a feeder or know where birds lurk in your neighborhood, we need your help.

To prepare and gain experience for the CBC, the most important thing is to GO BIRDING. Look at and identify all the birds you can in November and December before the counts. We will have a pre-CBC warm-up field trip on Saturday, Dec. 10, starting at the Dungeness River Nature Center at 9 am. We will view land birds at RR Bridge Park, then travel to Dungeness Bay to observe water birds. Please join us!

Dungeness Data—The Crowned Sparrows

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 genus of sparrows known as *Zonotrichia* is well-represented on the north Olympic Peninsula. The “Zonos,” as they are affectionately called, are the “crowned” sparrows, including five species: White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-

crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Harris’s Sparrow, and Rufous-collared Sparrow.

According to *Words for Birds*, a wonderful book about the etymology of bird names, “Zone” in Greek means band or girdle, and “trichias” means a small bird. Consequently, *Zonotrichia* means “small bird with bands,” referring to the streaked heads found on these birds, which are actually fairly large for sparrows.

Three of the *Zonotrichia* – White-crowned, Golden-crowned, and White-throated Sparrows -- occur on the Olympic Peninsula every year. White-crowneds nest here in abundance, Golden-crowneds winter here in abundance, and White-throateds occur mostly on migration and sometimes stay for the winter, particularly at feeders. There are a few Clallam records for Harris’s Sparrow, a species found in the center of North America, but not every year.

Rufous-collared Sparrow is the southern outlier, ranging from Central America to the southern tip of South America. If you’ve birded anywhere in South America other than the Amazon rainforest, particularly in the continent’s southern half, you’ve probably seen Rufous-collared Sparrows, one of the most abundant and widespread sparrows in South America.

Our two locally-abundant crowned sparrows, White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, are very closely related. One genetic study showed that the two species share 99.89 percent of their genome, as high as the genetic variability within some whole species. Studies suggest that the two species may have split apart as recently as 50,000 years ago, likely during one of the most recent glacial advances and retreats in western North America.

There are four subspecies of White-crowned Sparrow, but only one Golden-crowned Sparrow. Two White-crowned Sparrow subspecies largely nest in shrubby habitats across Alaska, Canada, and western mountains, from tree-line forests to tundra willow patches. *(Continued on next page)*



*Golden-crowned Sparrow, showing its distinctive black eyebrows and golden-yellow crown patch.
Photo by Bob Boekelheide.*

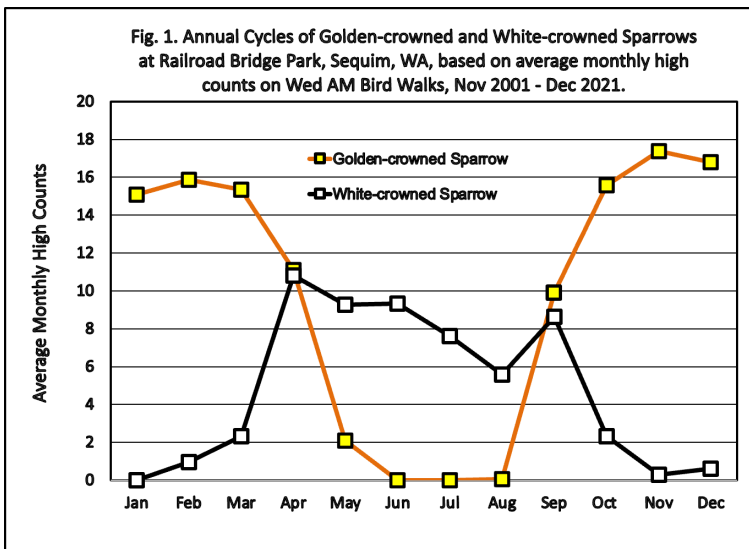
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*White-crowned Sparrow, showing its distinctive black-and-white head stripes.
Photo by Bob Boekelheide.*

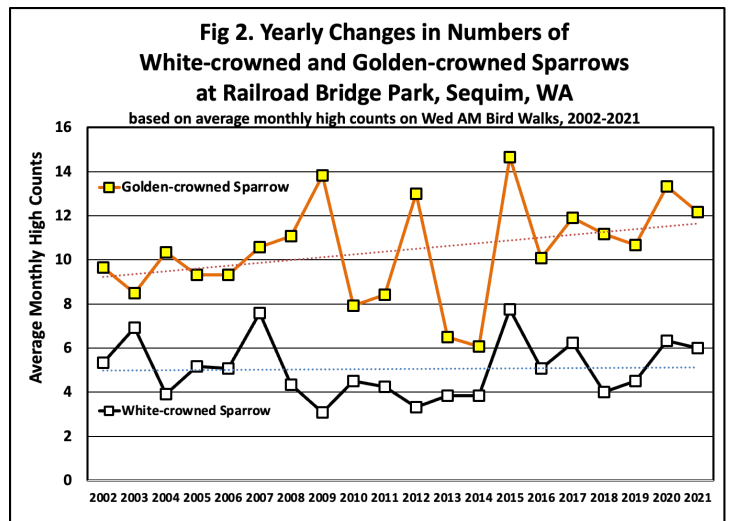
Two other White-crowned subspecies nest in shrubby habitats on the West Coast from southern B.C. to California, including the Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrows we hear singing on the north Olympic Peninsula. Golden-crowned Sparrows are somewhat wedged in between, mostly nesting at tree line in mountains of western Canada and the southern half of Alaska. Some Golden-crowns also nest down to sea level in coastal areas of Alaska and western Canada, even on some Aleutian Islands. The two species occur together in southern Alaska, where they occasionally hybridize.

Of interest, the White-crowned Sparrow is one of the most intensely-studied wild birds in the world, sometimes called the “white rat” of song birds. Many early studies with White-crowned Sparrows revealed ground-breaking information about regional song dialects, hormonal changes during breeding and migration, and how young birds learn to sing. There have been far fewer studies with Golden-crowned Sparrows.



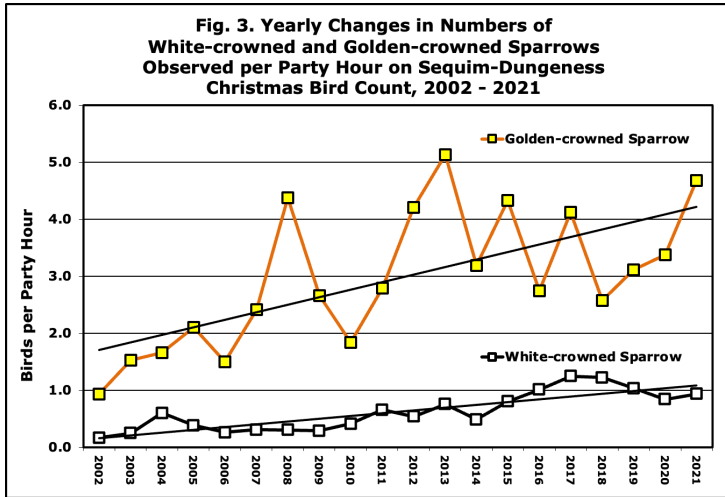
The annual cycles of Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows in the Olympic lowlands reveal a fascinating juxtaposition between the two species. As shown by monthly data from the Wednesday morning bird walks in Railroad Bridge Park (Figure 1), they make a complete switch twice each year. Golden-crowned Sparrows, which do not nest here, are abundant as a wintering species between September and April. The locally-nesting Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrows are abundant between April and September, then most of them migrate to coastal California for the winter. Some White-crowned Sparrows stay here during winter, but the remaining winter White-crowns largely flock with Golden-crowned Sparrows at locations closer to the Strait, such as in Dungeness and Jamestown.

April and September are intriguing months, the peaks of spring and fall migration for both species. On the graph (Figure 1), it looks like White-crowns and Golden-crowns occur in similar numbers in April and September, but the two species actually have very different missions. In April, White-crowned Sparrows arrive for nesting and immediately begin singing and setting up nesting territories. Golden-crowned Sparrows are still in flocks, getting ready to migrate north while finishing up their body molt and putting on fat. In September, it's the reverse. White-crowned Sparrows are intent to migrate south, whereas Golden-crowned Sparrows arrive and settle in for the long winter.



Our Wednesday morning bird walks also reveal changes to these species' populations over the last couple decades (Fig. 2). On the bird walks, we have counted birds on the same route every week for over twenty years, providing an index to their relative abundance over the years. Looking at the average high monthly counts from 2002 to 2021, the numbers of both species bounce around quite a bit, sometimes more than double from one year to the next, but the long-term trend

appears fairly stable over time, even increasing in Golden-crowned Sparrows (Fig. 2).



How do the data from the larger Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count compare with those from the smaller area at Railroad Bridge Park (Figure 3)? The trend lines from the Christmas Count are quite similar to the Wednesday bird walks over the last 20 years, also showing greater increases for Golden-crowned Sparrows. It appears that the two sparrow populations are doing okay around here.

Looking more closely at the graphs, though, it's apparent that the peaks and valleys of sparrow numbers do not perfectly line up between RR Bridge Park and the larger CBC. For example, 2013 is one of the lowest years for Golden-crowned Sparrows in the Railroad Bridge Park data, whereas 2013 has the highest count for Golden-crowns on the Christmas Bird Count. Why the difference? Remember that the Railroad Bridge Park data combines an entire year of bird walks, whereas the Christmas Bird Count is only one count occurring one day in mid-December.

Both White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows are expert singers, producing distinctive songs easily remembered and repeated. A favorite translation of our local Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrow song is "See Me, Pretty Pretty Pretty Me," starting with two separate notes on different pitches, warbling in the middle, then dropping on the final note.

Songs of White-crowned Sparrows fill the air in the Clallam lowlands during spring and early summer. Just about everywhere you go between April and July around Port Angeles and Sequim, from one end of town to the other, there are White-crowned Sparrows singing in nearby bushes. White-crowned Sparrows sometimes sing loudly at night and are a big contributor to the dawn chorus, much to the chagrin of sleep-deprived humans nearby.

Golden-crowned Sparrows also belt out full songs in the Clallam lowlands, even though they do not nest here. Their songs can particularly be heard when they first arrive in September and before they depart in April. Their common song translates to very mournful three notes descending on a minor key, sounding like "Oh Dear Me."

Klondike gold miners, digging for gold in the mountains of Alaska and the Yukon, noticed that everywhere they staked a claim there would be Golden-crowned Sparrows singing in nearby willow thickets. The miners called them "Sad Willies," and translated their three-note descending song as "Don't Dig Here."

Based on banding returns, it seems likely that the average crowned sparrow only lives to be one to two years old, provided it fledged successfully. At the other extreme, the oldest banded Golden-crowned Sparrow on record reached 10 years 6 months, whereas the oldest banded White-crowned Sparrow was 13 years 4 months.

Banding studies have shown that both species have fairly high site fidelity not only to nesting areas, but also to where they spend their winters. This means that the adult Golden-crowned Sparrows at your feeder this November may have visited you last November, provided they survived two migrations and a nesting season in between.

Whether you see Golden-crowned Sparrows visiting your feeders in December, or White-crowned Sparrows singing at the post office parking lot in May, please stop and take time to appreciate these amazing birds. Despite the curveballs we humans throw at them, these Zonos seem to be surviving reasonably well in our changing world.

Many interesting facts about sparrows 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

Dungeness River Nature Center — Upcoming Events

Volunteer 101 Training Workshops For River Center

The classes will be held on 11/8 from 5:30—7:30 p.m., and on 12/13 from 10 a.m.—12 p.m., and 5:30—7:30 p.m.

Organizer: Dungeness River Nature Center
Email: info@DungenessRiverCenter.org
Phone: 360-681-4076
Website: <https://DungenessRiverCenter.org/>

For New & Experienced Volunteers, we'll offer 3 more 101 Workshops for those volunteers who were unable to attend the last two that were offered or who signed up for volunteering after the workshops. We are asking every volunteer to come to one of these if you wish to volunteer for DNRC.

Powell Jones, the Center Director, will present an overview of the Dungeness River Center, its history, purpose, and goals. You will gain insights about our beautiful Center and information to answer many questions from our guests. You need only attend one of these sessions.

Drawing Swans in the Field

Organizer: Dungeness River Nature Center
Email: info@DungenessRiverCenter.org
Phone: 360-681-4076
Website: <https://DungenessRiverCenter.org/>
Instructors: Robert Amaral & Jenna Ziogas

Welcome Trumpeter Swans back to their wintering grounds here in Sequim with this two-session class:

Session One at the River Center,
Mon., Nov. 14, 2022 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.



The initial session will consist of a lecture on the natural history and anatomy of swans, drawing demonstrations, and participants drawing from the Center's swan mounts.

Session Two in the Field

Date: (Weather Dependent. Participants will be notified closer to the date which day we will head into the field.) **Nov. 15th, 16th, or 17th.**

Session two will consist of heading out to find the swans and drawing them with one-on-one instruction and discussion.

Nature Mart

November 19 - November 20
Saturday, 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.
and Sunday, Noon - 4 p.m.

The Dungeness River Nature Center Nature Mart features unique, high-quality, locally hand-crafted, nature-related gifts, and ornaments, as well as sweet and savory baked goods. There will be photo opportunities with some of the River Center animals. Construct your own, fresh wreath, or purchase a pre-made wreath or fresh holiday arrangement.

Since 2006

**RIVER CENTER
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**SAT., November 19
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Noon - 4 p.m.**

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We'll be seeing you!

www.snowgoosefestival.org
info@snowgoosefestival.org



Winter Wings Festival

PRESDENTS' DAY WEEKEND
Feb. 17 - Feb. 20, 2023

- Keynotes:
Jen Haj and Ray Hennessy
- Birding and photography
field trips and workshops
- Free talks on Klamath Basin
conservation initiatives



Klamath Falls, Oregon
www.WinterWingsFest.org
(877) 541-BIRD



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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)
___ 6 Year Membership (\$90.00, saves \$30) ___ Lifetime Membership (\$250.00)

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