



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 2023

“Promoting Birding and Conservation as Community Educators, Volunteers, and Stewards”

OPAS Program for November

by Ken Wiersema

“The Joy of Continuing Curiosity—Three Decades of Research in Ecology”

Presented by Rhonda L. Millikin, Ph.D., MSc., RPBio, ITA Horticulture

November 15, 2023 at 7 p.m.

Rainshadow Hall, Dungeness River Nature Center

No charge to attend.

Rhonda is a semi-retired ecologist after 37 years with the Canadian Federal Government – Forestry Canada, then Environment and Climate Change Canada, followed by a return to school for Landscape Horticulture and Soil Science. She’s currently combining the 3 disciplines to develop an Ecosystem Sustainability approach to vineyard management.



Rhonda L. Millikin, Ph.D.

The last time she came to the Olympic Peninsula and presented an OPAS program—over 30 years ago—she was developing what would become her Ph.D thesis and comprise the basis of 2 patents. She fused radar and acoustics to passively locate and identify night migrating birds in 3-dimensional space. She subsequently formed EchoTrack Inc. to apply her innovative technology to identify and conserve stopover sites for migrating birds and to recommend safer siting of wind turbines in proximity to migration flyways across North America and in South Africa.

For our Audubon program, she will share some key insights from her work on night bird migration and add current findings from her graduate students’ work on shorebird stopover flight behavior. She will also sneak in a few ideas from her vineyard research that we could apply to our landscaping on the Olympic Peninsula to help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

It will be great to welcome a longtime friend and distinguished scientist back to our midst for an informative and entertaining evening. Please mark it on your calendar and join us.

[Note: There will be no general membership meeting in December]

OPAS FIELD TRIPS: November-December

Please Note: Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society is instituting a new policy for in-person field trips. We are asking for field trip participants to sign a liability release form on or before the day of the trip. This signed form will be good for future field trips. *(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 aggift@gmail.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 Nature Center, 1943 West Hendrickson Road, Box 2, Sequim, WA, 98382. The public is welcome.

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President's Notes

by Ken Wiersema

OPAS's 50th and the future?

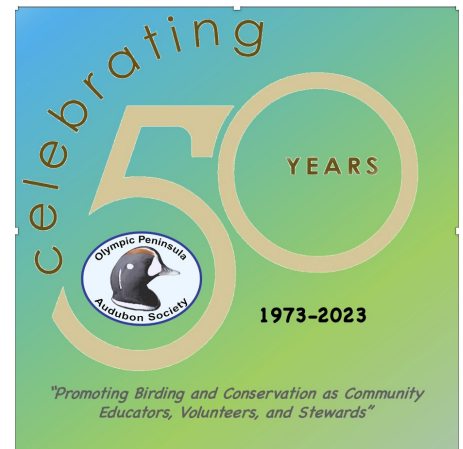
It was a grand celebration last month, and I again thank our OPAS team who organized the party and John Gussman for the generous contributions of his superb photographic skills, which graphically captured the essence of our home. It was a rewarding evening to visit with our members and guests and see folks in-person again. Thank you for attending. We received numerous contributions from our members and our community to support the party, which validates what we contribute, as well as the respect we have earned for our continuing dedication to *"birding and habitat conservation through science-based education, advocacy, and stewardship."*

So, as we reflect on the achievements and challenges we've worked on over the past 50 years, we now have the responsibility of looking forward. While we recognize the high quality of existing programs we are leading, from bird counts to monitoring and providing nest cavities for migrating birds, we must look forward to actions we can take locally to accommodate and document the impact of climate change on both our resident and migratory birds. Our board has discussed the potential to help establish a bird migration site in the MOTUS system. We'll have the opportunity to collaborate with the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe as they assume a lead role with the USFWS in the management and operation of the Dungeness Spit and Protection Island National Wildlife Refuges. We could expand and build on the framework of our education and monthly meeting programs to provide timely and science-based information to our members and our community.

We highly value our partnership with the Dungeness River Nature Center, which is unique in Audubon Washington. We, as the smallest of the four partners in terms of members and resources, can and do embody a commitment to our local habitat and the birds and wildlife we share it with. I believe that Hazel Wolf and the 10 folks she met with in the 1970s would be proud of what OPAS has achieved, while they would also urge us forward to build and grow our successes and meet the challenges that will surely come.

November's Special program – Presented by Dr Rhonda Millikin

I urge folks to attend our special program on the 15th of November. Please read Rhonda's background and accomplishments. Thanks to Tom Butler for helping arrange her visit. She is making a special effort to return to the Olympic Peninsula from her home in Whistler, BC to present a wide-ranging program for us. It's not often we get to hear from an international scholar and leader in environmental studies and technology applications to bird monitoring. It's interesting to note that she conducted a part of her pre-doctoral migration data collections in Sequim in the 1990s! It will be a superb evening, well worth your time. Please plan on joining us.



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President's Notes *(Continued from page two)*

Leadership challenges

I again remind y'all that becoming a part of the OPAS leadership team is a fun and rewarding experience; yes, there's work and thoughtful involvement too! We're part of OPAS because we believe in the conservation and protection of birds and their habitat. Please consider taking that extra step to contribute your time and skills to making us better. Please contact me or any of our board to learn more about OPAS leadership opportunities.

Nature Mart 2023 -- November 18 & 19, 2023

The Dungeness River Center Nature Mart, a holiday tradition since 2006, features unique, high-quality, hand-crafted, nature-related gifts and ornaments, as well as sweet & savory baked goods, along with photo ops with River Center animals. Make a fresh holiday wreath or purchase a pre-made wreath or fresh holiday arrangement. Look for OPAS's table with nest boxes and cedar bird silhouettes. We look forward to seeing you folks and spreading holiday cheer and greetings!

Holiday Greetings

This will be our last edition for 2023, I wish y'all a happy and joyous season. Although we won't have a December meeting, there is a great BYB class on birding optics on Dec 2d, and a full array of Christmas Bird Counts to join. See Bob B's dates and time. It will be fun for each of us!

OPAS Field Trips *(Continued from page one)*

The liability form will not be necessary for the Wednesday Bird Walks. You can review, download, and print the form in advance by [clicking here](#). You can also eSign the liability release form by [clicking here](#).

Message from the Field Trip Chair

by Marie Grad

The next two months bring shorter days and fewer options for bird watching.



We do have one scheduled field trip for November: Kathy McCoy is leading a trip to the mouth of the Elwha River on November 14th, starting at 9:00am. This is a great location for gulls and wintering waterfowl.

December is the month for Christmas Bird Counts. We have one field trip scheduled: Bob Boekelheide and I are doing a pre-Christmas Bird Count field trip to Carrie Blake Park and

John Wayne Marina on December 10th. This is a great opportunity to hone your bird identifying, locating, and counting skills.

If you wish to participate in any of these field trips register through the Olympic Peninsula Society website. The registration information is found on the Events Calendar page.

I will be working with my leaders to come up with field trips for the new year. All field trip announcements will be posted on the website Events page. Also, if you would like to become a field trip leader or help with trips, you can contact me at mlgrad53@gmail.com

Wednesday Bird Walks

Date and Time: Every Wednesday morning at 8:30 a.m.
Meeting Place: Outside the Dungeness River Nature Center.
Features: Easy guided bird walk through Railroad Bridge Park to see birds of the Dungeness River riparian area and adjacent fields and open areas.
Bring: Binoculars, scope, water, snacks, and appropriate

Mouth of the Elwha River

Leader: Kathy McCoy:
Date and time: Tuesday, November 14th, 9 a.m.—12 p.m.
Number of participants: 15 — Registration required. Click [here](#) to register
Cost: Free
Meeting place: Meet at the mouth of the Elwha Beach trailhead parking area at 9 a.m..
Directions: Take highway 101 west from Port Angeles, about 4 miles, then turn right onto highway 112 west. At 2.2 miles, turn right onto Place Rd. At 1.9 miles turn right onto Elwha Dike Rd. Follow to end and the mouth of the Elwha Beach trailhead parking. Once parked, there is a sign pointing towards the beach area a half-mile north. At first "Y" in the trail, bear left to dikes, ponds, and mouth of river.
Features: The mouth of the Elwha River is an intriguing place to visit. The way the landscape has changed following the dam removal upstream is a lesson in the power of the natural world. Please join me November 14 to check out a remarkable spot. Bob Boekelheide has challenged us to try to identify 10 gull species there. This is a challenge indeed. I am starting to get a handle on these birds; so let's try to puzzle them out together. Please dress for the weather; I will be there, rain or shine.
Special Requirements: The trail is very flat and solid for a half mile or so, then devolves to sand. Not rough, but also not easy walking. There is a porta-potty at the first "Y" in the trail.
Contact information: Kathy McCoy (208) 921-1340. Text or call if you have questions! *(Continued on next page)*

Harlequin Happenings

Pre-Christmas Bird Count Field Trip to Carrie Blake Park and John Wayne Marina

Date and Time: Sunday, December 10, 2023.

Cost: Free

Number of participants: 20 (Participants must sign up at <https://olympicpeninsulaaudubon.org/Events/Calendar>)

Leaders: Bob Boekelheide & Marie Grad

Meeting Place: Meet at parking strip on south edge of Carrie Blake Park soccer fields at 8:30 a.m. After a couple hours at Carrie Blake Park, we will travel to John Wayne Marina to view birds in Sequim Bay.

Features: Prepare for the Christmas Bird Count. Identify winter ducks, gulls, and sparrows. Learn how to count big flocks of wigeons and mallards.

Special Requirements: Watch the weather – it could be cold, windy, rainy, and/or snowy. Accessible to all, including wheelchairs and walkers.

Liability Form: Complete the liability form through the OPAS website. Once completed, your form is good for future OPAS field trips.

Further information, if needed: Contact Bob Boekelheide at bboek@olympus.net.

Christmas Bird Counts

by Bob Boekelheide

The Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count (SDCBC), our annual mid-December tally of birds in the Sequim-Dungeness area, occurs this year on Monday, Dec. 18. We have one of the richest bird areas in the Pacific Northwest, holding the record for the most species seen on a WA CBC with 154 species in 2015.

Christmas Bird Counts cover 15-mile diameter circles. The center of the SDCBC circle lies northeast of downtown Sequim, so it stretches north to Dungeness Spit, south to the Olympic foothills, west to MacDonald Creek, east to Diamond Point and Protection Island, and includes the towns of Sequim, Gardiner, Blyn, Dungeness, and Carlsborg. We split our circle up into about 30-35 separate areas, each covered by a different party. You can also count your backyards or neighborhoods, particularly if you have a bird feeder.

CBCs need many participants, hopefully all familiar with local birds. We really need "feeder watchers," in which you count the birds at your feeder or stroll around your neighborhood during the day. No matter where you count, you must keep close track of your times and mileages, to make comparisons with other counts and other years. To prepare, or if you are not familiar with local birds, please join bird walks at RR Bridge



Park on Wednesday mornings and go on OPAS field trips, in addition to looking at birds as much as possible this fall. If you wish to participate in the SDCBC, contact Bob Boekelheide at bboek@olympus.net.

Other CBCs on the north Olympic Peninsula include Port Townsend (Dec 16), Neah Bay (Dec 17), and Port Angeles (Dec 30). The compiler for Port Townsend is Steve Hampton (stevehampton@gmail.com), the compiler for Neah Bay is Charlie Wright (cwright770@gmail.com) and the compiler for Port Angeles is Barb Blackie (blackieb@olypen.com). Please contact these compilers if you can help with these counts.

We will have a pre-CBC field trip this year to Carrie Blake Park and John Wayne Marina on Sun., Dec. 10. Check the OPAS website or Harlequin Happenings for more details.

Conservation Matters

by Bob Phreaner, Conservation Co-Chair



Last month, we described the mission of the OPAS Conservation Committee to include initiation and monitoring of community science projects. This time of year the emphasis is on our wintering population of Trumpeter Swans (TRUS). Last season, juvenile TRUS made up less than 10% of the flock. I was pleasantly surprised on 10/26 to visit Kirner Pond before sunrise and to find a family group of 2 adults with 6 juveniles. That is an unusually large brood. Pardon my anthropomorphism but maybe this is a "blended" family? Several years ago I followed a family of 3 juveniles with two adults that we named "Full House," and I remember a "single mom" with three juveniles that I dubbed "Hard Times." It will be interesting for the OPAS swan observation teams to follow "Six Pack" to see if they all make it through the winter.

Commenting on conservation issues is one of the tasks of the OPAS Conservation Committee. Recently, Audubon Washington asked the chapters to provide comments on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Periodic Review of the Endangered status of the Northern Spotted Owl in Washington State. The WDFW staff report cited Climate Change, with associated drought and wildfire, as threats to survival but also emphasized competition from the invasive Barred Owl. WDFW is considering changes to the management of the Barred Owl population. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been experimenting with the removal of Barred Owls from Spotted Owl habitat to sustain the population of the latter species. OPAS supports maintaining the Endangered Status of the Northern Spotted Owl, but I would like to see the response of chapter members to WDFW policies that would

remove Barred Owls. Let the Conservation Committee know your thoughts.

In 2017, our chapter proposed a resolution to the Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee for the banning of marine Atlantic Salmon net pens in Washington State. This resolution was unanimously approved by the Audubon Council of Washington. It is no coincidence that Governor Inslee and the Washington legislature have prohibited marine net pens for Atlantic Salmon aquaculture after 2025.

If you have additional bird friendly conservation actions in mind please consider participating in your OPAS Conservation Committee. Visit the OPAS website under the Conservation/take action tab to learn more of our activities, attend a Conservation meeting, or contact Bob Phreaner (phreaner@aol.com) or Joyce Volmut (joyce.volmut@gmail.com) to volunteer.

Backyard Birding: Nov–Dec

by Rhonda Marks-Coats

Our 2023-2024 Series of Backyard Birding got off to a “flying start” with a well-attended presentation from Christie Lassen, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited, Gardiner, Washington. Christie discussed best practices for preparing our backyards for the special needs of various bird species as they winter over here on the Olympic Peninsula. We are looking forward to our next presenters lined up for November and December!

Admission to the series is free. However, we suggest a donation of \$5.00 per person to support ongoing OPAS education and bird conservation programs. Please note that current COVID-19 health precautions as recommended by Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe and Clallam County Public Health will be followed for the protection of attendees and volunteer staff.

[Editor’s Note: Because of printing and mailing delays, those who receive a printed version of the Harlequin Happenings Newsletter may not receive it in time to attend the November session.]

November Session

“Birds: The Inside Story—Anatomy & Biology”
Presenters: Shirley Anderson and Ken Wiersema
Saturday, November 4, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Rainshadow Hall, Dungeness River Audubon Center



For over 10 years, Shirley and Ken have been integrating her academic background in biology and Ken’s graphics skills into their “inside story” presentation. They have evolved this talk



Ken Wiersema Shirley Anderson

into a fact-filled, enjoyable program that conveys the unique physical features of birds. The program is well-suited to folks new to birding and to our region—as well as for those who wish to hone their bird knowledge and skills.

In this session, Shirley and Ken will discuss information on wild bird identification, biology, feeding, and nesting—as well as how and where birds use the habitats of the Olympic Peninsula. They will reveal how birds 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 locally recorded sounds.

December Session

“Understanding Birding Optics”

Presenters: Christie Lassen, Wild Birds Unlimited, Gardiner, WA
Jim Ullrich, Swarovski Optik, Pacific Northwest
Saturday, December 2, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Rainshadow Hall, Dungeness River Audubon Center



Christie Lassen,



Jim Ullrich

At the request of our attendees, Backyard Birding has added this new topic to the program series lineup. We will learn from two local experts, Christie and Jim, about the latest in optical technologies that provide “up close and personal” views of our feathered friends in our backyards, fields, and shorelines. They will discuss technical parameters such as lens diameter, magnification power, and other specifications that determine cost-benefit considerations when making purchasing decisions. They will explain the various uses of binoculars and spotting scopes in differing light and weather conditions. Additionally, they will touch on the topic of “digiscoping”— techniques for adapting a digital camera lens (such a cell phone camera) into a telephoto device for capturing images of birds at a distance. We invite you to join us in learning how to increase your birding enjoyment—while perhaps gathering ideas for your holiday gift giving!

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Holiday Bridge Light Countdown & Sing-along

Thurs., Nov. 16, at 5 p.m.

Join us for a countdown and sing-along after dark when the lights blaze on at the River Center and the historic railroad bridge on the Olympic Discovery Trail.

Thanks to the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, thousands of lights will brighten the Olympic Discovery Trail at Railroad Bridge Park, the bridge spans and trestle, the Dungeness River Nature Center, and the towering cedar tree out front from Thurs., Nov. 16 through the first few weeks of January.

The River Center's Gift Shop will be open extra hours during the bridge lighting.

Hurricane Coffee at the River will be open too for this special evening with holiday drinks...eggnog and pumpkin spice lattes, hot chocolate with whipped cream, chai, hot teas and cookies.



Holiday Lighting for Railroad Bridge
Photo by John Gussman

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10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

SUN., November 19
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

All proceeds benefit the
River Center's ongoing operations
and educational programs.

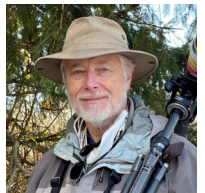


1943 W. Hendrickson Road
Sequim, Washington
www.DungenessRiverCenter.org
360-681-4076



Dungeness Data—Those Flashy Flickers

by Bob Boekelheide



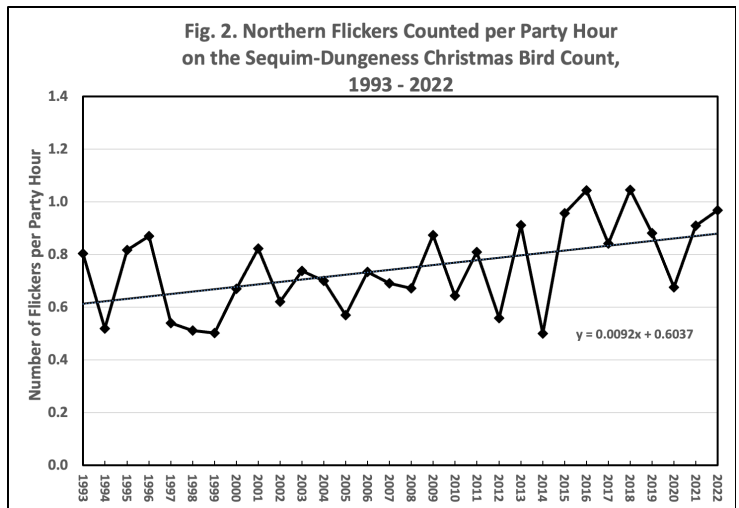
In place of the former Bird Sightings column, Bob is exploring data from OPAS Community-Science Projects. If you are interested in local bird sightings, check out eBird at <https://ebird.org/explore>, then under "Explore Regions" enter Clallam or Jefferson County. Please add your own sightings to eBird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

This month we give tribute to the amazing Northern Flicker, likely the most abundant woodpecker species in Clallam County. Without exception, on every Sequim-Dungeness Christmas Bird Count (SDCBC) since the SDCBC began in 1975, Northern Flicker has outnumbered all other woodpecker species combined.

Figure 1 is a graph showing the number of Northern Flickers observed on the SDCBC over the last 30 years.



Female Northern Flicker, red-shafted variety
Photo by Bob Boekelheide



finding flickers? Not likely. Flickers are big, obvious, vocal woodpeckers, so I suspect the increase is real.

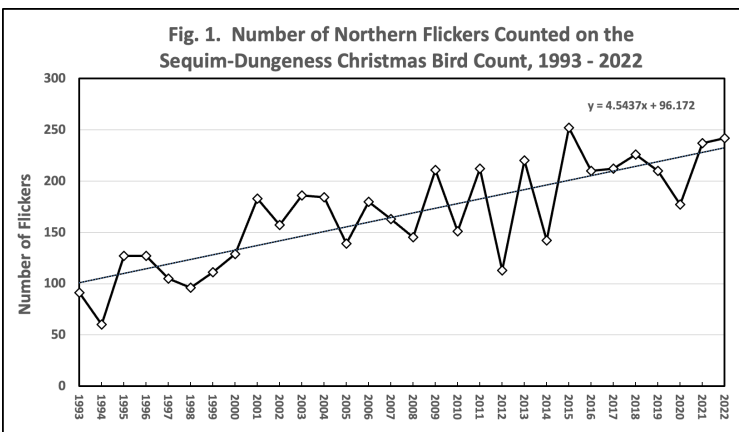
We know, however, that counting birds during a CBC is a bit of a crap shoot. Weather conditions and counters' abilities vary every year. This is why it is so important to not place too much emphasis on changes between individual years. Long-term changes, like over 30 years, are much more meaningful, as shown by flickers.

Supporting our local observations, trend analyses from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, as shown in their eBird Science section, also show increases in Northern Flickers in western Washington and along the West Coast of North America. Curiously, the same analyses show substantial decreases in flickers throughout many other areas of North America, including eastern WA.

Flickers are not particularly social, usually found singly, in pairs, or small groups. Flickers sometimes join together to form bigger flocks, perhaps dependent on food supplies or predators. The largest group I've seen locally was 25 flickers perched together in a big shrubby hedgerow in Jamestown on a cool fall day, possibly eating elderberries or some other fruits.

What time of year do we see the most flickers in the lowlands of the north Olympic Peninsula? Data from 21 years of Wednesday morning bird walks in Railroad Bridge Park show the annual cycle of flickers throughout the year. It is a clear pattern, with relatively few flickers during the nesting season from April to August, then rising to a peak in flicker abundance in October (Figure 3).

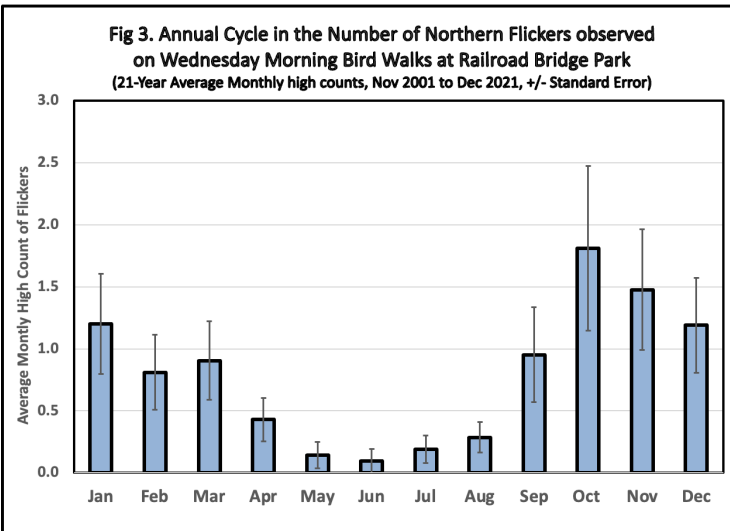
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It really looks like flickers have increased on the SDCBC over the last 30 years. This is true even when corrected for our counting effort, by calculating the number of flickers seen per party hour. The number of flickers still shows an increase, although it doesn't look quite as steep (Figure 2).

The number of flickers varies quite a bit between years, as shown by the sawtooth pattern moving above and below the regression line. Still, the overall increase is apparent. For example, prior to 2009 we never observed more than 200 flickers on a SDCBC, yet during 8 of the last 10 years (2013-2022) our count has surpassed 200 flickers. Have we become better at

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Where do the flickers seen in the Clallam lowlands in fall and winter go to nest in the spring and summer? A few flickers nest in the lowlands, but relatively few. It is likely that some flickers move upslope into the Olympic Mountain to nest, where they are abundant in open montane and subalpine forests during the nesting season. It is also likely that many flickers here in winter migrate north to nest in Canada and Alaska, where they nest as far north as the northern-most tree line.

This leads to an interesting story about flickers. There are three main “types” of flickers in North America – Yellow-shafted Flicker, Red-shafted Flicker, and Gilded Flicker. If you started birding before the 1980s, you remember when these three types were separate species. A watershed year occurred in 1982, when the American Ornithological Union lumped the three flicker species into only one species, the “Northern Flicker.” They did this because the three types freely hybridize and produce viable offspring (so why don’t they do this with large pink-legged gulls?). In 1995, the AOU partially reversed itself and decided that the Gilded Flicker, a desert flicker that typically nests in cacti, is unique enough to return to full species status, where it has been ever since.

Even though Yellow-shafted and Red-shafted Flickers now comprise separate subspecies within Northern Flicker, their geographic ranges are fairly distinct. The Yellow-shafted is mostly found east of the Rocky Mountains, whereas the Red-shafted is found in western North America down into Mexico. Where Yellow and Red-shafted types meet on the eastern slope of the Rockies, from Texas to Alaska, they produce “intergrades” that show variable characteristics originating from the two different subspecies. (Just to complicate matters, the term “intergrade” is used to designate crosses between subspecies, whereas the term “hybrid” designates crosses between full species.) One of the main intergrade zones lies north of us near the border between British Columbia and Alberta,

the likely origin for many of the intergrade flickers we see in western WA during fall and winter.

The typical Yellow-shafted Flicker you see in eastern North America, other than having bright yellow wing linings and tail feathers, has a brown face, bluish-gray crown, and a red mark on its nape, on the back of its head. Yellow-shafted males have a black moustache, also known as a malar stripe. In contrast, the typical Red-shafted Flicker, other than having salmon-red wing and tail feathers, has a bluish-gray face, brown crown, and lacks the red mark on its nape (although some Red-shafteds nesting in western WA may occasionally show some red on the nape). Male Red-shafteds have a red moustache, or malar stripe. Pacific NW Red-shafted Flickers may have darker bluish-gray back and breast, in contrast to a brownish back and breast on Yellow-shafteds and other Red-shafteds.

Intergrade Northern Flickers combine characteristics from both parent subspecies, in a myriad of ways. They often have orange wing and tail feathers, although these may range from yellow to red. They have variable face and crown colors, and may or may not have the red nape mark. Males have either red or black moustaches, sometimes both on the same bird.

Photos of intergrade flickers (All photos by Bob Boekelheide)



Intergrade male Northern Flicker, showing the red moustache and blue-gray face of a Red-shafted type, the red nape mark of a Yellow-shafted type, and orange wing shafts.



Intergrade male Northern Flicker, showing mostly red moustache with a hint of black in it, along with a brown face, bluish-gray crown, and large red nape mark of a Yellow-shafted type.



Female intergrade Northern Flicker, showing the brown face and bluish-gray crown of a Yellow-shafted type, along with red wing and tail feather shafts of a Red-shafted type.



Intergrade male Northern Flicker, showing red and black in the moustache, brown face, bluish-gray crown and neck, very bluish-gray background colors on its back and breast, along with orange wing and tail shafts.

It turns out the yellow, orange, and red colors found on flickers depend upon how the birds process carotenoid pigments from their diets. As the various pigments go through several metabolic pathways, the yellow feather colors arise from the least oxidation of the carotenoid pigments, the reddish colors have the most oxidation, and intergrade orange appears to be the result of incomplete oxidation when normal red pigment pathways are interrupted. It's based on genetics, of course, which controls the biochemical pathways.

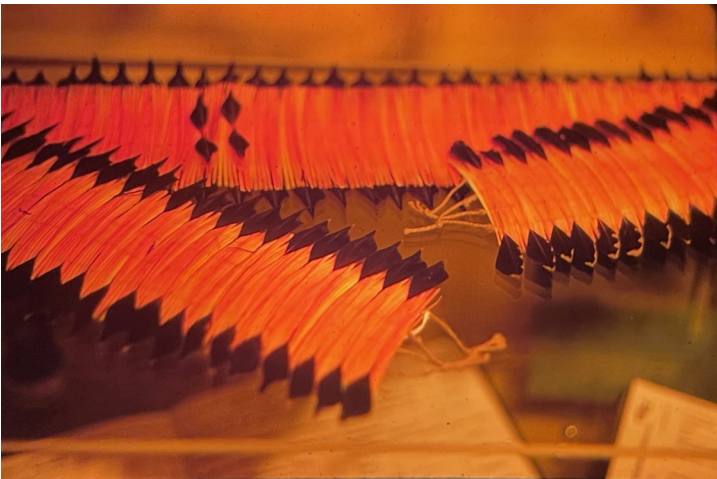
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We live in an area with many intergrade flickers. Lucky us! Look closely at all the flickers you see this time of year and you'll probably notice some flickers showing intergrade characteristics. The proportion of flickers listed as "intergrade flicker" on the SDCBC make up about two percent of all flicker sightings, but I suspect it might be higher than that.

Other research has shown that the intensity and saturation of flicker shaft colors, regardless of whether it is an intergrade or not, varies with the health of nestling flickers as they grow up in the nest. Healthy nestlings that fledge at higher body weights may show more intense coloration. Even the size of the black spots on their breasts varies with nestling mass, getting larger with higher body weights. The "blackness" of the bib on their breast may also be related to adult body condition and the age of the bird. Females with blacker bibs, likely older birds, laid eggs earlier, laid more eggs, and fledged more chicks. Their black tail bands may also enlarge with age, so that the chicks of older males with wider tail bands have higher fledging success. Feathers tell no lies, undoubtedly used by other flickers to determine the quality of potential mates.

Some Native American tribes are renowned for using flicker feathers in their regalia, particularly the Miwok tribe and other tribes in California. The feathers are trimmed and sewn into strips, for use as spectacular head dresses.



Miwok flicker feather regalia, at the Lava Beds National Monument museum. Photo by Bob Boekeheide

Flickers are master carvers, excavating nesting holes in as little as a week or two. The majority of flickers make their holes in dead trees, emphasizing the importance of leaving snags for wildlife. In actuality, many flicker pairs reuse old nest holes, so they may not excavate new holes every year. Their nest holes are not only used by flickers, but also by other species of birds

and other animals. For example, the nesting distribution of the Bufflehead, the most abundant diving duck on the SDCBC, is mostly dependent on old abandoned flicker holes throughout the taiga forest.

Like many woodpeckers, flickers drum not only on trees, but also on houses and even metal, both as territorial gestures and possibly to attract mates. Woe be the homeowner if a flicker sets up shop pounding on the eaves or the siding of their house. A question frequently asked at the River Center in late winter and early spring is "How do I get rid of a flicker pounding on my house?" You can try to scare them away, but eventually they go away on their own, when either the hormones change or the bird migrates somewhere else. Draping the area with netting, hanging mylar tape, or somehow covering the area may help keep the bird away.

What do flickers eat? Their preferred prey during nesting is ants. Lots of ants. They carry ants to their chicks using a bulge in the front of their esophagus, similar to a crop. They eat other insects as well, including beetles, flies, termites, and bugs. They are unusual for a woodpecker because they forage mostly on the ground, where they ingest ants, other insects, and even seeds. Outside the nesting season they eat a variety of insects and fruits, including poison ivy and poison oak fruits. Around Sequim, they often gather in fall where there are fruits like elderberry and blackberry, but it's hard to tell exactly what they're eating. If you provide suet at your bird feeder, you know that flickers can demolish suet cakes in no time.

Flickers are renowned for having a relatively "fast" life history compared with other birds of similar body size, even compared with other woodpeckers. Flickers usually breed in their first year of life, they lay relatively large clutches averaging 6 to 8 eggs, and they don't live as long as many other woodpeckers. Studies of banded flickers showed that less than half of the adults survive each year. Out of a sample of over 3000 banded flickers, the oldest male reached 10 years old and the oldest females only reached 9 years old. Life in the fast lane!

Your mission this month is to look closely at the flickers you see around the Olympic lowlands. What color are their wings and tails -- red, yellow, or orange? How and what are they eating? Are they alone or traveling with other flickers? How do they relate to other types of birds? We take flickers for granted because we see them so often, but there is so much to learn about flashy flickers.

*Many of the interesting facts about flickers contained in this story came from *Birds of the World*, an on-line resource availa-*

ble 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.

Gallery



Pied-billed Grebe
Photo by Robert Hutchison



Brown Creeper
Photo by Robert Hutchison



Golden-crowned Night Heron
Photo by Robert Hutchison



Northern Pygmy Owl
Photo by Bob Boekelheide

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