



KITITTAS AUDUBON SOCIETY

DECEMBER 2007

THE HOOTER

Hooter

EDITOR CRICKET WEBB

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

More than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC", is citizen science in action.

History

Prior to the turn of the century, people engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt": They would choose sides and go a field with their guns; whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages around the turn of the 20th century, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census"—that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them. So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Frank M. Chapman and the enthusiasm of twenty-seven dedicated birders, twenty-five Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied a total of 90 species on all the counts combined.

Would you like to participate locally?

Whether you are an expert birder or a complete novice you can participate. All of the areas are counted by teams. Each team needs at least one of the following. An expert to identify the bird(s) and someone to keep the tally of birds counted. One or two extra spotters and/or counters are helpful. So, even if you are not expert enough to ID the birds, you spot, count or tally. This year will mark the 30th annual Ellensburg Christmas Bird Count the 2nd Cle Elum CBC. If you are interested in participating in either of these events, see the field trip list on page 2.

The Christmas Bird Count takes the place of both the meeting and the field trip for the month of December. If you plan to participate, plan on bringing snacks and check with your team about lunch plans, some teams eat out, others bring lunches and either stop for lunch or eat on the run. The Ellensburg CBC has a Potluck after the days counting is complete. The Cle Elum Counters meet at a local restaurant to compare notes and tally the counts. Since some folks start the day hunting for owls before dawn and the eating/tallying portion does not even start until after dark, this is a full day of birds and birders. Personally, I do both counts and I can not wait for the fun to begin.

Introduction and history courtesy of the National Audubon Society website. Cricket Webb

**To contact the editor or to submit articles.
Email kashooter@kittitasaudubon.org.
Please use Cricket at the beginning of the subject line**

KAS Field Trips

December 1st: First Saturday BirdWalk at Irene Rinehart Riverfront Park bridge parking lot at 8:00 am. Leaves are gone so the birds may be easier to find. This is a walk of about 2.5 hours on uneven ground. Dress for the weather, bring optics and a friend. Open to the public, as are all KAS activities.

December 15th Christmas Bird Count

Many of you know that teams of people cover a 15 mile diameter circle in Ellensburg, no matter what the weather, to count every species and group of birds they see. At the end of the day, all get together to enjoy a potluck and hear reports. Phil Mattocks is the organizer for this event, and will be contacting the people who have covered a specific area in years past to verify that you will be doing so again this year. Af-

ter the count day he compiles the statistics for National Audubon. However, **if you have never been involved and would like to join a group, please call Gloria Baldi at 933-1558 no later than December 7th.**

December 19th Cle Elum Christmas Bird Count

For those who might be interested in joining a group of birders from Seattle, as well as some from our own Chapter, Cle Elum's second annual count is a good opportunity. Contact Michael Hobbs at birdmarymoor@verizon.net

January 5th: First Saturday BirdWalk (see details above)

January 12th: Location to be determined

FIELD TRIP REPORT

November First Saturday BirdWalk

With a light breeze, filtered early sun, and a picturesque carpet of fallen leaves, eleven 'Auduboners' sought birds in the half-clothed trees at Irene Riverfront Park. It did not take long as two Northern Harriers flew over the parking area, and shortly thereafter a mature Bald Eagle came into view. We had four other sightings of mature Bald Eagles during the walk, so they are back. A flock of ten Swans streamed overhead and disappeared down the river. Identity of the species was not possible, but it was exciting to see Swans so early in the year. We did miss seeing Downy Woodpeckers and Flickers. However, we counted 19 species for the morning, and it was a beautiful fall day to be outdoors. Jeb

Report of the November 4th Saddle Mountain Trip

The long trip into the Columbia Basin to the top of the Hanford Reach National Monument at Wahatis Peak at an elevation of 2700 feet should have yielded more than the 32 species we spotted, but the beauty on the warm fall day (mid 60's) and viewing a vast expanse of the Columbia Basin, in addition to Glacier Peak, Mt Rainier, and Mt Adams, compensated for the lesser number of species. Of the seven participants, I was the only one who spotted the target bird, the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. Hmmmm... how's that for leadership? (When Tom Gauron and I were on the scouting trip six days prior, we found four Snow Buntings on the ridge road.) On this day, however, all we found on the ridge road were Dark-eyed Juncos and two wrens, the Rock and Canyon Wrens, along with a Cottontail Rabbit. From the top of the ridge we took a "short cut" down the north slope of the mountain that ended at the former town of Corfu. Not an easy road but Jan Demorest in her Subaru navigated it well. About half way down we had good views of a Prairie Falcon, while at the bottom at the edge of the sage and farm land we saw several late Loggerhead Shrikes. In the harvested farm ground was a flock of several thousand blackbirds, mostly Brewers, but mixed in were many Red-winged and Yellow-head Blackbirds. We took a quick look into Redrock Reservoir and found an Osprey (which seemed late) and several Pied-billed Grebes. The interesting fact about birding is you just never know what you will find, and much has to do with the weather conditions. It was a full day's trip. Jeb

From: Don Wooldridge

I have recently assumed the role of membership chair from the capable hands of Keith Johnson and am re-learning some of the tricks one can do on Excel. I am looking to create a few special group e-mail addresses that we can then use to broadcast information. Currently only about 10% of the KAS membership have provided their e-mail address, so if you would be so kind, please send me a brief e-mail with your name and phone number, and I'll add this new-age information to our membership roster. Within the next month or so I hope to then be able to e-mail all of you the updated membership list for your own info! Thanks!

My electronic address is rifleman_don@excite.com; cell phone is 509 929 6727.

WHY THEY DO IT

Jim Briggs

Right now chinook, sockeye, pink, chum and coho salmon as well as steelhead rainbow trout are moving up the Columbia River. They have been dodging the trawlers and countless sport fishing boats. That's after surviving ocean predation by sharks, orcas and other trawlers. If they make it into the river they must swim through the effluent of Portland, the Willamette Valley and the total effluent of the whole watershed. After Portland they encounter nets set by Indians in accordance with treaty rights. Along much of the river there is a major highway and a set of railroad tracks on each side of the river. There are dredges along the river then the fish come to the first of several dams. Some make it over the dams but many don't. They must pass through agricultural areas where they plow right down to the river bank and endure water with runoff laced with herbicides, insecticides and fertilizer. When they get to the streams for spawning they have to contend with pumps for irrigation, roads that cross the streams and cows that wallow in the water. Then after spawning, the smolts go through nearly the same routine to get to the ocean. They don't have to worry about the trawlers until they grow up.

This litany was eloquently expressed at a 2000 Columbia River Conference by Jack Ward Thomas, former Chief of the Forest Service and focal point of the spotted owl controversy. It was a tremendously inspirational speech. But when I read it, I was afflicted by one question: Why do the salmon do it? Why not just live either in fresh water or salt water and not have to run such a gauntlet? I decided that they were either salt water fish who found an advantage to spawning in freshwater or they were fresh water fish that found an advantage to feeding in salt water.

So I spent some time in the Central Washington University Library and found that it is a complicated and not fully understood situation. First some statistics: Less than 1% of fish migrate between salt and fresh water or vice versa so it is not a universal survival strategy. Of this number, 54% breed in fresh water and feed in salt water and 25% breed in the ocean and feed in fresh water. The remainder move between fresh and salt for reasons other than breeding.

Now it gets interesting. Generally in temperate latitudes the marine environment is much more productive than fresh water and in tropical latitudes, fresh water is more fertile than salt water. Therefore in our latitude the salmon are *anadromous*—breed fresh, feed salt. In the tropics fish like eels are *catadromous*—feed fresh and breed salt, in this case in the Sargasso Sea in the middle of the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic.

It is felt that salmon originated in fresh water in the Pacific Northwest and they evolved a strategy of spending part of their lives in the rich feeding grounds of the ocean. But there is a tremendous cost of migration. It is estimated that less than 1% of the salmon that hatch, make it to their breeding area

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You are familiar with Steller's Jay, and you probably have heard of the Steller Sea Lion. But do you know about the Steller's Sea Cow?

Georg Wilhelm Steller was a German naturalist who although was not of aristocratic birth managed to cross Siberia on his own and get a position as a naturalist on Vitus Bering's second expedition of exploration of the North Pacific.

There are two books that tell his story and how he managed to return to Russia after their ship was disabled in the violent North Pacific storms when Bering and many of the crew died of scurvy. One reason Steller survived is he knew the benefits of eating the native greens.



The first book is Where the Sea Breaks Its Back: The Epic Story of Early Naturalist Georg Steller and the Russian Exploration of Alaska by Corey Ford, published in 1966. The second book is Steller's Island: Adventures of a Pioneer Naturalist in Alaska by Dean Littlepage, published in 2006

Ford's is entirely about Steller while the more recent book also includes the writer's hike around Kayak Island off the south central coast of Alaska which was Steller's first stop in what was to become part of the United States.?

Bering was unable to stay more than the few hours necessary for filling the water casks. The trip eastward took longer than expected and it was necessary to start the return journey before fall storms arrived in the Aleutians. Later Stellar lamented that he had spent 10 years for 10 hours of discovering new plants and animals.

Both authors had access to an English translation of Steller's journals.

Seeing the sea otter pelts brought back by the returning crew members started a rush bigger than the Alaska gold rush. Trappers and crew needed to eat. The biggest, easiest sources of food were the tame Steller Sea Cows who floated peacefully in the kelp beds which was their only source of food.

Steller described them in 1741. They were extinct by 1768. Now all we have of them are some bones dug from the beach sands scattered in museums in North America and Europe but no complete skeleton. Steller managed to take back to Russia the two boney plates from the sea cow's mouth while the rest of his collection had to be abandoned on Bering Island where they had been marooned over the winter of 1741-42.

Unfortunately neither book is in Ellensburg Public Library though you could request them via interlibrary loan.

There is a good reference about Steller's Sea Cows at

<http://home.conceptsfanl/~pmaas/rea/stellersseacow.htm>

Marianne Gordon

I had never gone on a professionally guided bird watching tour until we went to Puerto Vallarta Mexico in October. This was a one day introduction to birding tours so I could find out if I would enjoy this way of birding. The guide's name was Alejandro Martinez. Since we were going with my "not really a birder" spouse and his "never been bird watching" brother, he was definitely working with a handicap. Even with that he found me some incredible birds I would never find myself. I would never have found the locations myself, in fact I am quite sure I could not find them again.

We left very early so we were well on our way to San Blas by sunrise. With Ibises flying overhead we encountered a road kill that 2 Crested Caracara's flew off from.



Crested Caracara courtesy of Wikimedia



Western Long-tailed Hermit.

Photo by Glen Tepke.

Our first stop was in a shade forest Coffee and Banana plantation. After a brief break for fruit and granola bars we set off. In less than 10 feet we spotted a Golden Cheeked Woodpecker. This bird is on the Birdlife International's red list of threatened species. This sighting was followed by a dozen or so more of "lifers" for me. The highlights are Citroline Trogon, Black Throated Magpie Jay, and Masked Tityra. The stop here was capped by the sighting of a Long-tailed Hermit. This is a large hummingbird. During breeding season you can find these birds by sound but off season, we were just lucky.

The next stop was a crocodile refuge. Alejandro has a boat guide there that knows the mangrove swamp extremely well. The first bird was a Mangrove Cuckoo and they just got more and more exotic from there. A couple of old friends were present, a Great Blue Heron and a Belted Kingfisher. The boat slipped into the trees under a Boat-billed Heron rookery. Looking up through the trees, there did not seem to be anything to see, but once you saw the first one, they were everywhere, huge and close. Half a dozen were sitting within 10 feet and one was so close I could have touched him. That is what a guide is for. The camouflage does what it is designed to do. I was looking through my pictures when I came home and found one I could not figure out why I took it. I finally found the bird but almost need a guide to find the bird in my photo. Here are the rest of the highlights of the swamp. American Anhinga, Striated Heron, Green Heron, Yellow Crested Night Heron, Tiger Heron, Wood Stork, Snail Kite & Purple Gallinule

If you are going to be in Puerto Vallarta and want to see the local birds contact:

ALEJANDRO MARTÍNEZ.

BIRDING MEXICO www.birdinginmexico.com

Tel. 221 0467 Cel. 044 322 140 1690 or email him at info@birdinginmexico.com

Cricket Webb



American Anhinga Photo by Cricket

The Kingfisher, by Deborah Ruddell

I'm the boss of the marsh,
where the winters are harsh,
the high-flyin' king of my home.

I don't give a care
for the state of my hair,
and I won't use a brush or a comb.

When I start out to fish
for a rib-stickin' dish,
I dive like a blue-streakin' flash.
I cut through the air
with a natural flair,
and all you can see is my splash.

Thank you Tuck & Kay Forsythe for contributing the poem

The Kingfisher image to the right was taken by Ravi Vaidyanathan and is printed with permission by Wikimedia Commons. This is a free source of images for reprinting.



Common Kingfisher [*Alcedo atthis*](#)

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and then they die! That strategy has worked for millennia and in fact it has become an important anchor for a whole ecological system. The nutrients the returning salmon bring to their home streams not only help nourish the young fry but they support a host of other residents as well. There wouldn't be any bald eagles along the Northwest rivers if there were not dead and dying salmon.

But why do they die after spawning? Isn't that a waste of energy? That process is called *semelparity*. It means that a very large portion of the energy derived from ocean feeding can be devoted to egg production and after the long trip and spawning their bodies are exhausted of energy. And to give the next generation a good start, they in effect fertilize the infertile streams. Also it may be that by late summer the volume of water in their home streams has dwindled to the point where it could not support huge populations of huge ocean-fed fish.

What does the future hold for these migrating salmon? With such a complicated life cycle, an interruption of just one link could be a disaster. So without vigilant management, pollution, over fishing, more dams, competition with alien species and a number of other factors could exterminate these fish. Some of them will likely become extinct but a few may squeak by. Some populations of pink salmon, for example, spawn in saline estuaries and thereby forego the hazardous passage to their home streams.

Experiments with Atlantic salmon have induced fish to stay in fresh water if there is enough food available. If the rivers continue to become enriched with sewage and fertilizer effluent, we may see some of the West Coast salmon doing the same thing. The fate of these fish is still up in the air.

But whatever happens, we have been privileged to observe one of the truly remarkable phenomena of nature. So this fall go up to the Cle Elum River, just below the dam (turn left 2 miles past the Ronald General Store) and watch some anadromous semelparity.

HOOTER

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DONATIONS are appreciated and give you the opportunity to further support and fund KAS Chapter activities. If you have a National Audubon membership, donations are especially important since KAS no longer receives a portion of your National Membership dues to defray cost for the Hooter.

_____ \$15.00 American Goldfinch _____ \$100.00 Great Blue Heron
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Inland Internet, Roslyn, Donates internet service for our Website:

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Old Mill Country Store, Ellensburg

Provides a discount on bird seed to KAS members and prints our county bird lists.



The mission of Kittitas Audubon Society is to develop an appreciation of nature through education and conservation, with a focus on birds. The goal for KAS is a vibrant active organization recognized in Kittitas county.

**Kittitas Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1443
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