The mission of Kittitas Audubon is to develop an appreciation of nature through education and conservation, with a focus on birds.

THURSDAY PROGRAM: JANUARY 23RD

Carbon Sequestration on Kittitas County Farms—It Can Be Done!

It’s not only the Amazon Rain Forest that can trap carbon—we can do it right in Kittitas County farms! Come learn how...

In this talk, Dr. Gazis will present her research on carbon sequestration at Spoon Full Farm in Thorp, Washington. This farm was recently converted from conventional hay to no-till organic farming practices, and the owner has identified carbon sequestration as a main objective of the farm. The general idea behind carbon sequestration in agricultural soils is that conventional farming practices such as tillage and removal of crop residues remove carbon that is naturally contained in the soils. Instead of throwing that carbon into the atmosphere, just like we do with fossil fuel burning, alternative practices can serve to replenish the carbon in the soil. Such practices include reduced-till or no-till farming, and addition of organic amendments like compost and manure. Dr. Gazis and her students are working to document changes in carbon amounts, inputs, and outputs from Spoon Full Farm soils and comparing them to other soils in the region. What she has found so far suggests that our farms, with some changes in conventional practices, can indeed become carbon sinks and help improve our future.

Carey Gazis is a professor in the Geology Department at Central Washington University. Her research is in the area of environmental geochemistry, the way chemicals move and interact in Earth’s shallowest layers and how humans influence this chemical cycling.
Board Notes

By Gloria Baldi

Following is a brief summary of the December 5th Board minutes:

- **Member Laura Busby**, Interpretive Specialist for the Central Cascades Area of Washington State Parks, stated the State Parks System would like to partner with KAS next year in areas where our interests overlap. She listed some of the possible areas, such as the follow-up to last year’s “Feel the Burn” where the effects of the Vantage fires were studied. Perhaps a formal collaboration can be considered.

- **Field Trips**: **Tom and Diane Gauron** have volunteered to lead the January First Saturday BirdWalk.

- Audubon Washington encouraged KAS to invite legislators on bird walks. **Judy Hallisey** invited Senator Judy Warnick and Representative Alex Ybarra. (Senator Warnick was able to join her and several other members on the CBC counting birds at Irene Rinehart Riverfront Park.)

- Adam Maxwell from Audubon Washington plans to attend the KAS January meeting to inform our members on the project entitled ‘Survival by Degrees.’ Previously in December, he met with **Judy Hallisey** and **Dick Carkner** regarding a legislative bill compatible with ‘Survival By Degrees’, the 2019 climate report by National Audubon. He outlined the emphasis to be made on natural climate solutions, “policies that protect and enhance Washington’s farms, fields, forests and coastal habitats in order to sequester carbon emissions.”

- **Climate Change**: **Meghan Anderson** had a Letter to the Editor dealing with climate change and the importance that even a small conservation effort can have.

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Email Judy Hallisey: hydrojude@gmail.com if you are interested.

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Each month, we’ll send you an email with a link to the new Hooter.
December 14, 2019:
The 42nd Ellensburg Christmas Bird Count

Report by Phil Mattocks and Gloria Baldi • Photos by Doug Kuehn

Thirty-five observers in 10 parties, plus one at a feeder; 66 party hours, plus 1.5 hours owling. Fog AM, cloudy thereafter, 21-33 deg, 1"-4" snow, ponds partly frozen, creeks mostly open. Two species new for the Count (bold italic), and highest ever counts of 4 other species are in boldface.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada Goose</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>Hairy Woodpecker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallard</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>N. Shoveler</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green-winged Teal</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ring-necked Duck</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttlehead</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Common Goldeneye</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooded Merganser</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Black-capped Chickadee</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Turkey</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>Mountain Chickadee</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ring-necked Pheasant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>White-breasted Nuthatch</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Blue Heron</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Bald Eagle (40a,28i)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Harrier</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sharp-shinned Hawk</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper’s Hawk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Red-tailed Hawk</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough-legged Hawk</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Townsend’s Solitaire</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merlin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prairie Falcon</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia Rail</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Killdeer</td>
<td>2082</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilson’s Snipe</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rock Pigeon</td>
<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eur. Collared Dove</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>Mourning Dove</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna’s Hummingbird</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Barn Owl</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Horned Owl</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Barred Owl</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short-eared Owl</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Belted Kingfisher</td>
<td>622</td>
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<tr>
<td>Downy Woodpecker</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Red-naped Sapsucker</td>
<td>323</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yellow-bellied Sapsucker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Evening Grosbeak</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Birds</td>
<td>9,554</td>
<td>Total Species</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Fog was not what I had promised for Count Day, but it lifted soon and there was no wind. Overall, birds seemed to be scarce and most species counts were lower than usual. However, there were a few exciting birds found. Our first-ever Western Grebe was sighted on the far pond at Rinehart Park. Most surprisingly, two sapsuckers were located. A Red-naped Sapsucker, which should be in southern Arizona or Mexico, was found in the Thorp area. There are very few of this species seen in winter, in Washington. Way back on the 1989 Ellensburg CBC the first record of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker for Washington state was found in the Black Walnut trees on Pat Smith’s place at the east end of Sanders Road. This year there was another Yellow-bellied Sapsucker found in Ellensburg; thirty years later, in the same two trees, and by the same two observers. These woodpeckers live 5-8 years at the most. How did they both find the same trees in a small town on the east slope of the Cascades? They nest from the Yukon Territory across to Nova Scotia and south to Iowa and Pennsylvania, spending their winters in the southern US and south to Panama.

The fewest Canada Geese were counted since 1996. For the last several years there have been fewer geese here each year. More Mallards were present than average, but still less than last year. Other waterfowl were scarce. In winter Wild Turkeys travel in bunches. On the 2017 Count there were 46, last year none, and this year 110. The first ‘Wild’ Turkeys were seen on the Count in 2001, following their local introduction in the 1990s. Ruffed Grouse have never been common on the Ellensburg CBC, but there has only been one seen since 2000. (I blame the turkeys, they eat anything and everything). The number of California Quail was less than the 12-year average for the third year in a row.

The high Bald Eagle count was still not quite as many as were seen here in 2008. Has the tide turned?

An Anna's Hummingbird was at Doug Kuehn's feeder, and in Norm Peck's absence we had no report from his feeder. This is the third winter in a row that these hummingbirds have been found here. The first Short-eared Owl in three years was seen at the west end of the airport. Black-capped Chickadee numbers were well below average, but there were a few more Chestnut-backed Chickadees than usual. The count of Bewick's Wrens was well below average and the lowest since 2008, and the Ruby-crowned Kinglet found on the Ringer Loop area was the only one seen. Townsend's Solitaires are not often seen here in the winter, and four was the high count since 2005. Varied Thrushes stayed in the mountains this year and those few present were skulking quietly. There were slightly higher than usual counts of Golden-crowned & White-crowned Sparrows and Spotted Towhees. However, Dark-eyed Juncos, House Finches and House Sparrows were all scarcer than usual, and Red-winged Blackbird numbers were much lower than usual.

In keeping with the lower numbers found of many species this year, the total number of birds seen on the Count was the lowest since 1994. The 77 species found is right at our average of 78, and the total recorded in the 42 years of this CBC is now 146. We are still finding new ones each year.

Thanks to all observers. As we keep saying, these data become more and more valuable with each year. The world is changing around us, and our Christmas Bird Count provides a standardized census of the birds of the Ellensburg area.

Put Saturday Dec 19th 2020 on your calendar, and many thanks to our hosts Steve and Linda Hall.

See Next Page for another CBC Article...
CBC Special Guest—St. Sen. Judy Warnick!

Written by Judy Hallisey

Thirty avid members of Kittitas Audubon conducted the 42nd annual Christmas Bird Count in our valley, on December 14th. Each year since 1900, birders across the US have gone out during the Christmas season to count birds within assigned sectors of designated 15-mile-diameter circles. All this citizen science data is collected by Cornell University and National Audubon to track trends in bird populations, determine range of occurrence, and note use of habitat.

This year was cold, frosty, and foggy, so the birds were not as cooperative in showing themselves as in some years past. Even so, one outdoorsy woman joined in for a short walk in Irene Rinehart Park, our State Senator Judy Warnick! Kittitas Audubon was honored to introduce her to bird identification and why Audubon cares about birds. Eight local Audubon birders were able to point out ten species of birds to her. She wanted to see a Bald Eagle along the Yakima River, and before she had to leave, an immature eagle obligingly flew overhead. Senator Warnick was gracious in listening to our concerns for birds and was impressed with our local park. A total of 75 species was censused for the day within the Ellensburg count circle.

Field Trip: Winter Raptor Surveys—Continuing in January

Report by Steve Moore

Three driving routes around Kittitas Valley were completed in mid-December to tally the raptors seen - hawks, falcons, eagles and harriers. We found them perched on poles, flying, or feeding in fields. Seven counters participated. We’ll continue these counts in January and February. The next date is Tuesday, January 14. Call Steve to take part, 509-933-1179, and meet at 8 am, west side of Super One parking lot.

Both days chosen for the December surveys had fog and freezing fog with frost showing on the trees, and low overcast later in the morning. Our routes are 50 to 80 miles long and take 4 to 6 hours. Each survey totaled more than 100 raptors seen. Red-tailed Hawks are most abundant - we found more than 70 on each survey. Eagles were plentiful in the NE part of the valley, but absent from the SE. Kestrels were next in numbers, followed by fewer sightings of harriers, Rough-legged Hawks and Cooper’s hawks (see photos) and falcons. So far, we haven’t encountered a Merlin, Sharp-shinned Hawk or owl – although we know these birds are around in Ellensburg neighborhoods these days: prepare to be surprised on the next outing.

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.”

—Aristotle
Dec. 7 ~ First Saturday Birdwalk

Report and photo by Steve Moore

Just 3 came walking after a drippy night, but the temperature was mild for December. The Rinehart woods, still waiting for snow, attractively aglow with gray furrowed trunks, red osier stems and cottonwood lace against the gray sky. A pretty quiet day with 15 species tallied, and failing to find eagles, kingfisher, dipper, or much in the way of ducks. The usual winter bunch of Ring-necks, widgeon and geese on the upper pond aren’t showing up yet—’cause of late migration or early dog-walkers? Come on down in January to learn more. There were plenty of gossipy starlings and Downy Woodpeckers plus 3 perched Redtails and a pair of Mallards, a lone Canada Goose on the river bank, Song Sparrows foraging in the ditch, and maybe a heard-Bewick’s Wren.

We met walkers in the park who seem to be regulars—some walk the trail daily. At least three, recognizing us as birders, had to tell us about the eagles, ducks and kingfishers that they see frequently, mentioning especially a pair of eagles upstream. These folks make up for our slim sightings on a wet morning! Message: people love our park and the birds in it.

Under the freeway, a beaver is having a great time re-engineering the restored Reecer Creek; looks like the dam had been pulled away once (by people) but has been erected again to create 2 feet of head and room to swim back up into the wetland!

On the walk back through the woods, a chatter of chickadees above a small pond attracted attention. The alarm was then taken up by a persistently chirping Downy as we paused to investigate—almost gave up looking—and then were surprised by a shape dropping onto a limb above the pond about 50 ft away: a Northern Pygmy Owl (photo above). This bird eyed us without much alarm, turning its yellow eyes on us or facing away to show its darker, back-of-the-head eye spots. It dropped to the water for drinks and a bath, then flew a short distance to limbs while we watched for 10 minutes. This episode occurred a few steps from the path, as others walked by unaware of the show.

Lithium-Ion Nobel Prize

Speaking of batteries, the 2019 Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded to three scientists credited with work that eventually led to lithium-ion batteries, which in the words of the Nobel committee “… laid the foundation of a wireless, fossil-fuel-free society.” Of course, advances continue toward overcoming current limitations, such as the recharging lifetime and proper recycling. See the 9 Oct 2019 New York Times article by Brian Chen et al. at https://tinyurl.com/y5z4ulsr.

Natural Climate Solutions

Encouragement of “natural climate solutions” is a major emphasis of Audubon, both nationally and specifically in WA. Part of the impetus for this goes back to research which appeared 31 Oct 2017 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Quoting from a news release by The Nature Conservancy, “Better stewardship of the land could have a bigger role in fighting climate change than previously thought, according to the most comprehensive assessment to date of how greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced and stored in forests, farmland, grasslands and wetlands using natural climate solutions.” See the Nature Conservancy report at https://tinyurl.com/vlaefha.

Deep-ocean Wind Energy

The US Department of Energy awarded a $3.3 million grant to researchers at the University of Texas at Dallas to develop offshore wind turbines that look quite different from the ones we see in the Kittitas Valley and elsewhere. Aside from being placed many miles away from land, they will have a vertical axis of rotation. In previous presentations, we in the KAS Climate Change Committee have mentioned such a design as promising, one that should pose less of a threat to birds. Such a turbine “… looks more like an upended eggbeater than a pinwheel.” See the University’s 16 Dec 2019 news article at https://tinyurl.com/u7ffu8d.
Leaders Who Inspire
Submitted by Meghan Anderson

Dear Audubon Chapter Leaders and Membership,

As many of you know, our Program Director, Christi Norman, retires at the end of the year. So many of you worked with her throughout her 22 years at Audubon. We will miss her wisdom and personality, and we are forever grateful for the enormous contributions she’s made to conservation. Scroll to the bottom of this email for a message from Christi.

Teri Anderson, Chapter Network Manager

Christi reflects on her 22 years at Audubon:

Who would not want to see their photo in the NAS Magazine article “Ending on a high note”? What a way to head into retirement! Throughout my 22 years at Audubon Washington it has been an honor to work with all of you incredibly knowledgeable, wise, and generous chapter leaders. It has been a long road from a kid wandering the banks of the Wind River in search of Belted Kingfishers to implementing conservation through state and regional programs such as the Great Washington State Birding Trail maps and phone apps, and the recently completed Sagebrush Songbird Survey. I recall the gasp that went around the table at an Intermountain West Joint Venture meeting as I announced that Audubon was starting a million-acre bird survey, and now we have done it!

I cut my teeth organizing Puget Sound chapters to pass the first Growth Management Critical Area Wetlands ordinances in the state (remember WETNET and the Bulldozer Guide!) followed by marketing Public Benefit Programs to provide landowners financial rewards for preserving wetlands. My first community science project initiated at Seattle Audubon, the Neighborhood Bird Project, is still going strong after 25 years. I am pleased to have employed my artistic skills for five Audubon publications, including Important Bird Areas of Washington, the third IBA book published in the US, and presentations at four National Audubon Conventions. Expanding Audubon partnerships is a personal goal, as well as giving back to the community, hence my work in outreach to eight tribes as new partners along the Birding Trail, and joint field research and training Northern Colombia Birding Trail guides from South America.

Today, Audubon’s trajectory into climate change is the perfect culmination for the Sagebrush Songbird Survey, as our data will be both relevant and valuable, and just in time for 100% Clean renewable energy siting on the Columbia Plateau. I have confidence in the terrific team at Audubon Washington to carry on this important and timely conservation work.

Thanks for all the wonderful experiences.

~Christi

Photo: Christi Norman, Program Director of Audubon Washington.
Photo by Mick Thompson 2016

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THANK YOU!
Mark Your Calendars!

Board Meeting:
February 1st • 4:30 PM • United Methodist Church

First Saturday BirdWalk:
January 4th • 8 am • Irene Rinehart Park

Thursday Program:
January 23rd • 7:00pm • Hal Holmes

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