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

MAY 2020

MAY 21ST GENERAL MEETING IS CANCELLED FOR REASONS OF PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY

Spring Cleaning Time

by Marianne Gordon—reprinted from the May 2012 Hooter

When you start your spring cleaning don’t forget the birds. Feeders need to be cleaned at least once a month to keep from spreading disease. When was the last time you cleaned yours?


“Cleaning your bird feeders once a month, year round, is important for the health of the birds. It is recommended that hummingbird feeders be cleaned every four days. And it is important to make sure you avoid toxic cleaners.

Organisms such as Aspergillus fumigatus, a fungus which causes respiratory infections in birds, can grow on the feeders.

Here is a non-toxic solution and technique to make this chore easier and safe for the birds.

If you are enthusiastic about bird feeding and operate more than a couple of feeders, cleaning them on a rotating schedule will prevent having to clean them all at once—a potentially burdensome task.

Obtain a tub big enough to hold your bird feeder(s), a scrub brush, outdoor hose, gloves, scent-free liquid soap or detergent, and white distilled vinegar.

Place your feeder in the tub outdoors, fill it with warm water and a squirt of liquid soap or detergent. Wearing gloves, scrub the parts of the feeder you can reach, and rinse thoroughly with a hose. Empty the tub and fill it with clean water and 4 cups of vinegar.

Let the feeder soak for 1 hour. Rinse thoroughly.

While your feeders are soaking scrape up and discard the leftovers on ground or deck under the feeders. A layer of spilled seed and hulls is a good place for bacteria to lurk. Birds have a hard enough time surviving without our adding disease to their hazards.

“There is no season such delight can bring, As summer, autumn, winter and the spring.”
- William Browne

All Audubon meetings, held on the 3rd Thursday of each month, 7:00pm (except for Jan 23, 2020, which was the 4th Thursday), September through May (except December), at the Hal Holmes Center next to the Ellensburg Public Library, are open to the public. Please come and meet with us, and stay afterwards for juice, treats, and conversation. Many thanks to the Ellensburg Public Library for sponsoring our meetings!
Like all cancelled events during the COVID-19 crisis, Kittitas Audubon’s Board has not met since the beginning of March. Field trips and speakers, plans with the WA Parks and Recreation, participating in the KEEN Bird Fest and the CWU Earth Day event, were discussed at that meeting, but all have since been cancelled. From the March meeting, and subsequent e-mail, a few items have been discussed and itemized below.

**Norm Peck** reported that the Suction Dredging Reform bill passed both houses and was signed by Gov. Inslee. WDFW will conduct a round of rule-making to fully enact the bill’s requirements, though miners will have to comply with the new requirements pending finalization of the revised regulations. (The bill regulates dredging in streams.) KAS had been supporting the bill.

KAS signed onto a letter regarding the lawsuit involving Lake Kachess and Bumping Lake, but with a qualification about one statement being inaccurate since we had made no prior official comments.

KAS joined National Audubon with signing on to a complaint about weakening of the 1972 NEPA (National Environmental Protection Act). Excluding public comments was the weakening factor.

**Steve Moore** reported 6 owl boxes, with more planned, were made at Tom Gauron’s shop for use by both farmers and Yakima reservation land off Dolarway. (Later an article in the Daily Record pictured a box being erected.)

There are Blue Bird trails of boxes that need monitoring. *(Would this be a pleasant citizen science task for you?)*

First Saturday Bird Walks are continuing with social distancing.

The Sheep Country shooting area in Yakima County and roads accessing it are closed for construction and road improvement. Initial plans were to complete Phase I at Sheep Country Road this summer, followed by closing and completing construction on the Durr Road shooting area next summer. Timing is now uncertain.

The next National Audubon Conference will be held in Tacoma in 2021.

Board business and KAS activities may be limited, but the birds continue to migrate. May you all enjoy the beauty of spring that brings warblers, vireos, ospreys, swallows, hummingbirds, robins and turkey vultures. In this strange time of isolation, it is soothing to know the birds still make their annual appearance.

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**NEEDED: PUBLICITY CHAIR, EDUCATION CHAIR and HISTORIAN**

Email Judy Hallisey: hydrojude@gmail.com if you are willing.
News from Rinehart Park:

First Saturday Birdwalk: April 4

Report by Steve Moore

Stay-at-home advice during the virus epidemic kept many away, but two materialized to stroll through the park. Families, couples, cyclists, dog walkers and runners keep their distance and continue to use the park for fresh air and exercise. Vehicles are barred from entering, as in winter, to discourage groupings of people, but one restroom is being kept unlocked for use in the center of the park.

Recently, trees along the entrance road have been substantially cut back away from the road and embankment, and felled snags have been thrown across the ditch next to the road. Looks like a fish habitat improvement project - but Scott Nicolai reports that it’s probably just local road safety.

Signs of spring are “busting out all over”, as the show tune has it! There were the many singing robins, House Finches, the spring trill of the Dark-eyed Junco, and flocks of Tree Swallows flycatching over the ponds and river. A couple of invisible Bewick’s Wrens well up in the trees were practicing their loud and diverse announcements. We viewed a pair of kestrels mating on a cottonwood limb; a second female trying to get in on the action appeared to be chased away by the first one. A pair of magpies were cooperatively building a nest in a small pine near the inner parking lot – by recycling twigs from an old nest in the woods. Across the river from where Reecer Creek flows into the Yakima, a patient Great Horned Owl sits on a big nest high in the trees: a good look with the scope. Also, the Red-tailed Hawk nest that we pass on the entrance road has a female in residence! The geese are paired up; so are pairs of Common Mergansers floating downriver and Wigeon in the lower pond.

Beavers continue to be busy in Reecer Creek. The fellow under the freeway has been busy all winter creating a lake 1000 ft long, well back into the wetland, where maybe 30 male blackbirds are loudly guarding territories in the willows. A second beaver has created a one-foot dam just above the entrance road bridge that backs up still water to the footbridge.

Our circumambulation tallied 26 species and included a Merlin fleeting downriver; resting on a branch for 3 minutes it allowed a close-up look with the scope.

Need to get out and take a nice sunny walk?
May 2nd is the next Saturday Birdwalk
8:00am • Irene Rinehart Park Steve Moore and Jan Demorest to lead.

JUST ANNOUNCED
from Meghan Anderson:

Our bluebird nest boxes are full. Well, last year I put up one more box because a pair of tree swallows wanted a spot. They nested there peacefully, once ‘given’ a box.

This year, the bluebirds arrived earlier and the tree swallow nest box was full.

So the lovely tree swallows come in each morning looking for a box and I had the idea: I’ll put up another one! Which I did and the bluebirds promptly took over that one... So then I put up ANOTHER box and waited and watched. The swallows came in and looked... and left!

At this point my husband asked sheepishly (perhaps a little frightened) “Are you OK”? I had no idea what he was talking about: there are tasks at hand and of an imminent nature!

I offer this report as the efforts of a misinformed nest box builder for your amusement.

I don’t know who will inhabit the second ‘new’ nest box this year, but I know you will all want to know so I will amend this report when I discover ‘who’ finally inhabits the ‘last’ one.

Or will there be another?? Stay tuned!

from Norm Peck:

Today I have about a dozen White-Crowned Sparrows in addition to the usual House Finches, Black-capped Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches. As many as fourteen Goldfinches coming to the feeder daily, with males in full breeding plumage now. Yesterday there was also a male Purple Finch (no brown nape), possibly a pair, as there was a female Finch with him, though I’m not good enough to identify a female Purple. Still at least two male Anna’s Hummingbirds, though they’re coming to the feeder less as more blossoms emerge; they have also been working the cherry blossoms. I’m regularly hearing both Great Horned Owls and Barred Owls at night here in town, mostly from the Craig’s Hill area.

from Jim Briggs:

I have been counting birds in the Kirkland area in recent weeks on my therapeutic but well-masked outings. I thought it would take forever to get to 19 but I finally made it.

Here they are:

•  Great Blue Heron
•  Mallard
•  Bufflehead
•  Double Crested Cormorant
•  Bald Eagle
•  Red-tailed Hawk
•  Flicker
•  Rock Pigeon
•  Brown-Headed Cowbird
•  Red-winged Blackbird
•  Spotted Towhee

•  Song Sparrow
•  Dark-eyed Junco (LOTS of them)
•  Brown Creeper
•  Black-capped Chickadee (We have Rufous-sided in the area but so far no go)
•  American Crow
•  Steller’s Jay
•  Robin
•  Canada Goose
•  Lewis’s woodpecker (I need to go back and check this)
•  Varied Thrush
•  Red-breasted Sapsucker (but I don’t remember a super red head)
Motorized Suction Dredge Mining Update

Submitted by Norm Peck

There was a letter forwarded to KAS President Judy Hallisey from Vince McGowan, the Program Manager of the Department of Ecology’s Water Quality Program. In it, Vince assures us that Ecology will work closely with WDFW to ensure that in addition to project-specific individual Hydraulic Project Approvals (HPAs) required by WDFW for suction dredging (replacing the ‘general permit’-type Fish and Gold Pamphlet ‘guidance’ under which no site-specific review or monitoring occurred), suction dredge proposals will also require a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination (NPDES) Permit.

About three years ago, the then-director of the WQ Program indicated that it did not intend to issue either a state-wide general NPDES Permit or a project-specific NPDES Permit for suction dredge operations. I did politely challenge that position about a year later, with a cc to the Ecology Director, Maia Bellon (now moved on to private legal practice) and the Ecology Division of the Office of the Attorney General, expressing the opinion that suction dredging did result in a discharge meeting the definition of a “pollutant” to waters of the state, and should require an NPDES Permit. The reply did acknowledge that. At the same time, the first effort (last year) to pass the change of statute requiring HPAs for individual suction dredge operations passed both houses but died without reaching the floor for a final vote on changes by the Senate.

This year the legislative change did pass both houses and was signed by Gov. Inslee. A consortium of conservation groups who had joined in seeking the legislative change (contact me for a copy of the letter) was assured upon inquiry that Ecology does intend to work closely with WDFW to implement the changes and coordinate HPAs and NPDES Permitting for suction dredge mining. Thus over about four years, in concert with other conservation groups and interested persons and businesses, we have effected a major policy change by two state agencies to significantly reduce, or in some cases eliminate, damage to mostly small headwater streams in Washington State from suction dredge mining. Monitoring of receiving waters, not required before, will be required as well as more scrutiny of timing, location, and impacts, bringing us in line with other adjacent states and improving environmental quality. I understand many others also contacted Ecology, as well as lobbied for legislative change in the HPA law, as we were communicating with each other mainly under the organizing of Trout Unlimited.

Seabirds Teaming Up for Food?

Are seabirds engaging in mass collective action to locate food? That’s a plausible explanation for behavior observed via radar data generated by fishing boats. They found giant “rake” formations of birds—kilometers long. See the 13 Apr 2020 Science News article by Jake Buehler. Read it at https://tinyurl.com/r94jh7b, which contains a link to the original peer-reviewed research in the 23 Mar issue of the Journal of Avian Biology.

“The underlying attraction of the movement of water and sand is biological. If we look more deeply we can see it as the basis of an abstract idea linking ourselves with the limitless mechanics of the universe.” —Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe
April 20, 2020 • OL YMPIA – Washington’s wolf population continued to grow in 2019 as the minimum count of wolves reached their highest levels since wolves were essentially eliminated from the state in the 1930s. The annual year-end wolf report was released today by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

“The population continuing to recover is good news for wolf conservation but it can also bring additional challenges. Last year was particularly tough for wolf-livestock conflict management,” said WDFW Director Kelly Susewind. “We are working with citizens and communities to strike a balance so both livestock producers and wolves can share the landscape and thrive in Washington.”

In 2019, one of WDFW’s partners in wolf management, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR), changed their methodology for counting wolves. So for the 2019 annual count, the Department is reporting the counts separately.

As of December 31, 2019, WDFW counted 108 wolves in 21 packs, and CTCR reported 37 wolves in five packs. The two counts combined represent an eleven percent increase in the wolf population over the previous year. Ten of the packs WDFW monitored were documented as successful breeding pairs. Using the new methodology, CTCR didn’t collect information on breeding pairs. Because this is a minimum count, the actual number of wolves, packs, and successful breeding pairs in Washington is undoubtedly higher.

The CTCR changed count methodology because they consider wolves recovered (i.e., no longer threatened or endangered) on their lands. As a result, the same resources that have been put into year-end surveys by both WDFW and CTCR in the past—activities like track, aerial, and camera surveys—were not used for 2019 on the reservation. Instead, this year’s numbers provided by CTCR reflect winter numbers incidentally gathered from hunters, trappers, and public observations, which means they may come with additional uncertainty.

Two new wolf packs were confirmed in 2019, while another may have disbanded. The new Sullivan Creek Pack formed in Okanogan County. Wolves re-established a territory in the Kettle Mountains, in an area formally occupied by the OPT Pack in northeast Washington. That new pack is called the Kettle Pack. WDFW surveys indicated a single wolf maintained the Diobsud Creek territory this winter, which had been considered the only Western Washington pack, but no longer meets the definition of a pack for 2019.

The 2019 wolf counts increased from a year ago when WDFW reported 97 wolves in 22 packs and CTCR reported 36 wolves in 5 packs. While the overall minimum number of wolves in the state is up in 2019 compared to 2018, the number of packs and breeding pairs were slightly lower.

“As the wolf population begins to recover, we’re going to see population growth slow in parts of the state where the local population is nearing capacity,” said statewide wolf specialist Ben Maletzke. “It’s a natural occurrence that happens in many wildlife populations and is even more pronounced in a territorial carnivore. Similar to what we would expect, we are seeing the number of packs and the number of individuals level off in northeast Washington while new packs continue to form in the North Cascades recovery area.”

Each year’s population total reflects population losses as well as gains. WDFW documented 21 wolf mortalities during 2019: one was killed by a cougar, one died of unknown causes, two were killed by landowners protecting livestock, one killed by a...
landowner due to a perceived threat to human safety, one is still under investigation, and six were legally harvested by tribal hunters. Nine wolves were lethally removed by the Department in 2019 in response to attacks on livestock.

The majority of packs, 85 percent, were not involved in known livestock or other animal depredations last year. WDFW investigators confirmed 14 cattle killed by wolves in 2019, plus one more probable instance, and another 11 cattle that were injured. This represents a slight decrease over wolf-livestock conflicts that occurred in 2018.

“We had more negative impacts to cattle and lethal removals last year than we’d like to see. It’s been a challenging situation, but ranchers are continuing to play an important role in reducing wolf-livestock conflict,” said WDFW wolf policy lead Donny Martorello. “And we are starting to see local, grass-root efforts to improve the use and effectiveness of non-lethal deterrents.”

Since 1980, gray wolves have been listed under state law as endangered throughout Washington. In the western two-thirds of the state, they are classified as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act and are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In eastern Washington, WDFW manages the species consistent with the 2011 Wolf Conservation and Management Plan.

Contributors to WDFW’s annual report include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services program, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians.

The full Washington Gray Wolf Conservation and Management 2019 Annual Report and a video summary are available from the Department’s website.

Red-billed Oxpeckers and Black Rhinos

Some birds are known to use other animals as a mobile dining table, feeding on, e.g., resident ticks and insects. In exchange, the “dining table” gets free pest control. The Black Rhino may benefit in another—more surprising—way from Red-billed Oxpeckers: evidence suggests that the birds may be warning rhinos when people are in the area. Since Black Rhinos are endangered by poaching, and have famously poor eyesight, this could be a real help. Read the 9 Apr 2020 Science News article by Gloria Dickie at https://tinyurl.com/s8ja2de. It contains a link to the original peer-reviewed research in a forthcoming issue of Current Biology.

“To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter...to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird’s nest or a wildflower in spring — these are some of the rewards of the simple life.” —John Burroughs
Plastics Industry Lied About Recycling

Forty years ago, the plastics industry knew that recycling its products was unlikely to be economical, but they pretended otherwise, and spent millions of dollars promoting recycling. Why? “If the public thinks the recycling is working, then they’re not going to be as concerned about the environment.” This frank admission is by the person who led the industry lobbying group for a decade.

See the 31 Mar 2020 NPR article by Laura Sullivan entitled “Plastic Wars: Industry Spent Millions Selling Recycling — To Sell More Plastic,” at https://tinyurl.com/s6ffwcz. This is part of of a major investigation of NPR in cooperation with PBS’s Frontline, entitled Plastic Wars. It premiered 31 Mar, and I look forward to watching it. Go to https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/plastic-wars/. (Hey, sounds like a great way thing to do while staying at home! Then tell a relative, friend, or neighbor about it.)

Coronavirus is Reducing CO2. Why That’s Worrisome

The title suggests “Those environmentalists are never satisfied!” But the point is that (1) trading mass death from a pandemic for lower CO2 is not something anyone wants, and (2) reductions are not sustainable if they go right back up again once we’re gotten past COVID-19. See the article with that title by Benjamin Storrow in the 17 Apr 2020 E & E News. [That appears to be a legitimate news source; the statements made in the article include relevant links to established publications.] It’s at https://tinyurl.com/ycbdgw.

“Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our Children.” —Ancient Indian Proverb
Thank You in Advance for Your Membership!

GET “THE HOOTER” ONLINE
Save paper, printing, postage. If you would prefer to receive the electronic version, send your name, mailing address, and email address to: kittitasaudubon@hotmail.com
Each month, we’ll send you an email with a link to the new Hooter.

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Hand-crafted Bluebird, Kestrel, and Barn Owl Boxes by Tom Gauron
Please contact Tom at 509.968.3175 for more information.

Kittitas Audubon Society
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☐ NEW Membership  ☐ RENEWING Membership

Membership Options:
☐ KAS Individual $20 ☐ Family $30

Premium Memberships:
☐ Bluebird $50 ☐ Kestrel $75 ☐ Hawk $100
☐ Lifetime Individual $300 ☐ Lifetime Family $500

Make a Charitable Donation: (Please enter dollar amount)
Scholarship Fund $________ Nest Boxes $________
Education $________ General $________

Your generous donation to a specific project is symbolic. Kittitas Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon Society serving the communities of Kittitas County, Washington. Go to kittitasaudubon.org for more information. KAS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

Please indicate membership preferences below:

☐ YES I want to “Go Green” by receiving the Hooter newsletter online only

☐ YES I wish to receive occasional emails related to Audubon activities

May we print your name in the Hooter to acknowledge your membership/donation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

GIVE THE GIFT OF KITTITAS AUDUBON!
Please send gift recipient’s name, address, email, and phone to address below.

Get “The Hooter” Online!
Save paper, printing, postage. If you would prefer to receive the electronic version, send your name, mailing address, and email address to: kittitasaudubon@hotmail.com
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Please make checks payable to: Kittitas Audubon Society PO Box 1443 Ellensburg WA 98926

THANK YOU!
Mark Your Calendars!

Board Meeting:
4:30pm • United Methodist Church
May 7th: meeting will be conducted via email, due to reasons of public health and safety.

First Saturday BirdWalk:
May 2nd • 8:00am • Irene Rinehart Park
Guided by Steve and Jan

Thursday Program:
May 21st • 7:00pm • Hal Holmes
Canceled for reasons of public health and safety.

THANK YOU!
KITTITAS COUNTY BUSINESS SUPPORTING KAS!

Inland Internet • Roslyn
Donates Internet service for our website: www.kittitasaudubon.org

Old Mill Country Store • Ellensburg
Provides a discount on bird seed to KAS members.