

# Columbia Flyway

VANCOUVER AUDUBON SOCIETY *A chapter of the National Audubon Society*



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[vancouveraudubon.org](http://vancouveraudubon.org)



## From the VAS Board

by Randy Hill, Field Trip Chair

Wow, things can change quickly! Earlier this year we had a wet winter season (while other parts of the country were “drying up”). We nearly skipped spring until reaching the first day of summer and then went directly to dry, with only a trace of rain for the next nine weeks. Hot and dry weather persisted, with frequent air quality advisories from fires near and far away. There was just enough rain during the last week of August to feel some relief, and maybe we will see “normal weather” in the fall despite some days in the 90s over the last few weeks. We often schedule field trips based on seasonal opportunities. Summer is often more pleasant on the coast or at higher elevations but fall shorebird migration typically begins in July. Songbirds can be one-two months later, with raptors and waterfowl after.

We are fortunate to have plenty of areas nearby with good access to dedicated State and Federal wildlife areas in addition to other public lands that have more general public use options. As we go into the fall season it is important to understand how different public lands are managed. National Wildlife Refuge System lands (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) are deemed closed to access and uses unless specifically opened and allowed. Many were originally established for waterfowl habitat conservation, and many have hunting programs because they were acquired in part using “duck stamp” revenues; duck stamps are required annually for waterfowl hunting. Ridgefield NWR has waterfowl hunting in an area that requires a permit, while 3½ of 5 management units are closed to all public access, and with changing management priorities over the last decade, most access now is on roads and trails only. Steigerwald Lake NWR has trails and is closed to hunting. Both Pierce and Franz Lake NWRs are closed to all public access. Surprisingly, limited hunting is allowed in nearly 18% of National Parks where it does not

interfere with the mission of the park. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Land Management lands typically have closures specifically for safety and security.

In general, State-managed lands are more accessible. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is funded in part by hunt licensing and has a public use priority when not in conflict with endangered species management. Washington Department of Natural Resources looks at timber (locally, Yacolt Burn State Forest) “and other revenue from **state trust lands** for the financial benefit of schools and other institutions” for the benefit of the county where the lands are located. Washington State Parks are primarily visitor oriented. All three of these agencies generally require a Discover Pass for either parking or access to their managed lands.

When planning fall field trips it is helpful to consider conflicting uses of areas where safety can be an issue. Management agencies can change access seasonally for species protection during the breeding season or critical wintering areas. Considering both open range and forested areas, State-managed big game seasons often have a progression from archery to muzzleloader to modern rifle, giving the most primitive weapon the first chance where the animals “learn avoidance or escape” each year. So why does this matter to us? Most archery hunters won’t shoot beyond 60 yards; muzzleloader: about 100 yards; modern rifle: way, way farther! We’re best not spending time up Larch Mountain once the rifle season starts in October. And as waterfowl head south, we need to consider both safety and courtesy to those using areas with dedicated hunting programs. Ridgefield NWR has the hunt area separated from other public uses. WDFW’s Shillapoo Wildlife Area is a popular area for both pheasant and waterfowl hunting. During the first two weeks of September,

**Did You Pay Your Dues in September?**

*(Continued on page 2)*

## *From the VAS Board (con't)*

I met early goose and dove hunters in the area. We will not schedule field trips during regular hunt season in areas where we might expect conflicts. And as you bird on your own, please consider both the safety and courtesy factors where both public and private land hunting is going on.

So let's move from field trip planning to topics that the VAS Board deals with. Cindy covered several of them in the September newsletter. We are still working through updates to the website and how the Constant Contact and GroupMe APP will fill in between editions of the newsletter and when short notice field trips and other important deadlines approach. Unfortunately our September member meeting with Steve Bredthauer's excellent program of wildlife during a photography internship in Zimbabwe and Botswana was poorly attended, likely because the day after the Labor Day weekend. I do not expect that for our October meeting. The Northern Spotted Owl decline (especially in Washington) and recovery program that includes Barred Owl management is under periodic review, with public comments due in October.

Speaker Tracy Fleming will give you your annual membership (due now!) money's worth in his conversation on Barred Owls and Spotted Owls. He is likely the most knowledgeable Spotted Owl (and maybe all raptors) field biologist in Washington, with a holistic perspective on everything from periodic surveys of monitor species to what and how predator/prey relationships are changing through time. Attendees also will have an opportunity to meet Lauren Ellenbecker, the environmental reporter for The Columbian that Vancouver Audubon is supporting during her first five years in the position under Community Funded Journalism. Working with an endowment through the Community Foundation, VAS used \$10,000 of those funds as a challenge match during last year's GiveMore24 to help seal-the-deal to hire for the position. This year we are using Giving Tuesday (after Thanksgiving weekend) for the challenge match to support her position. If you read The Columbian you know that she is doing a great job! A few of us on the VAS Board will be touring The Columbian behind the scenes during the second week of October where the paper "comes together" each day.

### **Notes From the *Young Birders' Club***

If you have any questions, comments, or ideas for our club, please feel free to share them with youngbirders@vancouveraudubon.org. For additional information, updates, and a comprehensive calendar, visit our website at [www.vancouveraudubon.org/young-birders-club/](http://www.vancouveraudubon.org/young-birders-club/). As always, tell your friends about us, and happy birding!

*Jackson and Katie, YBC Leads*

*Upcoming Events: Migratory Bird Day — October 14th*



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Website | [vancouveraudubon.org](http://vancouveraudubon.org)  
Facebook | [@Vancouver Audubon](https://www.facebook.com/VancouverAudubon)  
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***Vancouver Audubon believes in the wisdom of nature's  
design and promotes this through education,  
involvement, stewardship, enjoyment and advocacy.***

*The Columbia Flyway is published monthly September through June (except January). Vancouver Audubon Board Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of the month, August through May. Membership meetings and programs are held on the first Tuesday of the month, September through June (except January).*

***THE COLUMBIA FLYWAY*** is the monthly newsletter of the Vancouver Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Publication deadline is the 20th of the preceding month unless otherwise posted.

# VAS Programs

The location of this IN-PERSON meeting October 3 is:

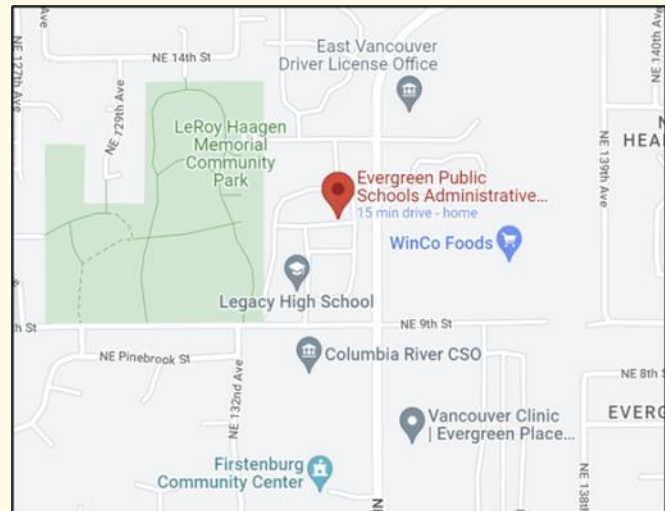
**Evergreen Public Schools Administration**  
**13413 NE LeRoy Haagen Memorial Drive**  
**Vancouver, WA**

**6:30 pm – 7:00 pm** - Social time to share bird sightings, stories, and upcoming events

**7:00 pm – 8:15 pm** - Program

Programs are held the first Tuesday of the month except Jan, July, & August. All are welcome, we hope you will join us!

**Contact Don Rose for more information or to get a Zoom link: [meetings@vancouveraudubon.org](mailto:meetings@vancouveraudubon.org) for Zoom meetings.** Please send all topic, speaker, and program suggestions and requests to Don Rose.



Enter the parking lot on the LeRoy Haagen Memorial Drive side.

## Upcoming Programs

### October 3, 2023—IN-PERSON

#### Tracy Fleming, *“Status update: Northern Spotted Owl”*

Tracy will give us the latest update on Northern Spotted Owl as the Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife is seeking comments on its 5-year status review of the species, with comments due by October 29.

Tracy Fleming is a retired Research Wildlife Biologist with degrees from Central Washington and Washington State Universities. He has a wealth of experience monitoring wildlife over his career, including Field Project Leader for Wenatchee (Eastern Cascades) Spotted Owl demography study on Federal, State, and private lands. Plus 20+ years of other various other Spotted Owl surveys (DNR cooperative surveys, Oregon USFS District surveys, consulting surveys, etc.) and Barred Owl + Spotted Owl telemetry banding (1400+ birds). He has worked on a variety of other bird species in Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, Idaho and Montana, as well as helping with monitoring during the BP Gulf Oil Spill.



Northern Spotted Owl  
Photo by USFWS

### November 7, 2023—ZOOM

#### Rebecca Heisman, *“Flight Paths: Untold Stories from the History of Bird Migration Research”*

Rebecca’s first book, [FLIGHT PATHS](#), tells the epic scientific story of *how* we know what we know about bird migration. She has worked with many organizations, including the Audubon Society, the American Bird Conservancy, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Wilson Ornithological Society, and the American Ornithological Society.

### December 5, 2023— Program TBD

Check out our [YouTube channel](#) for previous recordings of programs.

# Species Spotlight

## The Female Northern Harrier and the Grey Ghost

by Beth Marlin Lichter

Human parents, wherever they reside, are faced with universal challenges. Feed, protect and educate. They say it takes a village to raise a child and I concur. Hardship and sacrifice coincide with joy and relief, the main goal being to launch the next generation into an independent, satisfying life. How does bird behavior compare?

Listening to the melodious trills of a male Song Sparrow in early spring, when they sit atop shrubs in plain view singing their hearts out, it's easy to underestimate how rigorous, risky and ultimately a question of survival the next few months of nesting and rearing young will be for the birds. First job is to find a mate. Attraction strategies must be ready for implementation. Every male is primed to give a dazzling courtship performance.

Once paired up, the work begins. Relentless. There are no sick days, holidays, parental leave, reliable babysitters, or food delivery service options. Mates rely upon each other and available resources.

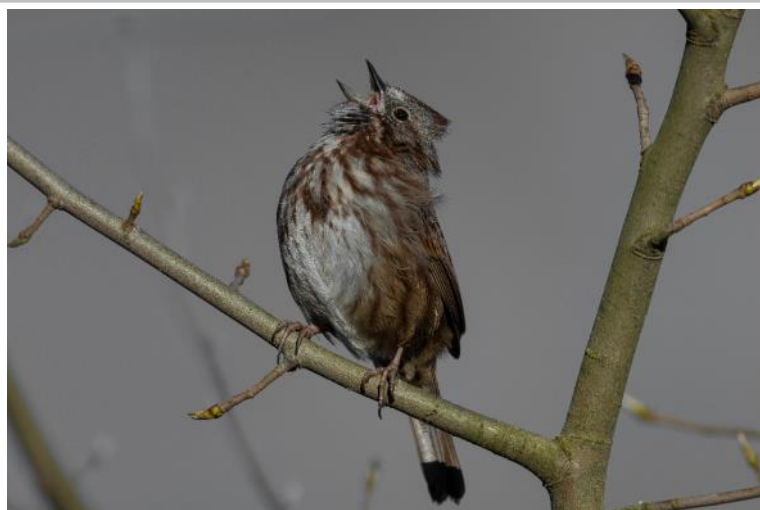
For the past year, I have been accompanying Ken Pitts on his twice-monthly guided bird walks at Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Walking the levee on the Mountain View Trail, overlooking adjacent wide open meadows, we have regularly observed the behavioral patterns of several mated pairs of Northern Harriers, from acrobatic male courtship demonstrations in the spring, to aggressive territorial female behavior in winter months. What I witnessed is a collaboration requiring strict adherence to delegated responsibilities with dire consequences unless both parties are committed to the preservation and furtherance of the species.

Some Harriers do not migrate, like the ones I observed this year both at Steigerwald and on the River S Auto Route at Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. These protected lands contain wide open fields with large rodent populations and have proven to be safe, productive and healthy environments to remain in year-round. The Refuges' meadows are also



Northern Harrier Male Aka 'The Grey Ghost' (*Circus cyaneus*)

Photo by Ken Pitts



Song Sparrow Singing at Crystal Springs Rhododendron Garden in Portland

Photo: Beth Marlin Lichter

(Continued on page 5)



surrounded by wetlands and forest habitats providing other food sources such as small birds, ducks, snakes, large insects and rabbits.

Springtime activity unfolds dramatically. Females locate prime habitat and claim it for themselves. The environment must have rodents aplenty, voles primarily, and be an ideal place for a nest on the ground. Eligible males begin courtship by performing exhilarating acrobatic sky dances. If food sources are plentiful, he might be mating with several females, who will choose their mates based upon who amongst the males is the most strong and agile. But that is only the first test of compatibility. The chosen male then enters a trial period which demonstrates his hunting and prey delivery skills. He must be able to catch a vole and pass it to the female, in a mid-air handoff. Why is this so important? Because during the nesting season between April and July, he must be a powerfully good provider, continuously supplying food for the female who guards the nest and her offspring. That meal delivery requires a delicate, precise above-the-nest transaction.

*Female Juvenile Northern Harrier with Chocolate Eyes at Ridgefield NWR  
Photo: Ken Pitts*



*Delivery Failure at Steigerwald Photo: Ken Pitts*



capture prey. Females are frequently observed devouring rodents, standing in fields of grass.

Once a Harrier has fledged, it continues to be fed for a couple of months while practicing flight and hunting techniques. After that, skills must be honed enough to be fully independent. No lolly-gagging about.

A change of seasons is in the air. Parental duties are finally done. What happens next? The female evicts the male. She drives him to the edge of prime hunting territory and bans him from her domain during winter months. Relegated to the fringes of her realm, he

In this picture, the male had not achieved a successful hand-off. The vole was dropped but the female was able to retrieve it.

While the male must continually prove his hunting prowess, the female Northern Harrier has her own set of heavy responsibilities. Fierce defender of her territory, she is a nest-builder, incubator of eggs and protective mother. To watch her hunt is a thing of beauty. She is adept at cartwheels, flips and dives. Harriers are unique among raptors, with a feather pattern that wraps around the face, owl-like, a shape that funnels sound into it. They hunt just a few meters above the ground and use both sight and sound to detect and

*Composite photo of a female northern harrier hunting at Ridgefield NWR  
Photos by Ken Pitts*





*Male Northern Harrier Hunting Behind the Pit Toilets on  
Ridgefield NWR Auto Route Photo: Ken Pitts*

sustains himself by hunting for small birds as well as rodents in more open, less dense habitat. He is elusive. She is more commonly seen.

On a January morning with an icy fog hovering over the landscape, the adult male Northern Harrier does indeed look like a Grey Ghost. Unlike the striking brown color palette of the female, his grey blends into murky sky and frozen grass. Hunting for rodents, flying low and then disappearing with a quick pivot into adjacent woods, a glimpse of him might be all you get.

Winter storms blow through. Floodplains fill with water. Extreme wind events bring down trees and ice storms interfere with food source accessibility. You see them hunkered down against the rain and then taking off to hunt in the most inhospitable conditions. Now seemingly the worst of friends, the previously mated pair of Northern Harriers are not making any commitments for next year. They do not mate for

life. How would they evaluate the shared intense experience of having produced young together? Was it a labor of love or just labor or labor with a kind of love that humans don't fully understand?

Steigerwald Lake NWR: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/steigerwald-lake>

Ridgefield NWR: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/ridgefield>

Ken Pitts' Photos: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kpitts/>

Beth's Photos: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/140660481@N03>



*Ridgefield NWR Auto Route on a Cold January Morning*

*Photo: Beth Marlin Lichter*



## Barred Owl Management Plan Draft EIS Coming

by Susan Saul



Barred Owl Photo: Jon Pugmire

On July, 22, 2022, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) published a notice of intent to prepare a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a barred owl management strategy. This announcement opened a 30-day public scoping period that closed August 22, 2022. The draft EIS is expected to be released for public comment this fall.

The FWS identified competition from non-native and invasive barred owls as one of two main threats to the northern spotted owl's continued survival (habitat loss is the other). Barred owls are larger, more aggressive, and more adaptable than northern spotted owls. They displace spotted owls, disrupt their nesting, and compete with them for food. Researchers also have seen a few instances of barred owls interbreeding with or killing spotted owls. Because the spotted owl is already struggling due to its reduced habitat, the effect of the barred owl's presence is an added stressor. An already vulnerable population has a much more difficult time withstanding dramatic changes in the ecosystem such as the encroachment of a competitor.

The FWS conducted a Barred Owl Removal Experiment between 2013 and 2021 that demonstrated success in reducing populations of barred owls and a strong, positive effect on survival of northern spotted owls within the removal areas. Learn more about the experiment here. We will learn more at our October 3 program meeting.

## Community Solar in Clark County Sells Out Quickly

by Susan Saul

Despite our many cloudy days, Clark County averages more sun exposure than Germany, the world leader in solar energy. Rooftop solar isn't an option for everyone, however, due to the physical structure of the home or business, the location of shade trees, or because the home or business is rented.

Community Solar projects allow utility customers to participate in a solar energy project that pays them back with financial energy credits towards their electric bill. For most participants, annual energy credit amounts are based on subscription level, and will be provided for the life of the system.

On September 1, 2023, Clark Public Utilities opened its newest community solar project, Community Solar East at the Port of Camas-Washougal, to both residential and business customers to purchase "units" and receive yearly generation credits on their electric bill for the lifetime of the solar array. The 799 kilowatt capacity solar array is being built across the rooftops of five buildings owned by the Port of Camas-Washougal. Affordable participation options started at \$10 for residential customers and \$85 for business and government customers.

The residential portion sold out before 10 am on September 1! Now it's time to tell our Clark Public Utilities commissioners that you want another project.

Jane Van Dyke  
jvandyke@clarkpud.com

Jim Malinowski  
jmalinowski@clarkpud.com

Nancy Barnes  
nbarnes@clarkpud.com

Also, make sure to get on the waitlist. That's another good way to let Clark Public Utilities know ratepayers want another project. [www.clarkpublicutilities.com/community-solar-east-residential-wait-list](http://www.clarkpublicutilities.com/community-solar-east-residential-wait-list).



Mark your calendars for [October Big Day](#) —14 Oct 2023! Like Global Big Day, October Big Day is an opportunity to unite around our shared love of birds. [Last October](#), nearly 35,000 people from 185 countries submitted 80,000 checklists with eBird, demonstrating the power of birds to bring people together.

Wherever you are on 14 October, take a few minutes to join in this global celebration. Participate from anywhere—even from home! By taking part in October Big Day you're also celebrating [Global Bird Weekend](#) and [World Migratory Bird Day](#). Be a part of the global team and help set a new record for October birding.

## How to participate

- **Get an eBird account:** eBird is a worldwide bird checklist program used by millions of birders. [Sign up here](#).
- **Watch birds on 14 Oct:** It's that simple. You don't need to be a bird expert or go out all day long, even 10 minutes of birding from home counts. October Big Day runs from midnight to midnight in your local time zone.
- **Enter what you see and hear in eBird:** You can enter your observations [via our website](#) or download the [free eBird Mobile app](#) to make submitting lists even easier. Please enter your checklists no later than 17 Oct to be included in the results announcement.
- **Watch the results roll in:** During the day, follow along with bird reports from more than 180 countries in real-time on our [October Big Day page](#).

## eBird Trip Reports on October Big Day

eBird Trip Reports are a great way to share where you went and the birds you found on October Big Day. We had so much fun exploring [eBird Trip Reports from last October](#) and can't wait to see more this year!

Simply create an [eBird Trip Report](#) for 14 October 2023. As you submit lists and upload media throughout the big day, they'll be added to your report automatically. Send the trip report link to friends and family so they can follow along. ([Learn more about eBird Trip Reports](#))



## October 2021 eBird Global Big Day

9 Oct 2021 Public

Capital, British Columbia, Canada

Liam Ragan

Share

For this year's eBird October Big Day Thompson Hyggen and I went absolutely ~~from~~, and ended up birding from around 4:30 AM till 7 PM, for a total of 14.5 hours straight of birding, and ended up seeing all-in-all 104 species to cinch first place in Canada! Over the course of the day we saw some really cool species, and despite a few

**104**

Species observed

+3 other taxa

**15**

Checklists

**18**

Species with photos

LIFERS

### Species observed

Show all details

2	<b>Snow Goose</b> <i>Anser caerulescens</i>	1
13	<b>Greater White-fronted Goose</b> <i>Anser albifrons</i>	2

Create an [eBird Trip](#), such as this one from [October Big Day 2021 by Liam Ragan](#), to share your locations, species lists, and media from October Big Day. You can make eBird Trip Reports for past October Big Days as well!

## October Big Day Pro Tips

- If you're new to eBird or want to make your checklists more valuable for science and conservation, take the free [eBird Essentials course](#).
- Use [eBird Mobile Explore](#) to find nearby places to go birding and recently reported species.
- Discover new things about your favorite species with [Birds of the World](#)—**FREE ACCESS** starting 8am ET Friday, October 13th through 9am ET Monday, October 16th.
- The Cornell Lab's free [Merlin Bird ID](#) app can help you to identify the birds you see and hear on October Big Day. [Upload your recordings](#) to your eBird checklists to help Merlin identify more birds by sound.
- Make your observations more valuable: [submit complete checklists](#), [keep counts of the birds that you see](#), and keep multiple checklists throughout the day.
- Share what you're seeing on social media with **#OctoberBigDay!**

No matter where you go birding on 14 October, have fun, enjoy the birds you find, and share your observations with eBird. Your checklists will help us better understand global bird populations through products like these [animated abundance maps](#) brought to you by eBird Science.

# VAS Bird Walks & Field Trips

Please visit the [VAS website](#) for field trip details and requirements.

## Monday, October 2 (note the date)

### First-of-Month Bird Walk

**Leader:** Cindy McCormack

**Meeting time:** 7:30 a.m.

**Meeting Location:** [Frenchman's Bar Regional Park, center south lot](#) (near restrooms)

**Register:** [vas@vancouveraudubon.org](mailto:vas@vancouveraudubon.org)

We will walk the loop from the south end to the north trail and look for lingering migrant passerines and early winter residents. Meet with the group at 7:30am in the parking lot near the south restroom building or catch up with us along the trail. There is a parking fee at the regional park with can be paid at the entrance kiosk or use your Clark County regional parks annual pass. Hope to see you there!

## Saturday, October 14

### Salmon Creek Greenway

**Leaders:** Ken Pitts and Beth Martin Lichter

**Meeting Time:** 8:00 a.m.—11:00 a.m.

**Meeting Location:** [Salmon Creek Greenway Trail](#) parking lot on east end near softball fields (45.707792, -122.663427).

**Register:** [kenp@vancouveraudubon.org](mailto:kenp@vancouveraudubon.org)

The walk is about a 3 mile out and back hike at a 1 A classification for speed and slope (relatively slow and flat terrain.) It is geared for beginning to intermediate level birders. Binoculars and spotting scopes are available for participants to use during the walk. Please indicate in your registration email if you need binoculars or would like a scope to use.

## Vancouver Audubon Field Trip—Monday, October 9—Woodland Bottoms

**Leader:** Randy Hill

**Meeting Location:** Salmon Creek Park and Ride

**Register:** [Re\\_hill@q.com](mailto:Re_hill@q.com) or call or text 360-975-2573

Target species include migrating/wintering cranes, raptors, waterfowl and a wide variety of marsh, riverine, riparian, and cropland species.

**Itinerary:** We will head north and regroup with northern participants in Woodland and do a circuit around Dike Road and many crossroads in open crop/agriculture areas. The trip will likely end around noon, although there could be an optional extension for vulture/ raptor migration viewing along Dike Road Extension. Spotting scopes encouraged, and bring radios if you have them. Limit of 4 cars, 10 total participants.

**Trip Travel Type Expectations:** Pace: 1-2; Terrain: A-B; <1 mile walking

Safety is a primary concern for Vancouver Audubon, and we ask anyone who is feeling unwell or who has had contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay at home until the risk for infection has passed.

All field trips, unless otherwise indicated, require pre-registration. This simply involves contacting the leader or person indicated on the announcement. Vancouver Audubon expects all registrants to attend, so please contact the leader with any cancellations. Late arrivals affect all participants and might have to catch up at another location. Some trips may have a wait-list, so please be considerate and contact the leader if you have to miss the trip for any reason.

Vancouver Audubon wants to be sure we conserve as much as possible, so any field trip that includes some driving will be a car-pooling trip unless otherwise indicated. Carpooling is generally arranged at the designated meeting location.

Please remember to pay your driver! The recommended amount is \$0.30/mile divided by the number of passengers in the vehicle. Leaders should keep track of mileage and let drivers and participants know the total for the field trip.

Check the [website](#) often for information on field trips. Alternatively, you can place yourself on an email list for **short-notice field trips**. Randy Hill is soliciting for members who want to be notified when a field trip opportunity arises on short notice. If you want to be on this list, contact Randy Hill at [re\\_hill@q.com](mailto:re_hill@q.com).

Additional bird walks can be found at Steigerwald and Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuges:

[Ridgefield NWR](#)

[Steigerwald NWR](#)

## Upcoming Events

### **Wings Over Willapa Festival**

September 22-24

Long Beach Peninsula, WA.

Sponsored by Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge. More information and Registration [Here](#).

This multi-day bird festival in one of the richest bird destinations in North America happens in the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge and sites on Washington's Long Beach Peninsula. The Festival has something for nature lovers of all ages and skill.

Events include expert-led bird walks and programs ranging from wildlife tracking to birding with technology. Other highlights include a guided tour to Long Island to an old-growth cedar grove, hand-building with clay to create your own bowl or mug, and a special Nature Play Day on Saturday for children and families.

FRIENDS OF RIDGEFIELD  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



**OCTOBER 7TH, 2023**

 @RidgefieldBirdFest



<https://ridgefieldfriends.org/birdfest-bluegrass/>

You can help with BirdFest and Bluegrass 2023! Expertise is not required, just a deep desire to share the birding experience. The event will be entirely in person, with a variety of activities happening on the River S Auto Tour and Carty Unit. One of the events being offered is spotting scope viewing. Vancouver Audubon has partnered with the Friends of RNWR for many years for this popular event. The BirdFest Committee is again seeking Vancouver Audubon's assistance at the scoping station, which will be set up at the River S Contact Station. Visitors will enjoy learning about birds and optics. It is a great opportunity for Vancouver Audubon to promote birding and its programs. We are hoping for a good showing of raptors and migrant species including cranes and swans throughout the day.

The event will run from 10 to 3, Saturday, October 7th. Do an hour or do five; then spend some time enjoying other BirdFest events and the Bluegrass music in town. To sign up, contact Susan Setterberg at [smsetterberg@yahoo.com](mailto:smsetterberg@yahoo.com) or Cindy McCormack at [vas@vancouveraudubon.org](mailto:vas@vancouveraudubon.org). Bring your binoculars and spotting scopes (if you have one and are ok with sharing). We will have extra scopes available. The Birdfest committee will arrange to have masks and hand sanitizer on hand. Feel free to bring snacks and your liquid of choice if you plan to stay a while. Contact Station volunteers will be around to answer questions about the Refuge in general and packets about the Refuge and the Event will be on hand. For more information about BirdFest and Bluegrass go to [www.Ridgefieldfriends.org](http://www.Ridgefieldfriends.org).



# Bird ID Challenge

By Cindy McCormack

Wow, someone is looking a little rough! Bed head? Bad day?

Bed head might be the closest in this case! What we have here is a recently fledged bird. How can we tell? There are several clues here. First is the overall disheveled look of an actively molting bird. The molt in this case is from the nestling's downy plumage into juvenile plumage.

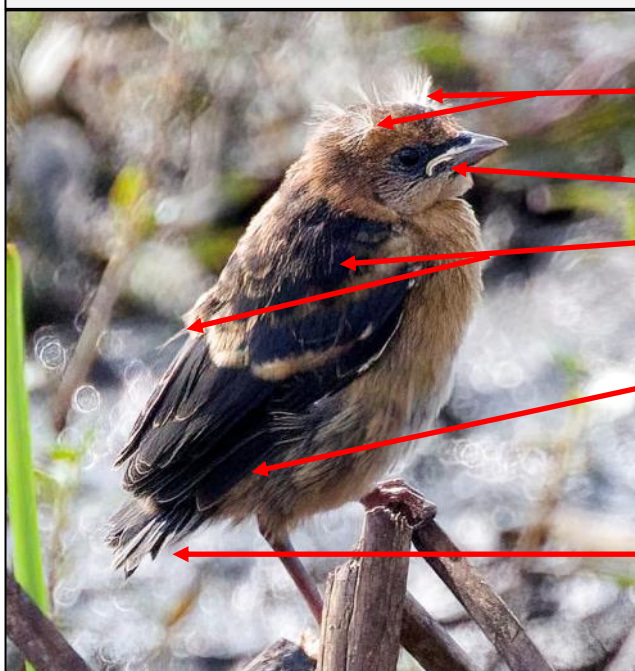
How can we tell? A big clue is the remnants of the downy plumage sticking up out of the head like a punk hair-do (or me on a humid day!). Another clue is the length of the flight feathers. See how both the wing and tail look quite stubby? All the feathers are growing in at the same time, which begins in the nest. An adult bird would be molting flight feathers sequentially, not all at once).

Disregarding all feather indications, what other features indicate a very young bird? Take a look at the base of the bill. That area is still showing remnants of the yellow, fleshy gape flange of a nestling. While it is quite reduced in prominence from the first few weeks after hatching, it is still obvious. The fleshy flange and brightly colored gape, when exposed during begging, acts as an attractive target for the parents to deliver food.

This bird has likely taken it's first brief and unsteady flight out of the nest. It is what it termed as a "local" bird. This means it still can't move very far from the nesting area and is still dependent



Photo taken July 2023 by Greg Johnson



## Recognizing a recent fledgling

Nestling down remnants showing as messy tufts

Gape flange still prominent

Some "threads" of down still showing on the back

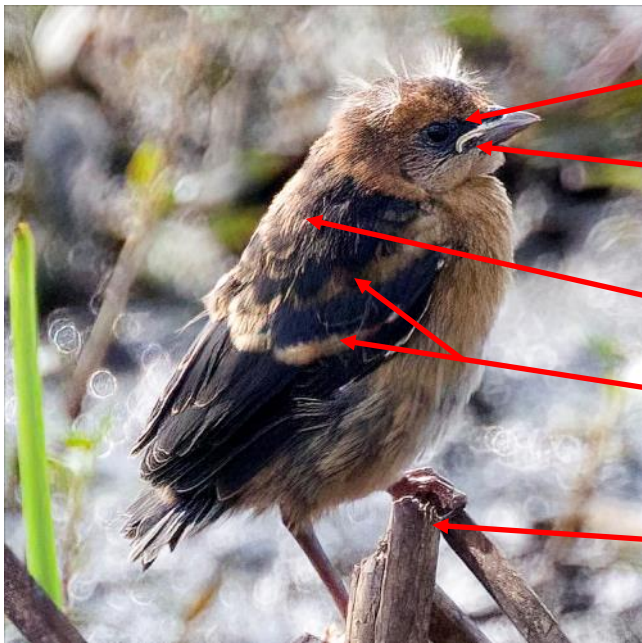
Primaries and secondaries (flight feathers in the wing) all growing in at the same time, wings appear too short and blunt

Tail feathers (rectrices) all growing in at the same time, tail very short.

on the parents for food. It will be producing begging calls frequently so the parents can find them to continue to pass food on.

So, we have at least established that this is a very young bird! This means identification will be challenging, but because we know that the bird is still molting and growing, we can take that





#### Field observations to note

It appears that a small mask is developing on the face. The lores and feathering at the base of the bill all appear black.

Note the general bill shape (but keep in mind that it is still growing). Look at the downward angle of the lower mandible at the base, as well as the angle of the tomium (the cutting edge of the bill)

Back feathers dark brown tipped with cinnamon, giving the back a scaly look.

The tips of the median and greater coverts are tipped in pale Cinnamon color, which show as double wingbars.

Head and breast a rich deep buff.

Remember to consider the habitat! This looks like a wetland and the youngster is perched on broken cattail stems.

under consideration. We need to use the information that is available to figure this bird's identity. Since this is such a young bird, we can assume that the bill is also still growing. It is not as large as it will be as an adult, but we can take some clues from the shape to help us. We have quite a stout bill, already starting to darken. Notice the shape of the lower mandible and where the two halves of the bill meet. Eliminating the pouty look that the gape flange gives, we can see there is still a downward angle.

The juvenile plumage is very distinct rich buff on the head and breast, and the dark brown feathering of the back is tipped in a similar color, giving the back a scaly look. The face has a noticeable black mask developing around the eye and at the base of the bill.

Now look at the habitat! Remember, this bird is not too far from the nest site. We can see standing water and emergent vegetation. The bird appears to be perched on a broken cattail stem. Since it is a local bird and can't fly far yet, we can safely assume it hatched in this wetland.

With all this information, you should be able to figure out this scruffy-looking bird. The black mask, bill, and habitat should help you the most, especially if you are not familiar with the short-lived juvenile plumage stage

(the rich buff head/breast, scaly back, and double wingbar).

Those field marks all point to a juvenile YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD!

This clumsy youngster was photographed at Shillapoo Lake Wildlife Area by Greg Johnson this last July. This bird will have undergone a partial molt of the head and body feathers by now (the pre-formative molt), making the sexes distinguishable. The brown juvenile primaries, secondaries, tail, primary coverts, underwing coverts, and alulae are retained and won't be replaced until next year!



*Adult male Yellow-headed Blackbird. Photo by Mick Thompson*



*American Bittern*  
Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge  
Photo by Jackson Wolfe



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# Field Trip Report

By Beth Martin-Lichter

## BURNT BRIDGE CREEK TRAIL WALK 9/2/23 WITH KEN PITTS



*Excited Birders on Burnt Creek Bridge Trail*

*Photo: Karen York*

For our first guided bird walk under the auspices of Vancouver Audubon Society, Ken Pitts and I chose Burnt Bridge Creek Trail East. 22 birders spent 3 hours using binoculars, Ken's scope, and the Merlin app to identify 48 species of birds. There were a few great surprises along the way, including a relatively rare Cassin's Vireo.

Jon Pugmire found a couple of unusual birds for us. He went ahead of the group and discovered 2 Barred Owls in the trees very close to the trail. By the time we caught up with him, one of the owls was still sitting in the tree

and we all got to see it. Jon also spotted a Pacific-slope Flycatcher. They like dense forest habitat and are not easily photographed.



*Cassin's Vireo*

*Photo: Karen York*

Most impressive on this field trip was the camaraderie. This time of year, although many bird species can be identified by sound, they tend to stay hidden in deep foliage, as adults oversee vulnerable young who are nearing independence but still need parental protection, guidance and feeding. Ken encouraged folks to install the Merlin app on their smartphones to use on this walk, and boy was it helpful! Eric Peterson de-



*Pacific-slope Flycatcher*

*Photo: Jon Pugmire*



tected the call of an Evening Grosbeak and many suspected IDs were either confirmed or corrected with the help of Merlin's sound recognition.

To make identification even more challenging, with so many juveniles making an appearance who haven't quite grown into their adult defining characteristics yet, it's easy to mistake one species for another. Plus, birds are molting. Time for a new fall and winter coat. Adults are looking rather ratty compared with their spring finery. We all helped each other find the birds and along the way, learned a lot about behavior, habitat and migration.

A great contributor to the outing was high school senior and already proficient birder, Stella Walk, who is receiving community service credits for accompanying us and helping identify the birds.

Britta Plumhoff from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service also joined us. It's always a joy to be with her in wild places. Her enthusiasm is contagious.



*Eric P. helping locate birds* Photo: Karen York



*Lesser Goldfinch* Photo: Stella Walk



*Molting, bedraggled-looking House Finch*  
Photo: Beth Marlin Lichter

A great walk! Join us on upcoming outings:

[Vancouver Audubon Society Calendar of Events](#)  
[Burnt Bridge Creek Trail East eBird Checklist](#)

For any unusual birds in this report, I use the following rarity codes which are used on the state checklist as well as on each of the 39 county checklists available at: [www.wabirder.com](http://www.wabirder.com)

- (1) Common,
- (2) Uncommon
- (3) Harder to find, usually seen annually,
- (4) Rare, 5+ records,
- (5) Fewer than 5 records

**Aug. 17**, John Willis birded at the Little White Salmon Fish Hatchery, finding a group of seven immature/female plumaged **HARLEQUIN DUCKS** (3) which are known to nest along the Little White Salmon River.

**Aug. 17**, Shorebirds are the first group of southbound migrants that we see locally with some arriving here from their arctic breeding grounds in early July. While most people associate shorebirds/sandpipers with the coastal beaches we have some very good spots to see them in our area. At Shillapoo Lake in the Vancouver Lowlands, Jim Danzenbaker identified 12 species of shorebirds including, 2 **SEMIPALMATED PLOVER**, 22 **KILLDEER**, 2 **BAIRD'S SANDPIPER** (his first ones in Clark County for several years), 60 **LEAST SANDPIPER**, 1 **SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER**, 65 **WESTERN SANDPIPER** (the most he had seen in this county for a while), 1 **SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER**, 1 **LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER**, 2 **WILSON'S SNIPE**, 1 **SPOTTED SANDPIPER**, 1 **SOLITARY SANDPIPER**, 5 **GREATER YELLOWLEGS** and 1 **LESSER YELLOWLEGS**. He also had a single immature **BONAPARTE'S GULL** which still some brown on the nape. 165 **AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS** rounded out the show.

**Aug. 18**, the first **SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** (5) ever reported from Skamania County was found at Home Valley Park by CJ FLICK. She identified it by its call notes, which are unique and nothing like the very similar looking Long-billed Dowitcher making that the best way to tell them apart. Stewart Fletcher was able to get a good photo of it for verification of this addition to the county checklist.

**Aug. 18**, Samuel Holman found a **SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** at the Bingen Pond, Klickitat County.

**Aug. 18**, the **GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** is one of the earliest migrant waterfowl to pass through here on their way to their wintering grounds, the first three reported this fall were found by Margi Finch at the Steigerwald Lake NWR.

**Aug. 18**, 2 **SANDHILL CRANES** were spotted along Northwest Lower River Road by Sarah Brotherton,



Ruddy Turnstone. Photo: Joseph Malott/Audubon Photography Awards

cranes attempted to nest on the Ridgefield NWR again this year and there were reports of them most of this summer.

**Aug. 18**, Robert Vanderkamp, Ken Vanderkamp and Les Carlson spotted a **BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (3) at Shillapoo Lake.

**Aug. 18**, Randy Hill was birding at Shillapoo Lake when from the disabled hunter's blind, he spotted a **RUDDY TURNSTONE** (5). This is another member of the shorebird family that is seldom seen away from saltwater. He was able to document the sighting with photographs and alert others who were able to see this bird.

**Aug. 19**, While on Lower Larch Mountain, Jim Danzenbaker had 3 **CLARK'S NUTCRACKERS** (5) fly right over him in a straight line south towards Camas, this was only his third sighting in Clark County

**Aug. 19**, at Shillapoo Lake, John Bishop picked out a **SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** among a group of **LEAST SANDPIPERS** by its slightly larger, paler coloration, very short bill, and dark legs.

**Aug. 20**, several miles west of Goldendale, Cheryl Stewart was sitting in her living room, four feet from the window, when a **BLACK PHOEBE** (5) landed on the top of the window frame. I believe that this is only the third record of this species in Klickitat County.

**Aug. 28**, 7 either adult female or juvenile or both **HARLEQUIN DUCKS** were found by CJ FLICK at the Little White Salmon Fish Hatchery. From their interac-

(Continued on page 16)



tions she thought they may have been from different family groups.

**Aug. 29,** Stefan Schlick visits South Prairie in Skamania County at the end of August for dragonflies, for the last 3 years, he has been hearing a **RED-SHOULDERED HAWK** (4) there. This is at 3000 ft, and generally deep timber, except for a set of smallish openings, a highly unusual habitat for a Red-shouldered Hawk; this may be a post-breeding location.

**Aug. 30,** Jim Danzenbaker, Les Carlson and Randy Hill spotted a juvenile **SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** at Shillapoo Lake, it gave a tchu-tchu-tchu call repeatedly without any kik calls like those of a Long-billed Dowitcher. They reported other interesting shorebirds that were continuing to show up at Shillapoo Lake in the Vancouver Lowlands of Clark County. 3 **SEMIPALMATED PLOVER**, 20 **KILLDEER**, 1 **BAIRD'S SANDPIPER**, 40 **LEAST SANDPIPER**, 3 **PECTORAL SANDPIPER**, 36 **WESTERN SANDPIPER**, 2 **LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER**, 5 **GREATER YELLOWLEGS**, 8 **LESSER YELLOWLEGS** and a **WILSON'S SNIPE**.

**Aug. 30,** Roger Windemuth found a **RED-EYED VIREO** at the Ridgefield NWR-River 'S' Unit, he noted the long white eyebrow and dark eyeline and confirmed it by its call.

**Aug. 31,** Jim Danzenbaker found a female type **HARLEQUIN DUCK** (5) at the flushing channel at the southwest corner of Vancouver Lake and a huge surprise was an adult **RED PHALAROPE** (5) transitioning to basic plumage on the second pond at Shillapoo Lake in the Vancouver Lake lowlands.

**Sept. 1,** On Strawberry Island, below Bonneville Dam, John Davis saw 14 **LEWIS'S WOODPECKERS** flying west in a loose group, where they have been seen nearly every year around this time, these large dark woodpeckers look almost crow-like in flight except for their pinkish breast and a gray collar.

**Sept. 1,** the fourteen participants on a Vancouver Audubon field trip to the Ridgefield NWR-Carty Unit, led by Cindy McCormack, saw 77 species of birds highlighted by 2 **WILSON'S PHALAROPE** and an **EASTERN KINGBIRD**. I have always thought that



Red-shouldered Hawk.

Photo: Marty Heath/Audubon Photography Awards

these outings are like a mini workshop on bird identification and the best way to learn bird identification.

**Sept. 2,** Jim Danzenbaker provided some highlights from a very productive trip he led to Clark County's newest ebird hotspot, Mountain View 4x4 Trailhead (Migration Corner) located on Larch Mountain along the eastern edge of the county that included a flock of 9 migrating **CLARK'S NUTCRACKERS**, a single **CASSIN'S FINCH** and a conservatively counted 475 individual warblers of 8 species. Also, a record 63 **RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES** in migration.

**Sept. 2,** Samuel Holman and Bill Tweit heard a series of rapid 'keer' call of a **RED-SHOULDERED HAWK** (4) three times, near the Little Klickitat River to

the north of the Goldendale sewage ponds. They then went to Horsethief Lake State Park where they found a **HORNED GREBE** and a continuing adult **RED-NECKED GREBE** on the river just below the boat launch.

**Sept. 3,** John Davis photographed a nice adult **RED-SHOULDERED HAWK**, perched in ash tree on Strawberry Island, which then flew across Hamilton Creek to the Pierce National Wildlife Refuge, calling numerous times.

**Sept. 3,** in Skamania County, the first of the fall **GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW** was found by John Willis at the Spring Creek Fish Hatchery.

**Sept. 5,** Tim Brennan located both a **WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER** (4) and a **BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER** (3) in the vicinity of the Wicky Creek Shelter along the FS8049 Road north of Trout Lake. This sliver of Skamania County that borders Yakima County has a mature Ponderosa Pine forest that provides habitat for species not common in the rest of the county.

**Sept. 6,** a **MERLIN** was seen by Jim Danzenbaker on Lower Larch Mountain,

**Sept. 7,** Grace Oliver spotted a **BLACK SWIFT** with **VAUX'S SWIFTS** over the Rock Creek Mill Pond in Stevenson. She said that they had great comparisons with Vaux's, noting it was all dark, larger than Vaux's, with a more bowed wing shape.

**Sept. 7,** 3 **AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS** were spotted at Beacon Rock State Park by Jim Danzenbaker, Cindy McCormack and Thomas Tinsley.

**Sept. 7,** another **AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** was

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

reported by Samuel Holman flying low over the river at the Spring Creek Fish Hatchery near Underwood.

**Sept. 7,** In Skamania County, a lingering **NASHVILLE WARBLER** was seen by Jim Danzenbaker and Cindy McCormack on Strawberry Island.

**Sept. 8,** Samuel Holman found Klickitat County's first **WHITE WAGTAIL** (5) foraging on a mudflat along the shoreline with peeps and **AMERICAN PIPITS** at the Goldendale sewage ponds which has restricted access. This was an adult bird identified as the Black-backed subspecies (lugens) from far eastern Siberia. He described it as larger than the pipits, but with a similar structure but with constant tail bobbing while walking around, and occasional brief sallies up to catch insects, flashing its bright white wings. They have a very upright posture when stopped, and horizontal posture with their tail sticking straight out while walking.

**Sept. 9,** on the west end of Stacker Butte in Klickitat County, 2 **LAZULI BUNTINGS** were spotted by Samuel Holman.

**Sept. 12,** Jim Danzenbaker birded the St. Cloud Wayside along Highway 14 in Skamania County and found a heavy movement of birds there ending up with a list of 56 species. He saw a **LEWIS'S WOODPECKER** and counted 229 **STELLER'S JAYS** and 59 **CALIFORNIA SCRUB-JAYS** passing through this historic apple orchard in the five hours he was there. Each fall this movement of jays has been noted but we have no idea where they are coming from or heading to.

**Sept. 12,** we also had a single **LEWIS'S WOODPECKER** fly over our field while I was birding from our deck. The best bird was a female **WESTERN BLUEBIRD** in our bird bath, the first one we have had on our property in the fifty years we have lived here,

**Sept. 13,** Luke Hanes confirmed that the **SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** was still at Shillapoo Lake.



*Parasitic Jaeger, Keith Kennedy/Audubon Photography Awards*

**Sept. 13,** Les Carlson and I birded into Klickitat County finding a **BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** that was being reported from Bingen Pond and then went up to the Balch Road area where we saw several **ACORN WOODPECKERS** and numerous **LEWIS'S WOODPECKERS**.

**Sept. 14,** Jim Danzenbaker returned to the ebird hotspot, Mountain View 4x4 Trailhead (Migration Corner) located along the eastern edge of the county on Larch Mountain. included a flock of 17 southbound **CLARK'S NUTCRACKERS**, a **CASSIN'S FINCH** and a **BLACK-CHINNED**

**HUMMINGBIRD** (5). Noteworthy was the passage of both kinglets and the first **VARIED THRUSHES** and **FOX SPARROWS** for the Fall.

**Sept. 15,** Cindy McCormack and Randy Hill made a trip to Migration Corner and encountered a major movement of birds. They saw 1 **DUSKY FLYCATCHER**, another **CLARK'S NUTCRACKER**, 67 **VARIED THRUSH**, 69 **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS**, 70 **BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLERS** and 91 **TOWNSEND'S WARBLERS**. Cindy then went to the Vancouver Lake Flushing Channel finding a reported **FRANKLIN'S GULL** (5) and had a surprise sighting of 7 **PARASITIC JAEGER**s (5).

The next major migration feature we will see is the return of our wintering waterfowl and raptors please continue to send me your sightings or enter them into eBird for use in this column and the year list project of compiling all of the species seen in each county by anyone this year. I would also appreciate any photos of any Code 3 and higher birds for use in this column. As of September 15<sup>th</sup>, the 2023 Washington County Cumulative Year List Project has tallied 228 species seen in Clark County for the year and in Skamania County the list is now at 189. These lists of all the birds reported in each county are updated every two months and can be seen at [Washington Birder \(wabirder.com\)](http://WashingtonBirder.com)



*Clark's Nutcracker  
Photo: Marian Herz/Audubon Photography Awards*



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>October 2023</b>						
Oct 1	2 Bird Walk— Frenchman's Bar	3 Program— Spotted Owls	4	5	6	7 Ridgefield Birdfest
8	9 Field Trip— Woodland Bottoms	10	11	12	13	14 Bird Walk— Salmon Creek Greenway
15	16	17	18 YBC Zoom Meeting—6 pm	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

### Upcoming Events:

**Oct 2 (Monday):** First-of-Month-Bird Walk, Frenchman's Bar

**Oct 3 (Tuesday):** Monthly Program—Live

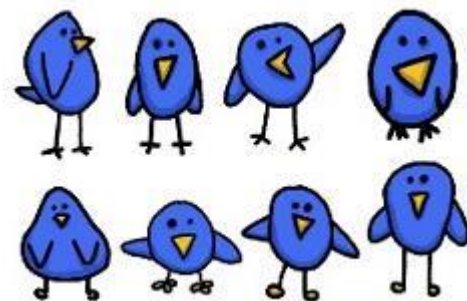
**Oct 7 (Saturday):** Ridgefield Bluegrass and Birdfest

**Oct 9 (Tuesday):** Field Trip—Woodland Bottoms

**Oct 14 (Saturday):** Bird Walk—Salmon Creek Greenway

**Oct 14 (Saturday):** eBird October Big Day!

**Oct 18 (Wednesday):** Youth Birding Club Zoom Meeting



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