

Birds in Your Backyard and Neighborhood

Beginning Birding 101

by Susie Schaefer

During this time of staying home, social isolation, and distancing, we can see it is now spring! Flowers are starting to bloom, and birds are flying around. Many are singing. Looking and listening for these birds can be a welcome distraction from the news of COVID-19.

It is great to be cheered up by the sight of Anna's Hummingbirds sipping from the blossoms of Red-flowering Currant bushes, brightly colored American Goldfinches eating sunflower chips at a backyard bird feeder, or a Black-capped Chickadee taking one sunflower seed at a time from a feeder.

Now is a good time to start observing backyard and neighborhood birds. You don't need to know the correct names of all our local birds or have fancy equipment or expensive cameras to get started watching and enjoying birds. What you do need is a sense of adventure and a willingness to slow down and pay attention using your eyes and ears. The best time of day to see birds is in the morning when they wake up hungry, or in the late afternoon when they want that last snack. Spring is a good time to see them any time of the day. For example, they may just be resting after a long or short migratory flight, or showing off their beautiful feathers to attract or find a mate, or even collecting materials to build a nest, or maybe hiding to avoid a predator.

Binoculars can be useful, but don't worry if you don't have them. If you have a yard in front or in back of your home, you can sit quietly by a window or on a chair outside and pay attention to see what might be flying or hopping around.

Many of us walk outside with dogs or family. I recommend that you slow down, listen, and check out trees and bushes (and telephone wires) for birds or other wildlife. As you walk by, note their activities.

American Crows are wild birds and can be interesting to observe this time of year. They collect sticks to build their nests, take turns sitting on their nests, and

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Our May Program Meeting is Going Virtual!

May 8 • 7:00 PM

We've missed seeing all of your bright faces and hearing your spirited stories, so we're excited to announce that we will be having our May program meeting via Zoom! You may participate either by computer or phone. Tune in at our normal meeting time from the comfort of your home and hear from Executive Director Brian Zinke about what we've been up to since the emergence of COVID-19 in our communities. Topics will include Birdathon, the addition of new Board members, exciting new projects we have underway, and more! We hope to see (virtually) everyone there!

When: May 8, 2020 at 7:00 PM

Where: The comfiest spot in your home!

How to Join: Click the link below to register for the Zoom video conference. Once you register, you will receive an email with the meeting link and password. When you're ready to attend the meeting on Friday, click the meeting link in your email. You may be prompted to download the Zoom application if you haven't already. Then enter the meeting ID and password to sign in. The camera on your computer will not be used, but you will be able to turn on your microphone to talk. Additionally, you can type questions and comments in the chat box during the meeting.

Register for Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZluceuuqDksH9cep3ODac27MMff741b9rYz>

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Volunteers Needed: Updating our Local Birding Book

Pilchuck Audubon's book, *Birding in Snohomish County*, is currently being revised and edited for an updated edition.

Originally published in 2001, *Birding in Snohomish County* is an essential guide to all of the birding hotspots throughout the county, and we are looking for volunteers to help us compile research on a number of parks in the area. The research can be completed from home using online resources, and we also welcome inputs based on your experiences at your favorite local parks.

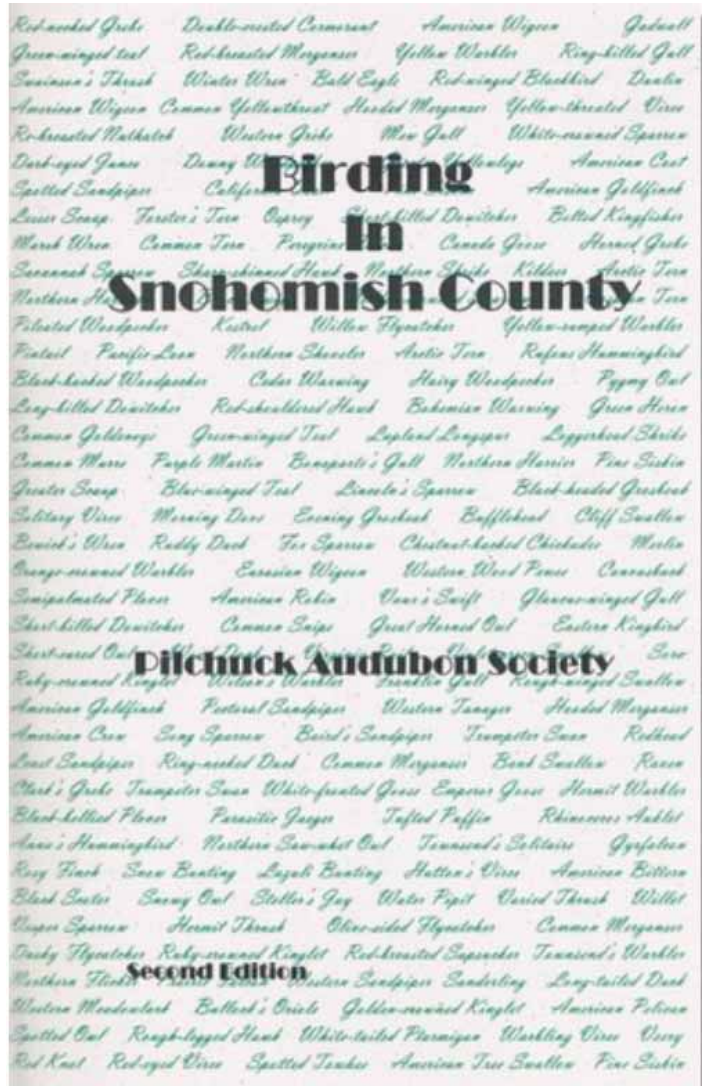
If you are interested in lending a hand as a researcher, writer, editor, or illustrator, please reach out to Mandy at communications@pilchuckaudubon.org. 🐦



TRIP CALENDAR

Check our website, www.pilchuckaudubon.org, for the latest information

No Birding Trips in May



About Pilchuck Audubon Society

The Pilchuck Audubon Profile, official newsletter of Pilchuck Audubon Society, is published monthly.

Pilchuck Audubon Society (PAS) is a grass-roots environmental organization with members throughout Snohomish County and Camano Island, Washington.

Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife, for the benefit of the earth's biological diversity.

Through education, advocacy, and community activism, PAS is committed to bringing people closer to wildlife in order to build a deeper understanding of the powerful links between healthy ecosystems and human beings, and to encourage the involvement of our members in efforts to protect the habitat this wildlife

depends upon for survival.

We serve as a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. PAS is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, non-profit organization incorporated in the state of Washington.

Newsletter Submissions

Submit articles to newsletter@pilchuckaudubon.org or mail to 1429 Avenue D, PMB 198, Snohomish, WA 98290. Submissions must be received by the 21st of the month preceding publication. We reserve the right to edit.

To contact Pilchuck Audubon Society, call 425.610.8027.

The monthly Profile is available online at

www.pilchuckaudubon.org

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Birdathon Is Happening Now

by Brian Zinke

In case you haven't heard, our Birdathon fundraiser is still on, and it is happening right now! Birdathon is running for the full month of May, so it's not too late to participate! We've changed the rules this year to account for stay-at-home orders and travel restrictions, but there are still lots of birds to see wherever you are!

What is Birdathon?

Birdathon is Pilchuck Audubon's most exciting fundraiser of the year. Birdathon is a uniquely Audubon way to help protect native birds. It is a friendly competition to see who can spot the most birds and raise the most money while doing it. Similar to a walk-a-thon, participants collect pledges from family, friends, work colleagues, and others who want to support Pilchuck Audubon. But instead of getting a pledge of \$1.00 per mile walked, bird enthusiasts ask for a pledge for each bird seen by a person or team.

How can I participate?

- Compete in our friendly birding competition and collect pledges to see if your team can see the most birds and raise the most money
- Donate/sponsor a team
- Submit your photos to our [bird photography contest](#)

What's different this year?

- This year there are no categories for Big Day, Big Sit, or Big Month. Instead, we want everyone to bird for the entire month of May from wherever you are in Washington!
- You can have teams, but unless you live with your team members, please do not meet up and go birding with them. Rather, keep in touch while birding by texting, calling, or video conferencing with them. Or let them know you're going birding in the morning and fill them in at the end of day to update your team species list.
- Report your species counts frequently and see how each team is doing on our webpage.
- While birding, we insist you follow all government regulations regarding travel, shelter-in-place measures, and social distancing.

For all of this year's updated rules, [visit our Birdathon webpage](#). Here you'll also find resources to register your team, print your species checklists and pledge trackers, meet our teams, find fund-raising tips, and learn how you can support a team or Pilchuck Audubon by making a donation!

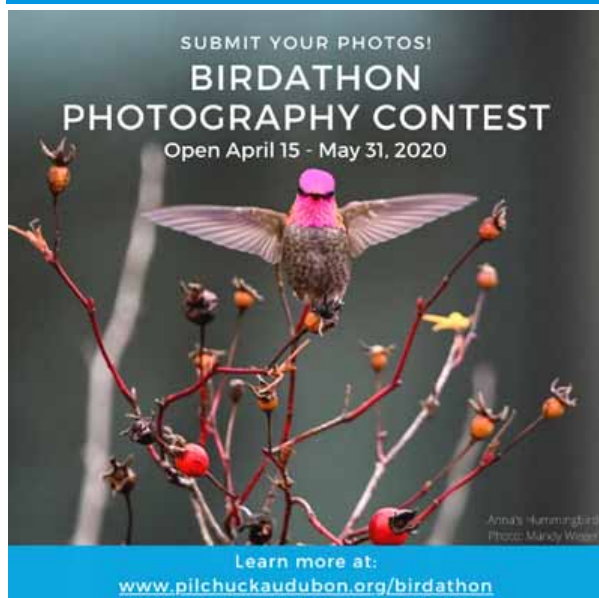
Please consider supporting this incredibly important fundraiser for Pilchuck Audubon. All proceeds go toward our mission and programs throughout the year. [Make a donation online here](#), and select "Birdathon—General" in the dropdown box. If you'd like your donation to go toward a specific team, mention the team name in the comment box.

Thanks for your continued support!

This year's Birdathon is sponsored by:



Submit your Bird Photos! Birdathon Photography Contest



Our Birdathon photography contest is now accepting submissions.

Enter your best bird photos for a chance to win great prizes, including items from our amazing sponsors [Nature Together](#) and [Larkwire](#).

All entry fees go to support our incredibly important work of protecting and giving voice to the birds, so please consider supporting us by entering or making a general donation to Birdathon. Thank you!

[Read the official contest rules and how to submit your photos.](#) 🦅

Birding Between the Pages

by Cindy Easterson

As we all adjust to life with the Coronavirus one of the small pleasures is getting a glimpse into the lives of our favorite journalists, TV personalities, and co-workers. For me, a recent on-line meeting with a fellow ornithologist was punctuated by his pet cockatiel sitting on his shoulder and robustly joining in on the conversation. I have truly enjoyed seeing people reporting or telecommunicating from their home libraries or studies where we are offered a quick view into their reading habits.

It's made me think about my own library and the books I would love to share with the world. If you are looking for some good reads while waiting out the social distancing, here are a couple of old favorites and a new release that have helped keep me connected to birds and nature during this time.

***A Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold**

Often called the father of wildlife management, Aldo Leopold published *Sand County Almanac* in 1949. He offers a masterful array of memorable one-liners, but the true value of his work is the eloquent introduction of a stirring land ethic crafted through sketches of farm life and observations from personal travels and experiences.

Rare Encounters with Ordinary Birds

by Lyanda Lynn Haupt

This beautiful, small work reminds us of the special place common birds should hold in our treasure of valued things. Haupt's writing about the most common and even dismissed species such as the starling and the Double-crested Cormorant is full of wit and humor. This work truly launched me into a world of bird watching other than simply bird "seeing" (check the box!).

***In Search of Meadowlarks: Birds, Farms, and Food in Harmony with the Land*, by John M. Marzluff**

A local favorite, John Marzluff of crow research fame, takes the reader across the globe to better understand practical, sustainable solutions to food production and how a thoughtful farm or ranch land ethic can work in harmony with nature to support bird and wildlife populations. A chapter featuring our local Oxbow Farms near Duvall, Washington, was a real treat as I've supported avian monitoring on the site and could visualize firsthand the value of these principals to guide the use of working lands.

I would invite all to share a short book review with our membership. As birders, we are experiential people; while we might not be able to venture far and wide to go birding, sometimes a close second can be the engaging experiences found within the pages of a good book. 🦅

WANTED



GREAT BLUE HERON COLONY INFORMATION

An effort to update the status of Great Blue Herons in the Puget Sound is underway and we need your help to locate heron colonies! The status of Great Blue Herons hasn't been updated since 2007, so it is long overdue.

By helping us locate these colonies and counting the nests and birds in them, you'll be contributing to this assessment which will help guide the conservation of Great Blue Herons in the Puget Sound Region.

If you know the location of a heron colony please contact:

Brian Zinke, Executive Director
Pilchuck Audubon Society
director@pilchuckaudubon.org

Audubon for Kids



Right now there are lots of kids at home unexpectedly, and lots of parents trying to entertain and educate them. To help, we put together Audubon for Kids: a new hub, to be updated each week with a new theme, for kid-friendly activities that can be done at home or in a yard or park. Audubon for Kids curates bird and nature activities, games, quizzes, DIY projects, and more from across the Audubon network, featuring content from Audubon Adventures. We hope these lessons will help you find awe and inspiration in nature together.



[Check out Audubon for Kids!](#)



Beginning Birding 101, *Continued from Page 1*

eventually start feeding and training their noisy youngsters. Crows are smart and don't miss many opportunities, so don't write them off; research has shown that they do remember and recognize us as individuals.

There are many species of birds who live in our neighborhoods or are migrating through this time of year. Here is a short list of some of the most common you may be able to see in your yards or on neighborhood walks: American Robin, Northern Flicker, Black-capped and Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Dark-eyed Junco, Hairy or Downy Woodpecker, Steller's Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, American Goldfinch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Song Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, House Finch, Anna's Hummingbird (here through the winter), Rufous Hummingbird, Spotted Towhee, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Violet Green Swallow, Barn Swallow, and more. If you are near the Sound, lakes, or creeks, you may also find Mallard Ducks, Great Blue Heron, or Belted Kingfisher.

One of the things you may want to do right now while at home is to get your yard certified for birds and wildlife by either the [National Wildlife Federation](#) or [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#). It is not difficult to meet the five main certification requirements. More certified yards are needed to protect birds and wildlife. It is a self-certification process, which also suggests that you stop using pesticides (like Round-up); this could make a huge difference for spring butterflies, bumble bees, and other pollinators. Applications are available

online, and you can fill in the required information online at <https://www.nwf.org/CertifiedWildlifeHabitat> or find the forms and requirements on the [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) website under Species and Habitat. You don't need to purchase supplies for certification—you can easily build a brush pile out of sticks and branches, and the birds will use it for cover. You can use an old pie tin or wash basin to fill with water and put in a few rocks for birds to stand on, and have a good water feature. One last thing you can do to help wild birds is to keep cats inside with you, especially in the early morning and late afternoon hours when birds are hungry and looking for food and are most vulnerable.

There are other bird ideas for families to use online. The National Audubon Society website (audubon.org) has a fun educational curriculum called Audubon Adventures (<http://audubonadventures.org/Contact.htm>), and the National Wildlife Federation (nwf.org) also has a lot of good materials for kids of all ages. There are three other easy-to-find websites to use for reference: (1) Seattle Audubon Society (seattleaudubon.org); (2) Seattle Audubon Bird Web (<http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/>), which is a guide to birds of Washington; and (3) Cornell Lab (allaboutbirds.org/guide/search) to learn everything you always wanted to know about birds. You can also watch several of their live cams. You might also enjoy the Washington Native Plant Society website, www.wnps.org, and learn about the native plants you will want to get eventually for your wildlife garden at their big sale later this year. 🦉

Toilet paper, sanitizer, and a couple Washington lifers: the Costco quarantine saga

by Brian Zinke

When I moved to Washington a few years ago, it's safe to say a few things I didn't imagine getting excited about were finding toilet paper on the shelf and researching how to make homemade hand sanitizer. Fortunately, I haven't had to try the latter yet. But perhaps the least expected and most exciting of my finds were in the Costco mitigation ponds, not on the empty shelves inside.

For many of us, birding during quarantine has been a struggle and downright heartbreaking. We miss visiting our favorite hotspots and catching up with our old migratory pals as spring progresses into summer. I am personally saddened that my first Birdathon with Pilchuck Audubon is being overshadowed and affected by Covid-19. I had big plans to travel from the Edmonds Marsh to Semiahmoo, back to Spencer Island and over the mountains to the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge— all the hotspots I expected to get my species count up because I'd never see many of those species around my urban apartment. Or so I thought.

Like everyone else, I've been relegated to birding around my apartment. Luckily, I live close to a lake and can get some good birding in there on my walks. But sometimes you need to mix it up and the biologist in me always wants to fill in gaps on the map. So I thought, "Where can I bird that most people never would?" In the concrete jungle there are a lot of little patches of habitat we often assume aren't very good because they're too small, too noisy, not high-quality, etc. So we never take the time to look at them.

Case in point: Costco mitigation ponds.

Admittedly, I was very skeptical I would see much of interest in the Costco parking lot ponds near where I live. After all, they are laden with plastic bags and fast food detritus. While standing in the socially-distanced line outside Costco, I could hear and see the usual suspects: Red-winged Blackbirds, Mallards, American Crows, both Chickadee species, Dark-eyed Juncos, Song Sparrows, and the resident parking lot gulls. Nevertheless, I started incorporating the mitigation ponds into my evening walks.

At first, my initial suspicions were confirmed—nothing unusual, the highlight being a Pacific Wren. But after a couple of weeks and the early stages of migration beginning, things started to change. Yellow-rumped and Black-throated Gray Warblers had recently arrived, as well as sightings of Golden-crowned Sparrows and a Hairy Woodpecker. But there were two birds I was especially excited about. I was so excited about the first one, that I

called my partner in the apartment and had her stop what she was doing and run over to the parking lot, because I knew this would be a life species for her. Sure enough, she got there in time to see two Wilson's Snipe in the mitigation pond, which was no larger than 50 x 50 yards.



Two Wilson's Snipe well camouflaged on the edge of a mitigation pond. Photo by Brian Zinke through binoculars.

I couldn't believe it. My only experience with Wilson's Snipe was in a vast wetland in Kansas covering thousands of acres. It never crossed my mind I could see one at my local big box store. Fast-forward only a few days later, and I spotted not one but two Green Herons! Same Costco parking lot, but different mitigation pond. I was awestruck.



A Green Heron perches on cattails behind a chain-link fence. Photo by Brian Zinke through binoculars.

It also made me really start to wonder how many birds, that live in or use these ponds, are we missing because we never look? How many times have we loaded up on two months-worth of trail mix at Costco for our birding adventures, only to miss these elusive and beautiful species hiding next to our cars in the parking lot?

Oh, and did I mention these ponds are right next to the interstate? Not exactly prime habitat as we usually think of it.

So what started out as an effort just to fill in some gaps on the map and mix up my quarantine birding walks, ended up giving me two Washington lifers in a matter of a week. As you continue to bird locally, think about what areas around your residence could be your equivalent to my Costco experience. You never know what you might find—just don't expect it in bulk. 🦉

BACKYARD BIRDING HIGHLIGHTS

February 26, 2020 to March 25, 2020

by Mara Price, Sightings Coordinator

I hope things get back to normal soon, although staying home gives us more time to appreciate the birds in our yards.

Reporting from Lake Bosworth, Carole and Larry Beason had a total species count of 46 that included 50 American Crow in a field, 12 American Robin along the road, a Bald Eagle over the lake, a Belted Kingfisher, 12 Black-capped Chickadee, 5 Brewer's Blackbird, 2 Band-tailed Pigeon, 14 Canada Goose on the lake, 3 Common Raven in the trees, 5 Common Merganser on the lake, 5 Evening Grosbeak, a Fox Sparrow in the birdbath, 8 Golden-crowned Sparrow, a Great Blue Heron flying near the shore, 2 Greater Scaup and 2 Lesser Scaup on the lake, 3 Hairy Woodpecker, 3 Northern Flicker, a Pileated Woodpecker, 8 Purple Finch, 50+ Red-winged Blackbird, 3 Ring-necked Duck on the lake, 2 Rufous Hummingbird, 25 Trumpeter Swan, 24+ Tree Swallow, and 5 Wood Duck on the lake and in the yard.

Hilkka Egtvedt's count from Mukilteo included 5 Band-tailed Pigeon, 3 Mourning Dove, 2 Anna's Hummingbird, a Rufous Hummingbird, 2 Northern Flicker, 2 Steller's Jay, 3 Chestnut-backed Chickadee, a Red-breasted Nuthatch, a Varied Thrush, 3 Spotted Towhee, a Fox Sparrow, 2 Song Sparrow, a White-crowned Sparrow, 2 Golden-crowned Sparrow, 11 Dark-eyed Junco, 2 House Finch, 4 Bushtit, and 5 Pine Siskin, for a total species count of 24.

Kriss Erickson's total species count of 20 from her home in Everett included 16 Dark-eyed Junco, 6 American Robin, 2 Bewick's Wren, 4 Steller's Jay, 12 Bushtit, 23 Northwestern Crow, 6 Western Gull, a Bald Eagle flying overhead, 21 Black-capped Chickadee, an Anna's Hummingbird, 3 House Finch, 2 Downy Woodpecker, 3 Song Sparrow, 4 Wood Duck, 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 2 Mallard Duck, and 2 Varied Thrush.

Reporting from her home in Stanwood, Mary Sinker listed 14 American Robin busy building nests, 5 Anna's Hummingbird, 2 Bald Eagle, 2 Bewick's Wren, 11 Black-capped Chickadee, 2 Brown Creeper, 7 Chestnut-backed Chickadee, a Cooper's Hawk, 22 Dark-eyed Junco, 4 Downy Woodpecker, a Great Blue Heron at the creek, 6 House Finch, 18 Mourning Dove, 4 Northern Flicker, a Pileated Woodpecker, a Red-breasted Sapsucker, 55 Red-winged Blackbird, a Rufous Hummingbird, 8 Song Sparrow, 14 Spotted Towhee, 12 Steller's Jay, 2 Varied Thrush, 2 White-crowned Sparrow, and 4 Winter Wren, for a total species count of 39.

Walter Zandi's report from Monroe listed 3 Northern Flicker, a Song Sparrow, 12 Dark-eyed Junco, a Pileated

Woodpecker at the suet, 3 Black-capped Chickadee, 4 Chestnut-backed Chickadee, 2 Hairy Woodpecker, 3 American Robin in the yard, a Red-breasted Nuthatch, a Fox Sparrow, 2 Varied Thrush, a House Finch, a Rufous Hummingbird and 2 Anna's Hummingbird at the sugar water, and a European Starling, for a total species count of 15.

My report from my home in Marysville included 15 American Robin along the road, 2 Anna's Hummingbird, 25+ American Crow in the field, 8 Dark-eyed Junco, 2 Kinglet species, 50+ Mallard Duck on the water in the fields, 12 Mourning Dove, 4 Northern Flicker, 5 Ring-necked Duck on the pond, 3 Song Sparrow, 5 Steller's Jay, 3 Spotted Towhee, 20 Trumpeter Swan in the fields, a Pileated Woodpecker, and a Common Raven, for a total species count of 18.

If you are interested in participating in the Backyard Birding count, please email me at pricemara1@gmail.com or leave a message on my cell phone at 425-750-8125. ✉

Demo Garden

Susie Schaefer reports that, for May and beyond, there will be a program for the Demo Garden on Zoom. Look for it on the PAS website. ✉

Pilchuck Audubon Society Membership Information

Support your local Audubon chapter by becoming a member. PAS dues are tax deductible (consult your tax professional for details). The PAS tax ID number is 91-6183664.

- New Member \$28
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