

THE FISH HAWK HERALD



Coeur d'Alene Chapter of the National Audubon Society
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Upcoming Events

Chapter Meeting February 14; Sign Up for Birding Trip to Skagit Valley By No Later Than February 7

The regular monthly chapter meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday, February 14, at the Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 Ramsey Road in Coeur d'Alene. The program for the meeting is to be determined.

A birding trip to the Skagit Valley has been planned for the President's Day Weekend. Participants will drive there on Friday, Feb. 17, bird on Feb. 18-19 and return Feb. 20. If you are interested in going but haven't signed up please contact Ted by no later than February 7. His email address is tehesmith@gmail.com.

Christmas Bird Count Results

Participants led by Doug Ward in the Dec. 17th Christmas Bird Count included 22 people on six teams in the field and 9 people watching their feeders. While the snow cover was fairly deep (6-16"), the weather was reasonably nice, with water being mostly open, all of which led to a fairly average count overall. A total of seventy-one (71) species and approximately 6,740 individuals were seen. The 31-year average for the CBC is 68 species and 7,000 individuals. In addition to count day totals, two species, the Common Loon and Brown Creeper, were reported in count week.

Two species new to the count this year included an immature Harris's Sparrow (Harvest Rd), and two Brown-headed Cowbirds (Rathdrum Prairie). Other species of interest seen included Northern Pintail (CdA), Bewick's Wren (Harvest

Rd), American Tree Sparrow (Harvest Rd), White-throated Sparrow (CdA), and Spotted Towhee (5 total for an all-time high count). Besides the towhees, we had high counts for a number of species including Mallard (1,239), Cooper's Hawk (6), Townsend's Solitaire (6), and American Tree Sparrow (8). We almost missed Steller's Jay for just the second time in 32 years – thank you Peggy Albertson for watching your feeder. However, we had just a single Bohemian Waxwing reported when we typically have over a hundred.

A very brief sampling of Doug Ward's comprehensive final report is below. To request the complete numerical chart, including CBC counts for 1991-2021 with averages, minimum and maximum numbers for each species, please email alicekoskela@icloud.com.

<u>Species</u>	<u>Individuals</u>
Canada Goose	1,551
American Wigeon	20
Mallard	1,239
Northern Pintail	3
Canvasback	31
Ring-necked Duck	42
Bufflehead	105
Common Goldeneye	95
Barrow's Goldeneye	4
Hooded Merganser	40
Common Merganser	53
Red-breasted Merganser	3
California Quail	113
Wild Turkey	181
Ring-necked Pheasant	3

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President's Message

Greetings Coeur d'Alene Audubon Society birders.

Can you believe it is February already? Where does time go? Holiday celebrations are behind us, school vacation didn't last long enough and we begin to think of Spring. I do hope each of you have some lingering, pleasant memories of the holidays to make you smile when you think of them.

Last month I mentioned my holiday intentions of going to North Dakota to visit family. Well, I went. I call it "the trip below zero." The thermometer showed -3 degrees when we left Coeur d'Alene and dipped to -27 degrees in spots along the way. You might say that is kind of cold for old folks to be traveling but our vehicle performed well and kept us warm. Temperatures warmed up as we traveled on to Denver for a few days and then home.

From a birding standpoint, the trip was a bust. I didn't see a Snowy Owl. I attribute it to snow covered ground causing a lack of prey visibility, as I didn't see the usual raptors either. One year ago, we made a Christmas holiday trip to Denver and back. I was amazed at the number of Rough Legged Hawks we saw across Montana and Wyoming on that trip. In fact, we nearly hit three of them on the highway on separate occasions. This year we saw less than a half dozen during the entire trip. No doubt this is also attributable to the depth of the snow and therefore lack of ability to spot their prey. They go where the food is!

Anticipating the coming of Spring awakens thoughts of bird migrations, and the question "where would I like to go this year" to enjoy the migration. Do I want to travel east to see the Warbler migration? How about to the Pacific Coast for the shorebird migration. Maybe to one of the waterfowl migration routes. Freezeout Lake in Montana comes to mind because I have heard much about the Snow Geese migrating through there, though I have never seen it. Reports say 40,000 to 50,000 Snow Geese can be seen at one time.

The photographer in me would like to see the mass liftoff against the background of the Rocky Mountain Front Range. Maybe one day. Or, enjoy the migration locally at your backyard feeder or local "hot spot." The most important thing is just to enjoy our avian friends as they make their respective ways to summer breeding grounds.

Speaking of migration, I am eagerly anticipating the February field trip to the Skagit Valley of Washington state. The field trip is addressed elsewhere in this newsletter so I'll only mention it here. This will be a new area of birding for me and I give thanks to Ted for the work he is doing to make the arrangements.

I never tire of seeing majestic bald eagles. Area photographers have posted some amazing photographs of eagles from fishing scenes to perched scenes, and numerous inflight photos. I got lucky once or twice myself. But, for a photographer, there is always "one more photo to get" so I'll probably be out by the lake next year.

Please look at the web site and/or look for an email announcing a program for our February monthly meeting. I learned a lesson this holiday season—it's difficult to find a speaker around the holidays. Please stay tuned for an announcement of the upcoming program.

I put together a January program from my own photos and called it "Bird Potpourri." I chose to emphasize some feeding habits of various birds from the diving fish eaters to the small songbirds foraging in winter. I included photos of fish-eating birds showing the amazing size of fish the respective birds can swallow. Here's a merganser:



I photographed this male Common Merganser at local Fernan Lake. We first looked at the Merganser's slender neck while not feeding. Then we viewed the sequence of the Merganser with a large trout (compared to the size of the bird) in its mouth, and a sequence of photos where he positioned the fish to go down headfirst.

Attention was called to how thick the neck of the Merganser became as the fish started down. It amazes me the size of fish he could swallow whole and have room for it inside.

The other feeding photo sequence was of a Ring-Billed Gull on Lake Coeur d'Alene diving into the water and catching a Kokanee Salmon. The size of the fish compared to the bird was of note once again. In this case, the gull took flight immediately after surfacing and manipulated the fish into a position to swallow it headfirst, all while airborne. The sequence showed the gull swallowing the fish while flying and the fish gradually disappeared down the gull's throat. Ring-Billed Gull photo is below.



Both of these events happened at local lakes, so you could take your chair and binoculars and just watch the action without having to travel large distances. You have to stay alert because these events happen fast, literally only a few seconds.

The merganser scene took place in the spring, while the gull scene took place in December. A hint, the presence of gulls on Lake Coeur d'Alene in December indicates the presence of plentiful fish and usually means there will be Bald Eagles to watch. If the number of gulls is small, the fish

are not as plentiful resulting in fewer eagles being present.

I'll just bet many of you are already planning summer vacations. Should you include a birding destination in your plans, would you make some notes, maybe take photos, and share with the club at one of our monthly meetings. Many of us enjoy hearing about the personal birding experiences of the members.

As we look forward to the spring migration, don't forget the local field trip occurring the second Tuesday morning of each month. Instructions are listed elsewhere in this newsletter.

Good Birding!
Ralph Kerr

"Wilma on the Wing"—A New Book for Young Readers from Boise State

"Wilma on the wing," a story about the 5,000-mile migration of the tiny Wilson's Warbler, has recently been released by Boise State University. The book was written by BSU biology major Anna Connington, who also illustrated it with her own original artwork.



Wilson's Warbler

"Wilma" traces the migration of the tiny warbler (it weighs about the same as eight thumbtacks) from Alaska to her wintering grounds in Mexico.

Along the way the bird stops in Boise at the Lucky Peak banding station operated by BSU's Intermountain Bird Observatory.

Connington, from Boise, volunteers with the observatory to band birds. She is an avid bird watcher and began selling her artwork when she was just 13. She is considering enrolling in graduate school in raptor biology or ornithology.

If you are interested in purchasing this book, click on ponyup.boisestate.edu/ibobook.

Test Your Avian Awareness: Raptor Facts and Falsehoods

One statement in each series below is false. Which is it? (Answers on Page 5.)

1. A. There are 325 species of raptors worldwide. B. Raptors have existed for more than 100 million years. C. The word "raptor" in Latin means "to seize." D. Raptors are generally anti-social.
2. All but one of these is a real town:
A. Buzzards Bay, MA B. Eagletown, OK
C. Hawkville, IL D. Vulture City, AZ
3. A. The peregrine falcon is the fastest animal on earth. B. A bald eagle nest in Ohio was shaped like a wineglass and weighed almost two metric tons. C. Some hawk nestlings fling their feces at each other. D. Sharp-shinned male hawks eat the heads off their prey before feeding their young.
4. A. The Utahraptor was just a little larger than the Velociraptor. B. The Utahraptor lived about 125 million years ago. C. Utahraptors looked like giant turkeys. D. Utahraptors had nine-inch claws.
5. A. Owls can carry prey that weighs 3 times their body weight. B. Vultures can spot a carcass from 4 miles away. C. Coopers Hawks have been known to drown their prey. D. Falconry is a popular sport in Australia.
6. A. Ospreys are found on every continent but Antarctica. B. Ospreys' outer toes are reversible. C. Osprey males breed with several mates each year. D. Ospreys sometimes eat insects.

7. A. The Andean Condor is the national bird of Chile. B. The longest-lived known condor was 100 years old C. Condors lay their eggs directly on rocky cliffs D. Condors can fly up to 180 miles in search of food.
8. A. The South Nicobar Serpent Eagle is only about 1 foot long. B. Eagles sometimes kill their prey by dropping it from great heights. C. An eagle's beak stops growing when the bird reaches maturity. D. Eagles have been observed playing with plastic bottles.
9. A. A hawk is "mantling" when it ruffles its feathers to scare away enemies. B. Turkey vultures spew vomit when harassed. C. Owls can rotate their heads 270°. D. Great Horned Owls are the top predator of Barred Owls.
10. A. Peregrine Falcon can migrate as much as 15,000 miles every year. B. Golden Eagles' legs are covered with feathers. C. Orange-colored owl eyes indicate the bird hunts late at night. D. Yellow-eyed owls hunt during the daylight.

The Magnificent Andean Condor



If you'd like to be on the Chapter's email list to receive reminders of meetings, field trips, bird sightings and other related notices please email a request to Shirley Sturts at Shirley.sturts@gmail.com.

Answers to Quiz: 1-A, 2-D, 3-C, 4-A, 5-D, 6-C, 7-B, 8-C, 9-A, 10-C.

Friday the 13th a Lucky Day for Sandpoint Birders

January 13th turned out to be a lucky Friday for a group of chapter members traveling to the Sandpoint area for a birding excursion.

Ted Smith, Dick Cripe, Mark Launder, Ron and Pam Gomes, Marilyn Robertson and Ted Smith braved the rain and fog along Sunnyside Road, Denton Slough and East Hope and were rewarded with sightings of 25 species, including Trumpeter Swans and Hooded Mergansers at Denton Slough.

The group had lunch at a nearby pizzeria and were treated to a view of a pigmy owl with its own meal, a large vole.

The highlight of the excursion was a sighting of a beautiful Long-tailed Duck, a rare bird in North Idaho. The group got a "tip" from a friend of Pam's that one had been spotted near Pringle Park in East Hope. Sure enough, the birders found the Long-tail just where they hoped it would be.



Long-tailed Duck

This species breeds along the Arctic Coast from Alaska to Greenland and throughout the Canadian tundra. The bird usually winters on both coasts of North America. The male, shown above, has stunning "mirror image" plumage which changes dramatically from winter to summer.

Los Angeles has a new "Star"—Rare Snowy Owl

Most tourists in the Los Angeles area are on the lookout for movie stars, but a rare bird that took up residence in a neighborhood outside LA had tourists flocking (yes, cringe) to catch a glimpse of a rare snowy owl.

The bird was seen perched on the roof of a house in the town of Cypress. It's since left the area, but while the owl was on the rooftop it attracted lines of cars and paparazzi to capture the owl with their telephoto lenses.

Snowy owls are most common in Northern Canada, with the southern limit of their usual winter range in the northernmost US.

This sighting has perplexed wildlife experts and birders, who snapped photos of the white-plumaged raptor among palm trees—an unusual combination of images.

David Bell, a board member of the Los Angeles Birders, was sure the bird was a clever fake until he saw it for himself.

"It's the last thing on Earth you'd expect to see here," Bell said. "You're thinking to yourself that it couldn't possibly be real, and then it swivels its head. Yep, it's real."

The snowy owl is one of the heaviest owl species, with thick layers of feathers and even a downy covering on its feet. Their wingspans are 4-5 feet on average. They swallow small prey whole, and eat a variety of other animals, including lemmings, Arctic hares, mice, ducks and seabirds.

Some people speculate that unusually cold temperatures in the Northwest in early December "tricked" the owl into flying so far south. Others think it might have been "ship-assisted"—meaning that rode in on a ship (not unusual for an owl) to the Port of Los Angeles, then headed inland to Orange County.

Last year a snowy owl was spotted in New York's Central Park, the first time the bird was seen there in more than a century.

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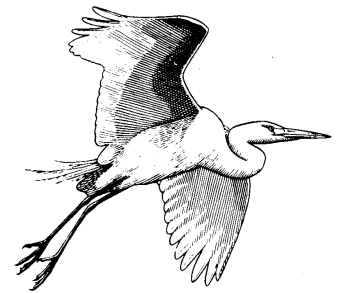
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