

# The Avalanche



North Cascades Audubon Society Newsletter

[www.northcascadesaudubon.org](http://www.northcascadesaudubon.org)

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Volume 59: Issue 2

May 2024

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## May Membership Program

May 28, 7:00pm at Whatcom Museum Old City Hall (In Person)

### Sound the Alarm! How chickadees and other small songbirds communicate sophisticated information about predators – Chris Templeton

The abundance of bird song is one of the most remarkable springtime transformations. These vocalizations fill the air with music-like sounds, but they are just one type of sound made by birds. Why do birds make a variety of sounds and what do these different sounds mean? In this presentation, biologist Chris Templeton will introduce you to avian bioacoustics, describe how birds produce their impressive vocalizations, and discuss the types of information they communicate. The talk will highlight some of the bioacoustics work his research group is conducting on common songbirds, such as chickadees and nuthatches. While the birds might be common, their vocalizations are anything but; chickadees have one of the most sophisticated means of communicating about predators. He will discuss what types of information is encoded in subtle variations of chickadee alarm calls and how other songbird species use this information to learn about threats in their environment.



*Black-capped Chickadee. Photo: Chris Templeton*

Dr. Chris Templeton is a faculty member in the Biology Department at Western Washington University. He has spent

more than 20 years as an ornithologist and studied a wide variety of different bird species. His research focuses primarily on avian cognition and communication—how smart are birds and how do they talk to each other? Templeton has traveled around the world to study numerous avian species and their vocalizations, and published more than 50 scientific papers on the subject.

***Please note: The next regular newsletter will be published in September 2024.***

# North Cascades Audubon Society

## Mission Statement

The purpose of this society is to promote the study and conservation of birds and other wildlife, their habitat, and the environment; to increase public appreciation of the values of wildlife, plants, and the natural environment; and to stimulate action to protect and preserve them for the future.

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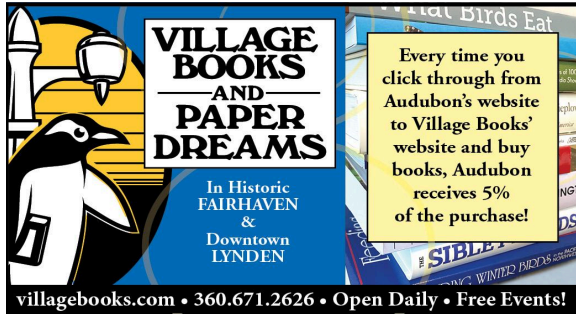
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## WhatcomBirds:

[Whatcom Birds](#) is a bulletin board where local birders exchange news of sightings, and ask for help in identifying birds. Usually we publish some highlights from the previous month, but last month seems to have been a quiet time for bird sightings with no recent postings.

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## May/June Field Trips

### [Birding at Semiahmoo Spit](#)

**Saturday, May 4, 2024**

**Time: 9:00am-12:00pm**

**Trip Leader: Paul Woodcock**

**Registration Required**

**Trip Limit: 16**

Meet at Semiahmoo County Park parking lot.

When spring arrives and migrant songbirds begin to return to the Pacific Northwest, our focus tends to shift to the wooded shoreline of Drayton Harbor. Most of our marine species will still be present so, after checking the beaches to see who is there on the water and the spit, we will focus part of our time on trying to find spring migrants such as Rufous Hummingbirds, Swainson's Thrushes, Wilson's Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Black-headed Grosbeaks and, hopefully, swallows overhead as well as others. Resident species from eagles to chickadees will also be present. Please join us to enjoy spring birding at Semiahmoo and Drayton Harbor.

### [Clayton Beach](#)

**Saturday May 11, 2024**

**Time: 9:30-11:30am**

**Leader: Alex Jeffers**

**Registration Required**

**Trip Limit: 16**

Meet at the Lost Lake Parking Lot, DISCOVER PASS OR PAYMENT AT THE PARKING LOT REQUIRED.

Larrabee State Park, located where the Chuckanut Mountains come down to the Salish Sea, offers a great birding experience during spring migration. Both the forests and the water provide habitat for spring migrants, summer arrivals, and year-round residents. The newly constructed Clayton Beach Trail makes the best of both wood and water, winding through the forests down to a sandstone coastline. We will expect to see migrating warblers and other songbirds, as well as ducks and shorebirds in the water. We will be walking approximately 1.2 miles on uneven terrain, restrooms are available at the parking lot.

**Whatcom Falls Park**  
**Saturday May 18, 2024**  
**Time: 8:30-10:30am**  
**Leader: Joan Sauber**  
**Registration Required**  
**Trip Limit: 12**

Meet at Whatcom Falls Park parking by fish hatchery, Silver Beach Road

Let's explore Whatcom Falls Park. We'll start in the parking lot, and make our way through a wooded section to Derby Pond. There should be opportunities for various viewings there. We'll continue up the trail that will lead to the wetlands adjacent to Scudder Pond on the northwest side with a possible short side trip to view the old trestle. After spending some time in the wetlands area, if time permits, we will work our way over to Scudder Pond. The loop continues back along Whatcom Falls Creek and eventually to our starting point. Of course, no trip would be complete without a view of the old stone bridge built by WPA to view the falls.

There are bathrooms available. We will be walking mostly on gravel paths although some of the forest paths have uneven ground. There will be very minimal elevation gain. If we make our way to Scudder Pond, viewing from Electric Avenue, we would need to be careful since the viewing area is right next to the road where there are no sidewalks.

**Beginning Birding by Ear at Point Whitehorn**  
**Sunday May 19, 2024**  
**Time: 9:00am-12:00pm**  
**Leaders: Pam Borso and Phil Calise**  
**Registration Required**  
**Trip Limit: 12**

Join Pam and Phil to hone your skills in identifying birds by ear as you learn to recognize avian species by their calls and songs. This will be a fun trip for beginners as well as for experienced birders who wish to stay in tune with our feathered friends.

We will find resident species in woodland habitats as well as some newly arrived migrants. Note that the trip will not involve walking down to the beach.

**Tennant Lake Wildlife Area**  
**Sunday May 19, 2024**  
**Time: 9:30am-12:00pm**  
**Trip Leader: Helen Dolejsi**  
**Registration Required**  
**Trip Limit: 12**



Parking is available at 5200-5298 Nielsen Rd, Ferndale at the Tennant Lake Fragrance Garden. We will meet at the Fragrance Garden.

We will be exploring the Tennant Lake Wildlife Area in Ferndale, which includes wetlands, woods, and a 50-foot-high viewing tower. The walk will be a mix of gravel trails and boardwalk. The lake can be a wonderful place to see ducks, woodpeckers, songbirds, and raptors. All are welcome!

**Ladies of the Lake**  
**Sunday May 26, 2024**  
**Time: 7:00-10:00 am**  
**Leaders: Sue Parrott & Pauline Sterin**  
**Registration Required**  
**Trip Limit: 10**

Join us for a few hours of birding at Ladies of the Lake, a Whatcom Land Trust property

at the south end of Lake Whatcom. We will spend time on the south end of Lake Whatcom (South Lake Whatcom County Park), along a short segment of Park Road, and then wander through parts of Ladies of the Lake. The property includes a field surrounded by woods (big leaf maple, alder, and conifers) and edged by two streams. The trees will be fully leafed out....so we will focus on listening, and looking of course! The diversity of habitat and environments should provide us with a wide variety of bird species. We will be walking on a paved road for a short distance, dirt and gravel trails, and some grassy meadows with uneven surfaces. The distance will be no more than 2 miles. We will meet at Ladies of the Lake - specific directions will be provided to those registered a few days before the event.

### **Birding at Semiahmoo Spit**

**Saturday, June 1, 2024**

**Time: 9:00am-12:00pm**

**Trip Leader: Paul Woodcock**

**Registration Required**

**Trip Limit: 16**

Meet at Semiahmoo County Park parking lot.

Looking ahead toward summer at Semiahmoo, the birding emphasis shifts from our marine birds more toward returning migrant songbirds. Certainly, representatives of most marine families will still be present. But, after checking out what is present on and around the water, we will spend some time in the shoreline forest looking for woodpeckers, swallows, thrushes, warblers, sparrows and finches among others. We can expect to find Rufous Hummingbird, Hermit Thrush, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped and Wilson's Warblers, Savannah, Song and White-crowned Sparrows, American Goldfinch and Brown-headed Cowbird as well as other migrant and resident species.

Please join us on and along the beaches of Semiahmoo for this look ahead to summer birding. Birders of all skill levels are welcome. If you are a beginning birder, please feel free to ask questions and for help in locating and identifying what we find.



### **Please read- important!**

#### **NCAS Officer Elections**

The nominating committee of Blanche Burch and Pam Borso would like to submit the following candidates for officers for next year for North Cascades Audubon Society.

*President*----- Jamie Huson

*Vice President*-Steven Harper

*Secretary*----- Deborah Kaye

*Treasurer*----- Sue Parrott

We will be accepting nominations at the membership meeting when we vote **May 28, 2024** so if you or anyone you know is interested please contact either one of us:

[Blanche Burch](#) or [Pam Borso](#)

## Save the Date!!!

### Pearrygin Lake Campout

Thursday, May 30th through Sunday, June 2nd.



Our sixteenth **annual NCAS Campout** will be held at Pearrygin Lake State Park group camp again this year. Camping (tents and small vans only) in the group camp will be restricted to no more than 30 people (NCAS members prioritized). Field trips, led by leaders familiar with the area, will be scheduled for Saturday and Sunday. Campers are free to roam on their own on Thursday and Friday. **Reservations are required for this event whether you are camping or not and will be accepted beginning with the publishing of the May newsletter.**

There is room for people with tents in the group camp and vans or small pickup toppers are allowed in the parking area. RVs and trailers are not allowed in the group camp or parking area, however reservations may be available in the Pearrygin Lake State Park Campground. Picnic tables and grates are available for cooking (bring your own food) and water and a toilet are on site. A swimming area is also on site to enjoy after a warm day of birding. Showers and full-service bathrooms can be accessed 1 1/2 miles away in the main campground. Reservations can also be made for lodging

in the Winthrop area for those not wanting to camp. The primary focus of the campout is birds, however there will be time for lounging and enjoying the sunny and clear weather and for visiting. In past years people have brought their musical instruments and we've had a sing-along on one of the evenings. Other entertainment is also appreciated! Cost is \$10/night for each party.

You will be able to register and pay for your camping beginning May 1st by contacting Blanche Burch at [bburch@northcascadesaudubon.org](mailto:bburch@northcascadesaudubon.org) or 360-852-3088. Information we will need is: Whether camping or not, which nights, number in your group, names of each person and the field trips they would like to attend Saturday and Sunday (see link below). Please also provide information on your NCAS membership status and number of people in your group.

[Field trip descriptions:](#)

[Bird list:](#)

We look forward to an amazing weekend of birding!

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*(new from Cornell Labs)*

### Save Spring Migrating Birds

#### Cut light pollution and treat glass to prevent deadly collisions

Just received this important and timely release from Cornell Labs. It's worth reading in full, but there isn't space for it here. There are simple things *you* can do to reduce mortality in migrating birds. Click on [this link](#) to view the article.

## Special Events at the Whatcom Museum

121 Prospect St., Bellingham

**Friday, May 31, and Saturday, June 1, 2024**

The [Whatcom Museum](#) in Bellingham, home to nearly 500 preserved birds in the [John M. Edson Hall of Birds](#), is proud to host taxidermy world title holder and museum preservationist **Allis Markham** for a weekend of events, May 31 – June 1. Allis apprenticed with taxidermy luminary Tim Bovard at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles for several years before starting her own company, [Prey Taxidermy](#). She and biologist-taxidermist **Paloma Strong** teach classes utilizing museum preservation best practices, and their taxidermy clients include national museums and nature and science centers.



Allis and Paloma are bringing their curriculum, specimens, and stories to the Whatcom Museum for two special events:

**Friday, May 31: “Stuffed”**

**Film Viewing and Q&A**

**6:30 – 9 pm**

On Friday, May 31, the museum is hosting a viewing of the film “[Stuffed](#),” which premiered to acclaim at SXSW in Austin. It features Allis and documents the often-surprising and always-unique world of taxidermy through the eyes of the newest generation of artists and naturalists. The film allows the audience to dip into and explore a diverse subculture, where sculptors must also be scientists. It is a genre of art formed by a collection of people who have a fanaticism for nature, matched only by their desire to protect it.

Allis will join us for the viewing, answer questions, and show us a sampling of taxidermy specimens.

[Tickets on sale now](#)

*Discounts offered for Whatcom Museum members*

**Saturday, June 1: Taxidermy Lab 101  
10 am – 12:30 pm**

This demonstration course will provide students with an on-site tutorial into the world of museum taxidermy. Students will work with acclaimed museum preservationists Allis Markham and Paloma Strong of Prey Taxidermy to discover how this ‘dead art’ is breathing life into conservation education. Classes at the Prey Taxidermy studio sell out quickly and require travel to Los Angeles, but for one weekend, Allis and Paloma will bring their expertise to Bellingham.

This is an introductory course where students will learn the basics of taxidermy through detailed presentations and demonstrations followed by a Q&A. This is not one of our hands-on workshops but is a demonstration and presentation course. While students will not participate or take home any pieces, they will be given a comprehensive overview of the craft of

taxidermy. Students will also be sent a follow-up email with a PDF copy of the presentations and a list of resources discussed in the course. This is an excellent opportunity if you've ever wanted to learn taxidermy but didn't know where to start, or if you're exploring taxidermy already and have questions.

[Click here for a lab curriculum and to purchase tickets.](#)

*Discounts offered for Whatcom Museum members*

**Also at the Museum this summer...**

### **Introduction to Scientific Illustration**

**Saturday, July 20, 10:30 am – 3:30 pm**



Join **Madison Mayfield**, natural history artist, taxidermist, and ornithology collections manager at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, for a scientific illustration workshop at the Whatcom Museum.

In 2016, she graduated from the Natural Science Illustration Certificate Program at the University of Washington and has been creating science art as a freelance illustrator (and as part of her own personal art practice) ever since. She has spent several

years working as an art educator in museum spaces, teaching scientific illustration workshops at the Field Museum, the National Museum of Scotland, the California Academy of Sciences, and the Puget Sound Museum, and she is passionate about introducing anyone and everyone to the world of science illustration! Madison currently serves on the national board for the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators as well as on the board for the local GNSI-Northwest chapter.

This workshop will be held in the Lightcatcher Building studio (250 Flora St., Bellingham) with a short walk to Old City Hall, the Whatcom Museum's second exhibition space, to view the [John M. Edson Hall of Birds](#) and [UNEARTHED: Art and Science Survey the Fossil Record](#).

[Tickets on sale now](#)

*Ticket prices include all art supplies (which students will keep) and museum admission. Discounts offered for Whatcom Museum members.*

**Rand Jack & Whatcom Land Trust: Fireside Chat at Whatcom Museum**  
**Friday, May 3, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.**



The community will celebrate the latest art exhibition by Whatcom Land Trust



co-founder **Rand Jack**, *Carving Birds and Conserving Land*, at Whatcom Museum. Jack will share conservation stories from the last forty years and answer audience questions about his exquisite wooden bird carvings and conservation work.

Follow Whatcom Land Trust on social media or [sign up for Whatcom Land Trust's e-newsletter](#) so you don't miss out on other events. Stewardship work parties, guided birding and hiking opportunities on Trust properties and much more are planned for the months ahead.

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## Seeking Spanish Speaking Volunteers

Do you speak Spanish? Are you interested in sparking the joy of birding in the lives of young people? We are seeking volunteers fluent in Spanish to introduce concepts of the avian world to school age kids with partner organizations. Opportunities may include field trips or in-classroom learning and may be conducted during the school year or during summer break. If you're interested contact [Pam Borso](#) our Volunteer Coordinator.

### CAUTION: Bird feeding makes you happy!

Mon-Fri: 10 - 4:30  
Saturday: 10 - 4

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## The House Sparrow

by Owen Bamford

Yet another in an occasional series of essays on non-charismatic birds.



It's brown and gray, doesn't sing, doesn't belong here, and is pushing out native species. But the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*, and just "sparrow" from here on) has its fans. According to a website called Owlcation, "In modern new-age circles, sparrows are believed to symbolize joy, community, teamwork, protection, simplicity, hard work or self-worth. " The same website informs us that "In Chinese culture, the sparrow is an auspicious symbol of happiness and the coming of spring, while in Indonesian lore, sparrows signify birth, marriage, rain and other good tidings." Perhaps it's a different sparrow- the text is vague about the actual species. Sparrows were associated by the ancient Greeks with Aphrodite, the goddess of love, due to their perceived lustfulness. Shakespeare mentions sparrows in 11 plays and poems, including Hamlet's musing on "a special providence in the fall of a sparrow". As Shakespeare was writing in England, he was probably thinking of the House Sparrow.

Although they are not particularly impressive or attractive birds, they are noticeable, if only because of their incessant loud chirping. Originally native to the Middle East, they are now found just about everywhere, following deliberate or accidental introduction, and are thought to be the second most abundant wild bird in the world. They first reached the US when they were introduced to Brooklyn in 1851, and had spread as far as the Rockies by 1900. The word "wild" needs some qualification, because according to the Audubon website, their association with humans is the secret of their success. They are found almost everywhere that humans live, feeding on stuff that we drop, and nesting in any available nook, including indoors and even underground. Anywhere there are houses, there are likely to be sparrows. In fact they are so abundant and commonplace that we often don't really notice them, but they have been extensively studied by ornithologists and bird physiologists just because they are robust, easy to obtain, and thrive in captivity. About 5,000 scientific papers have been published on House Sparrows. So what do we know about them?

Body length is about 6", and weight about an ounce. They are not closely related to New World sparrows, but coloration is similar- mainly browns, black, gray and white. The male has buff-gray underparts, white cheeks, a gray cap and a black bib. The back is striped brown and black. The female is duller and lacks the black bib. In the wild they mainly eat seeds and insects, but after centuries of hanging around people they will eat almost anything. They are highly social- they roost and forage in groups, and often nest communally with groups of nests close together.

Sparrows mate for life and are more or less monogamous, though some studies find that 15% of the hatchlings are fathered by a male who is not the female's partner. If a male doesn't find a mate, it may stay around a mated pair and help raise the young. It sounds altruistic, but there is an advantage- it may get accepted as a substitute mate if the original is lost. The nest is domed, about 8-10" in diameter, with an outer layer of

stems and roots, a middle layer of dead grass and leaves, and a lining of feathers. Four or five eggs are usually laid, and there are at least two broods a year, or more if food is abundant. Incubation lasts 11-14 days, mostly by the female, and the nestlings stay in the nest for about another two weeks. By 14 days they can fly and feed themselves. Only about 25% survive the first season, but after that the survival rate increases, with about 50% mortality per year. Mortality is from predation, diseases (several), parasites (many), roadkill, fights with other sparrows, and deliberate killing by humans, either to preserve native species or (in parts of the Mediterranean) for food. Domestic cats may be one of their most important predators.

So how are they doing? Judging by their apparent abundance, they are doing well, but longitudinal population data tell a different story. Many, but not all, populations show a dramatic decline in numbers. In the UK, populations have declined 60-90% since a peak in the 1970's. In North America, the decline is around 60-70% since the 1960's. In the Netherlands the sparrow is considered an endangered species. The reasons for these declines are not clear, but a decrease in insect populations caused by agricultural use of insecticides, is one possible cause. Fewer insects would result in reduced breeding success as they are critical for feeding the nestlings. Another possible cause is a shortage of nesting sites resulting from changes in building practice. Whatever the cause, sparrows are still abundant, widespread and, at least overall, not endangered so far. Love them or hate them, they will be with us for a long time to come.





# BEACHWALKERS Wanted!

## BEACHED BIRD TRAINING

RSVP by contacting:  
206-221-6893  
coasst@uw.edu

SATURDAY, May 11, 2024  
11:00 am–5:00 pm

Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve  
10441 Bayview-Edison Rd,  
Mt. Vernon, WA 98273

Join the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST)  
and help make a difference for the environment!

COASST  
University of Washington  
School of Aquatic &  
Fishery Sciences

COASST participants collect data on beach-cast carcasses of marine birds on a monthly basis to establish the baseline pattern of bird mortality on North Pacific beaches. Data collected helps address important marine conservation issues and protect marine resources. No prior scientific experience is needed. Beach surveys are best and most fun when conducted in groups of 2 or more — so please come with a survey partner in mind or in tow! The training is free, but we do ask for a \$31 refundable survey kit deposit to take the materials home.



Photo: N. Quinter/COASST

## North Cascades Audubon Society Membership

We hope you will support North Cascades Audubon by joining the chapter locally. Our chapter is locally funded, and we do not receive any portion of donations you make to National Audubon. Your commitment to Audubon is important to us. We will continue to provide you with information regarding local chapter activities through our website. All activities are open to the public.

### We're Paperless!

We hope you are enjoying our fully digital newsletter which allows us to be more environmentally friendly! The newsletter will continue to be e-published monthly between September and May. Please help us ensure you will continue to receive our newsletter by verifying we have the correct email address on file. To make any changes to your contact information please email: [membership@northcascadesaudubon.org](mailto:membership@northcascadesaudubon.org)

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## Join or Renew (circle one)

*Please make checks payable to North Cascades Audubon and mail to NCAS, PO Box 5805, Bellingham 98227. Please make sure you include your email address. You can also [join online](#). Does your company match donations? Let them know you donated to North Cascades Audubon Society*

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 Kestrel  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$35 Merlin  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$50 Prairie Falcon  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$75 Peregrine Falcon  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 Gyrfalcon  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$\_\_\_\_\_ Other (any contribution small or large is appreciated)

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