
Echo

August 2019
Olympia, Washington



We're bringing birds to a Shelton Classroom

By Kim Adelson – One of the exciting new collaborations begun by BHAS last year is a partnership with Aidé Villalobos, a second-grade teacher at Evergreen Elementary School in Shelton. We have long talked about our desire to “adopt” a school; that is, to do more than give one-shot presentations in classrooms but to instead return to a single school on a regular basis and use birds to foster an appreciation of nature and an interest in science in children. Beginning this winter and continuing into next year, we are doing just that!

Aidé is an energetic, enthusiastic, and creative teacher. She approached us about coming into her classroom to teach her students about birds, show them how to properly use binoculars, and help select bird feeders and food. Her hope was that observing birds would not only be engaging to her students, but would also be an avenue to helping students access national science and math standards, including developing data collection and graphing skills. Aidé successfully wrote several grants which allowed her to purchase binoculars for her students’ use, and, thanks to Bob Morse’s generosity, we were able to provide the class with field guides. She also got funds to set up several bird feeders outside the classroom windows.

Evergreen Elementary is a dual language school, and the students spend half of the day learning in English and half in Spanish. Aidé is partnered with another teacher, Jennifer Dawson, and on the days we come they modify their schedules so that we can work with both sets of students back-to-back. We spend about an hour with each group of children. Shelley Spalding and I have taken them on bird walks, practiced binocular use, talked about the birds likely to show up at their feeders, worked with them on using a book’s index, discussed how you can guess what a bird eats by the shape of its beak, and explained about the dangers birds face while migrating. Next year, we hope also to have the students keep running records of the birds seen from their classroom windows, practice making graphs of the data, and coordinate with the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge to prepare the students for their field trip there.

The children are enthusiastic and excited to learn about birds! They look happy when they realize that we will be working with them, and they ask us many questions. A significant number already seem to know quite a bit about our local birds but are eager to learn more. We truly look forward to going back to Evergreen next year.

Armchair Birding: Saving Orcas by Naming Orcas

by Anne Kilgannon – Recently we were in a park overlooking Active Pass*, about to return to our car and the next activity when a strange—sensation—vibration—surge—pulled our eyes back to the water. Seals were skittering in all directions, gulls wheeled overhead, and there in the waves was a pod of at least a dozen orca whales. Surfacing, blowing, dorsal fins held high, powerful bodies pushing through the water, they dominated the strait. Everyone in the vicinity stopped and gaped and gasped. The moment of their passage couldn't have been more than a few minutes but we were all spellbound; we had been granted a very special boon. Long after they had passed out of sight we could feel their presence, their power. It was much more visceral than seeing them on television in a nature show; I realized I really knew very little about them at all.

The library had several books on orcas: one I dipped into, *Of Orcas and Men: What Killer Whales Can Teach Us*, by David Neiwert was very helpful, and another that riveted my full attention, *Puget Sound Whales for Sale: The Fight to End Orca Hunting*, by Sandra Pollard. I learned that the whales we had seen that day would have likely belonged to the northern resident group. Like the southern resident group that live in Puget Sound waters, they chiefly eat Chinook and chum salmon and other fish, unlike the Transient, or Bigg's, group, who depend on seals and other marine mammals for their sustenance....although the seals present in the water that day were taking no chances. There are also Offshore orcas, a different group.

These groups, identified as ecotypes, overlap in some areas but do not interbreed, have different diets, and different vocalizations, in short, different cultures...not so different from humans. I had not fully realized before that orcas were so distinct, that if we—terrible thought—lost all our local whales that other whales could not replace them. As our numbers of orcas swimming these waters plummet, we are facing extinction in real time. My thoughts flitted to marbled murrelets; how we are fast losing them in our area too, but how they continue to survive in other places, but that is not “good enough.” It was never an answer. I had a whole new set of questions and concerns.

The orca lifespan almost matches the human one, and their life cycle and reproductive patterns are also not dissimilar. One crucial and fascinating fact is that orca families are matrilineal, headed by grandmother whales which, studies suggest, live on well past their reproductive prime and take on leadership roles to pass on their knowledge and accumulated experience to the next generations. This is a rarity in the animal world and helps account for their intelligence and complex group dynamics.

Learning about this close family relationship added to the pain and poignancy of reading about the relentless capturing of orca whales in Puget Sound in the 1960s and 1970s. Pollard spares her readers no details of the exhaustive chasing, cruel corralling and netting of the orcas, and then the wrenching separating out of the young orcas from their family groups and remorseless removal for sale, while forlorn and helpless grandmothers, parents and siblings circle and cry out in fear and longing for their lost family members. From Whidbey Island right into our local Budd Bay, the hunters pursued the orca families to provide whales, ostensibly for so-called research and public education, but really for entertainment and profit for Seaworld-type aquariums and tourist attractions. To me, the worst part of

the story was how many of the whales died within months of their captivities, all that pain for nothing, yet lasting for generations of disruption and destruction for the whale families that were torn asunder.

Finally, thanks to a growing wave of awareness of the horrors involved and some valiant work by local heroes and advocates, the hunts were stopped. And true research began. In recent decades we have learned so much more about the nature of orcas, of how they live and what they need to flourish. Fear based in myth has been replaced by awe. These are astonishing beings, indeed.

Now the danger is more insidious: the pollution and other degradations of Puget Sound waters that impact the orcas directly and indirectly as it decimates their food sources. And the intrusive noise of too many ships and whale-watching boats that interfere with whale communication and hunting techniques. And now the uncertainties of climate change that play havoc with ocean currents and water quality, and related issue of the presence of plastic waste in ocean waters. News reports of dying orcas trouble our hearts and minds. The new issues are much less visible than boats bearing down on hapless orcas before our eyes and therefore much more difficult to address. The present drama calls for new solutions.

Still, as Crosscut reporter Mark Leiren-Young writes in his June 24, 2019 posting, "*Orcas: Call them by their names*," we can begin with understanding and empathy and galvanize action by acknowledging our sameness, our fellow creatureliness and our growing affection. He notes: "*Jane Goodall changed the world by naming the animals she studied. People who had never cared about apes quickly connected with stories about David Greybeard, Flo and Flint.*" The same could be true for orcas. He meticulously names all the southern resident whales now living. (See: <https://crosscut.com/2019/06/orcas-call-them-their-names>) And then he adds: "*One real action we all can take during Orca Action Month is to learn those names — and we can stop waiting six months, as we usually do, to see if newborn orca calves survive and give the latest member of J-Pod a name.*" Ominously, Leiren-Young leaves us with the words of whale researcher Alexandra Morton, "*If we lose the southern residents, it will be the first extinction where every individual's name was known.*" Let's use the power of that insight to make a difference for these spectacular beings. It goes without saying that tackling the issues that threaten southern resident orcas will reverberate throughout the web of life and rebound for the good of herons, ducks, cormorants, gulls—and ourselves. Come to think of it, everything has a name even if we don't yet know it; let's make every one count, murrelet, orca, salmon... (*photo courtesy Robert Pittman, Wikimedia Commons*)

*Active Pass is a strait of water flowing between two of the southern Gulf Islands, Mayne and Galiano, that empties into Georgia Strait. The Gulf Islands are geographically an extension of the San Juan Islands, but are located in Canadian waters. It is a designated Important Bird Area and is frequented by Orca whales. To see a video of whales in these waters,

see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfyVMWuUQnw>. To learn more about birds in these waters,

see: <http://www.activepassiba.ca/>

Bird Cruising on Hood Canal

by Sharon Moore – Led by expert birders Bill Tweit and Gene Revelas, 51 of us from Black Hills and Tahoma Audubon chapters boarded the Lady Alderbrook on April 28, 2019 in anticipation of an excellent birding morning on Hood Canal. Under clear skies promising good visibility and braced by a

brisk temperature, we settled in the deck chairs and along the railings on the roomy 60 ft. cruiser. Originally built in Coos Bay, Oregon, and named the “Rendezvous,” this craft was specifically designed to accommodate dinner cruises; hence, the excellent hull stability and extra-wide upper deck.

The morning started out well with a raft of Western Grebes sighted in the middle of the Canal. Bill estimated 500 birds in that flock. Later we spotted another large raft of Western Grebes to the north of us. As to why the birds congregate in those waters in the spring, Bill explained that millions of young chum salmon were migrating at that time down the Skokomish River into the Canal to embark on their long journey to the Pacific. That yearly chum migration provides a rich food source for many species of birds.

The strong Grebe presence we witnessed was a relief to those of us who have been aware that, by the 1980’s, Hood Canal had become severely polluted. This habitat degradation affected the fish populations adversely, which also impacted bird numbers as well. By 2006 a Watershed Management Plan (90.82 RCW) was finally approved for Mason and Jefferson Counties to improve water quality, stream flows, fish habitat and marine waters. In the last 12 years, cooperating municipalities, agencies and tribes have improved the Hood Canal waters; however, significantly more effort is needed to increase levels of dissolved oxygen in the water, which chum and other fish species need to survive. As birders we understand that improved fish survival will attract more birds into the Canal watershed.

During the morning cruise we identified 20 species including Red-necked Grebe, Western Grebe, Horned Grebe, White-winged Scoter, Surf Scoter, Common Loon, Red-throated Loon, Pacific Loon, Glaucous-winged Gull, Mew Gull, Red-breasted Merganser, Scaup, Great Blue Heron, European Starling, Bald Eagle, Bufflehead, American Crow, Purple Martin and Pigeon Guillemot. Towards the end of our time on the water, a Marbled Murrelet appeared in the far distance. Bill said it was an unusual sighting since that species is seldom observed in Hood Canal any longer. Severe loss of old-growth forests, needed by Murrelets to raise their young has banished the birds from that historic nesting habitat.

A lovely cruise with plenty of bird sightings made for a successful three-hour event. With thanks to Lady Alderbrook co-skippers Cindy Sund and Duain Dugan, we disembarked with plans to return in spring, 2020. (*Trip photos by Steve Curry, Western Grebe photo courtesy Frank Schulenburg, Wikimedia Commons*)

Update on Rocky Prairie

Elizabeth Rodrick, Sharron Coontz, and Diane Sonntag were recently interviewed by Debbie Cockrell who wrote an extensive article in the Olympian about the proposed warehouse project, <https://www.theolympian.com/news/business/article232147112.html>.

Following is an excerpt from The Friends of Rocky Prairie’s new website, <https://www.friendsofrokyprairie.org/petition>.

The current owner of Rocky Prairie, the Port of Tacoma, is working with a Missouri company, NorthPoint, to develop a massive intermodal industrial center on Rocky Prairie. The reported 6,000,000

square feet of NorthPoint warehousing would be one of the largest in the northwest. With a facility this massive we can expect 24 hours a day truck and train traffic with thousands of trucks per day clogging area streets and highways from Maytown to Lacey. It will also light up the skies for miles around, fill the air with noise and pollution, and disrupt or destroy the sensitive balance of nature in the area. The buildings' size of **6,000,000 square feet is the equivalent of 104 football fields**, and the parking areas and roads will add much more paved impervious surface. This development would border [West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area](#) and [Millersylvania State Park](#). This is no place for an industrial hub!

OUR COUNTY COMMISSIONERS NEED TO HEAR FROM US: DON'T REZONE THE MAYTOWN PROPERTY TO ALLOW A HUGE INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX.

What you can do:

- [Sign the Online Petition here.](#)
- [Send each Commissioner an email explaining why this is a bad idea.](#)
- Help get Postcard Petition signatures from neighbors and friends. Email sdanver7@aol.com for details.
- [Read the Fact Sheet](#) and help educate friends and neighbors on Next Door, Facebook, and Instagram.

Birding by Kayak

by Bruce Jacobs – The Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge is one of the treasures we are fortunate to share. I've made thousands of visits there over the years, but recently, I got another view of the Nisqually Reach, this time by kayak through the City of Olympia Department of Parks and Recreation's annual kayaking trip to the Nisqually Reach. Although it's not a "birding" trip, I would highly recommend it.

The trip I took was in May; it was cool and threatening rain at 9am when a dozen of us met at Swantown Marina. Staff members loaded up the kayaks and gear and drove us to the boat launch at Luhr Beach, where we were greeted by the Purple Martin colony. Once we launched, we made our way south, just about to the end of the Refuge boardwalk, and spent a while exploring. Although there were only a few birds visible (Eagles, Cormorants, and Gulls), looking at the Refuge from this vantage point was an eye opener (I only wish the weather had been better).

We then made our way north along the shore to Tolmie State Park. In route I saw six Caspian Terns, several Belted Kingfishers, more Cormorants, and at least a dozen Bald Eagles, one of which landed in what appeared to be a nest. About half way, there were three Pigeon Guillemots and an Osprey catching a fish. I heard numerous Song Sparrows, Steller's Jays and an Olive Sided Flycatcher calling. Of course, there were the ever-present American Crows and American Robins. The water was exceptionally clear enabling us to see the clams, fish and jellyfish; the houses and geology along the shore were also interesting to look at. A number of seals were curious about us, and kept diving around and under the kayaks. We passed the National Fish & Oyster farms, trying not to disturb the oyster

crates. We pulled into Tolmie State Park at about 12:30, had our lunch under the trees and then returned to Luhr Beach under steady rain.

Even though the weather wasn't the best, I truly enjoyed the trip. The Olympia Department of Parks and Recreation staff are first rate, the trip was well planned and suited for anyone with basic kayaking skills. Check it out next summer as an optional way to go birding!

Duck Stamp Details

The newest Duck Stamp went on sale at the end of June. The art contest was won by Scot Storm with his rendition of a Wood Duck. This stamp is available to purchase for \$25, and, through June 30, 2020, it will give the purchaser admission to all national wildlife refuges that charge admission. However, that is not the best reason for making this purchase. It is one of the easiest ways that anyone can support bird habitat conservation, and it is among the most successful conservation tools ever created to protect habitat for birds and other wildlife. These conservation revenue stamps use 98 percent of the purchase price to help acquire/protect wetland habitat and to purchase conservation easements for the National Wildlife Refuge system.

Waterfowl hunters over the age of 16 are required to buy these stamps; hunters have been the major purchasers since 1934 when the first stamps were sold. Now hunting is in decline while wildlife watching and photography are increasing. It is up to us conservationists to step up and put money into a system we enjoy all over the country every day of the year. Since it first began, sales have brought in over a billion dollars, helping to conserve over six million acres of high quality waterfowl habitat. Let's keep this ball rolling!

Duck stamps can be purchased at Nisqually Wildlife Refuge gift shop or office as well as at the following retail stores: Cabela's, BassPro Shops, WalMart, and some post offices.

There is also a Junior Duck Stamp competition, and those stamps are available for purchase. Take a look at this year's winner by Haley Chandler, age 18. Revenue from the sale of these stamps supports conservation education in all 50 states.

Volunteer Opportunities August 2019

All chapter work is done by volunteers for whom we are very grateful. There are many opportunities to become involved at a level that is comfortable for you. Please contact Kathleen Snyder (ksnyder75@gmail.com) if you are interested in any of the following:

Graphic Arts: Our BHAS tri-fold display board for tabling events needs updating and improving. If you enjoy working with lettering, photographs, and visual presentation, we would love to turn you loose on this project!

Financial advisor: The Ways and Means Committee is looking for one or two folks willing to help make decisions about our organization’s investment strategies and fiscal policy. If you are interested or would like more information, please contact Kim Adelson at kgdolgin@owu.edu

Outreach Coordinator: The purpose of this new position is to increase our visibility to the community and to reach diverse audiences which are not part of our traditional demographic. If you are familiar with our area’s many festivals, parades, and other environmental events (or are eager to be familiar with them), we would love to talk about how you can help BHAS expand its reach.

EVENTS FOR AUGUST 2019						
EVENTS IN 8/2019		SEARCH Keyword		FIND EVENTS		VIEW AS Month
« July						September »
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
28	29	30	31 Bird Walk at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Shelton Birds & Brew	1	2	3 Birding and Breakfast at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge/ Leslie Lynam
4	5	6	7 Bird Walk at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge	8	9	10
11	12	13 Grays Harbor County Birding Hotspots	14 Bird Walk at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge	15 Birding Eagle's Pride Golf Course	16	17
18	19 Olympia Birds & Brew	20	21 Bird Walk at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge	22	23	24
25	26	27	28 Bird Walk at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Shelton Birds & Brew	29	30	31