

Echo

July 2023
Olympia, Washington



BHAS ANNUAL PICNIC

We had absolutely beautiful weather and a lovely setting for our annual picnic at Squaxin Park. Over 60 people attended which must be a record. There were lots of conversations among our members, some of whom hadn't seen each other since pre-Covid. We also honored our 2023 award winners: Stephanie Bishop as the Dave McNett Environmental Educator of the Year, Sue Danver (2022) and Elizabeth Rodrick (2023) as Volunteers of the Year, and the Legacy Forest Project and the Center for Responsible Forestry for the Jack Davis Conservationists of the Year. The event was topped off with a rousing game of Bird Bingo which had multiple winners. In addition, there were many free books and avian-themed items available for folks to take home. Miles McEvoy led an after-event bird walk through the lovely forest of the park.

We thank our Picnic Committee chaired by Stevie Morris for all their work. The committee consisted of Carla Miller, Kathy Prosser, Bruce Jacobs, Margery Beeler and Kathleen Snyder.

The Enchantment of the Familiar

Part 2

By Rachel Hudson

I messaged my fiancé late one night as I sat in bed, misery incarnate, tissues shoved up both nostrils, gasping ineffectively for oxygen with my mouth wide open and drier than the desert outside my window. Certain I was nearing my death, I asked him to tell me that he loved me and needed me, for I desperately desired the strength to carry on. He did so, and I resolved to not die in my sad pile of snotty tissues that night in a remote cabin in Arizona....

While Scotland had been so similar to home it was almost as though I'd never left, Arizona was an entirely different beast. My sweet, amazing aunt had generously planned out a full birding expedition to all the most legendary spots in Southern Arizona for the two of us, and I was thrilled to experience everything for the first time. I loved the desert, and I had always wanted to see the famous deserts of Arizona, as well as the birds that called it home. Upon arrival, we had a few hours to kill before sundown at our first hotel, so we hit up a nearby eBird Hotspot and I was immediately flooded with incredible Life Birds: Bell's Vireos, Gambel's Quail, Abert's Towhees, a Vermilion Flycatcher... it was astonishing! What was most astonishing to me here, however, was what I was hearing... for the first time in my life, I was completely overwhelmed by the sounds of things that I could not even identify to a general family group. Was that some sort of goldfinch or some sort of vireo? Can sparrows sound like that, or should I be looking for a towhee? What options for warblers do I have here, anyway? The confusion was never-ending, and I quickly adopted the glassy-eyed "I-have-no-idea-what-that-is-or-what-I'm-doing-here-but-it's-all-pretty-neat" expression of a girl who was way out of her element.

The pride I had felt in Scotland from my ability to identify birds I'd never seen before based on their sounds was fast diminishing. Here, I could sometimes pick up something familiar; Yellow Warblers sang from many treetops that first night, and Song Sparrows did the same from vegetation around the ponds' edges. However, many calls were foreign to me, and I used Merlin extensively to at least get me in the correct ballpark.

The following day, we drove near to the summit of Mount Lemmon, over 9,000 feet above sea level. One thing I quickly learned in Arizona was that much of the area is incredibly high in elevation. I was accustomed to living close to sea level throughout my life in Texas and in Washington. But here, all our hotels and cabins were in areas between 2,500 and 5,000 feet above sea level. We often traveled to Sky Islands, massive mountain peaks that sharply rise up from the desert and create their own unique ecosystems. With all these rapid elevation changes, my health quickly started to deteriorate. As we drove from 2,500 feet up to 9,000 feet and back down again on Mount Lemmon, I became very lightheaded, but also had a terrible headache, dizziness, drowsiness, overall fatigue, and what almost felt like a fever but without the high temp; all while just sitting in the passenger seat in the car. My state worsened as we descended, and I finally found an excellent excuse to pull over; my Lifer Gila Woodpecker flew across the road at an intersection, and I weakly watched as it flew straight into a saguaro in an empty church parking lot. I had always dreamed of seeing a Gila Woodpecker in a saguaro! We pulled over into the parking lot, and I carefully stepped out of the car, taking a few minutes to acclimate to not moving.

After a while, I was able to photograph the Gila Woodpecker and its mate, and I saw several other surprisingly great birds darting around the densely flowered trees and shrubs: a Verdin, a Hooded Oriole, and more Gambel's Quail. I gradually felt recovered enough to continue, and we then went to the Saguaro National Park, where absolutely everything was in bloom—

brehtaking to behold. A more sweeping and majestic landscape I had never seen before, and there were many birds still active in the blazing afternoon sun. A Pyrrhuloxia snacked on cactus flowers, Rufous-winged Sparrows sang from the shrubs, and Lucy's Warblers flitted about everywhere. However, in looking at the vast seas of flowers, I began to wonder if they would affect me at all... I'd always had pollen allergies, and there was probably an awful lot of it there.

I soon had my answer; I was indeed suffering from allergies starting that evening, and they gradually got worse as the week went on. The wretched combination of severe allergies and altitude sickness made it so that, by the end of the week, I could not talk or move at all without gasping for breath. Whatever faucet controlled my sinuses was thrown wide open, and I soon risked heavy nosebleeds with every sneeze or sniffle. Still, I wanted to try my best to enjoy this region; my body may have wanted to pack it in, but my heart yearned to see more.

I got to observe the vast majority of the "Arizona Specials"—the Elegant Trogons (which had taken three exhausting attempts over two days, hiking up a steep trail at 5,000 feet), Elf Owls, Dusky-capped and Buff-breasted Flycatchers, more Red-faced Warblers than I could comprehend (21 individuals along one small road on Mount Lemmon alone), and 10 species of fantastic hummingbirds, to name a few. One such hummingbird, the Blue-throated Mountain-gem, was shown to us by a skilled guide; with the hummer's massive size, shocking cobalt throat, and endearing cheeps, it quickly became my favorite bird of the trip. There were many more species I saw for the first time while there that I probably should have seen ages ago, such as Green-tailed Towhees, Burrowing Owls, and Cactus Wrens. As the trip went on and I forced myself to ignore my body's protests, I couldn't help but become fully enamored with the beauty of the region. Tall rock formations begged to be photographed, flowers of every color painted the earth, building-sized saguaros took my breath away, and all the wildlife was far richer and more diverse than I ever could have imagined. The deserts were never boring, always alive. I saw my first Gray Fox, my first Coati, and scores of other adorable reptiles and small mammals. It was nothing at all like the Pacific Northwest, and though I found myself deeply in love with everything, my afflictions reminded me of home comforts I missed. Cold, freshly filtered water was something I hadn't had in days. My own bed, with a box of lotion-infused tissues beside it, sounded like paradise. And the birds back home... they were things that I knew, things that I hadn't realized were a comfort to me until now.

I first pondered this truth in Madera Canyon, where the Townsend's Warbler that lives in my backyard all winter was a local celebrity in one of the greatest birding areas in the world, with many photographers thrilled by his striking poses. I, too, delighted in taking pictures of the stunning little black-and-yellow bird... but then, I stepped back and just watched. Here I was, over 1,200 miles from home, in a new world where I was surrounded by the beautiful and the unfamiliar... and flitting before me was a single tiny flash of memories of home. The sensation of sitting in my warm bedroom during a winter storm was carried to me on feathers of onyx and gold, in the middle of a desert at the end of April. I began to understand why the birds of Scotland were so enchanting and exciting to me... they reminded me of the comforts of home. They weren't boring at all! They made me happy in a cozy sort of way. In Arizona, the birds also reminded me of the comforts of home, but indirectly; they showed me that the world beyond the familiar was vast, and there was so much more I had to learn and discover. It was humbling, and I began to really appreciate the little, "ordinary" things from back in Washington.

The “ordinary” Anna’s Hummingbirds at feeders had many guests stumped in this land of the flashy and magnificent, but I was able to hoarsely call out their ID with confidence, something I hadn’t had a great deal of since Scotland. As much as I longed for an “ordinary” Turkey Vulture to morph into a Common Black Hawk, it was not to be... yet still I watched them and smiled, as they kettled over a group of 30 or so birders, all of whom were instead focused on Hepatic Tanagers and Rivoli’s Hummingbirds. As the week of my most challenging and rewarding adventure to date drew to a close, I spent my final morning simply standing and watching as droves of Yellow Warblers, Wilson’s Warblers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Lazuli Buntings took happy baths in a water fountain in our host’s backyard. All such comforting, *familiar* species from back home....

The last leg of my Grandest Adventure soon came, and my time birding in Arizona was over. My aunt and I packed our bags and left our beautiful cabin in Portal to catch a few planes to Texas, where I had grown up, and where the rest of my family were waiting. In the week that followed, the *familiar* would take on a new meaning to me, and with it, a new gravity....

To be concluded next month...

**Let’s Go Birding Together:
A LGBTQ Birdwalk at Nisqually
By Sally Nole, BHAS Volunteer**

June is Pride month. To celebrate, on Friday June 2, BHAS, PFLAG and Nisqually WDFW sponsored an evening LGBT guided bird walk for 55 attendees. This evening, LGBT meant “Let’s Go Birding Together.”

The weather was perfect.

The group was diverse.

The wardrobes ranged from flamboyant to drab.

There were children, and there were gray-haired birders.

Birders’ experience levels were from first-time birder to years of experience.

Ethnicity was all over the map.

The Nisqually WDFW guides introduced us to the Refuge and explained that many organizations, including the Nisqually Tribe, are involved with protecting and preserving this delta.

We all played a bird call game that made us laugh a lot.

And then we broke up into five groups and headed out to find the birds. Binoculars were available for anyone without them. Our group leader was Bonnie Wood from BHAS, and we made our way to the woodland boardwalks. Quickly we learned that we had some expert birders in our group. These two women had keen eyesight and great hearing skills. It became a game between those two and us BHAS

birders. We used the Merlin Sound ID to help us when we couldn't agree. Everyone was engaged and did not give up until they saw the bird or had seen a photo of the bird on the Audubon or Merlin Apps.

We did not have time to continue toward McAllister Creek to find waterfowl before we were scheduled to get back to the Education Center for cookies, water, wrap up, and goodbyes. I heard nothing but laughter and pleasant chatter from everyone; there were smiles and parting words of "Hope to see ya again soon!" We had a truly good time on a beautiful evening.

I plan to attend next year! I hope you'll join me.

Birds we saw or heard:

American Robin, Brown Creeper, Black-headed Grosbeak, Song Sparrow, American Goldfinch, Spotted Towhee, Bewick's Wren, Yellow Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, Warbling Vireo, Canada Goose, Barn and Tree Swallow, Bald Eagle, American Crow, Starling, Anna's Hummingbird, Cedar Waxwing, American Coot, Mallard (21 species).

Contribute to Science Through Birding

The Puget Sound Seabird Survey is looking for birders in Thurston County - in particular the Olympia, Lacey, and Boston Harbor areas - to join this established Community Science program. Volunteers are asked to conduct 7 surveys with a small team of fellow surveyors at specific locations. All surveys are synchronized to take place once per month on the first Saturday, October – April. You will be provided training in the survey technique, and ideally will have good seabird identification skills. However, there are roles on the survey team for birders of all levels. Now in its 15th season, you'll be contributing to valuable science that monitors wintering seabirds across Puget Sound and informs important management decisions. Previously, the project was part of Birds Connect Seattle's (formerly Seattle Audubon) science program but transitioned to its new home at Puget Sound Bird Observatory in 2022. More information can be found on our [website](#) and if you are interested in taking part, please reach out to Program Manager Toby Ross at t_ross@pugetsoundbirds.org

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

All chapter work is done by volunteers for whom we are very grateful. If you are interested in volunteering in something other than the opportunities listed below, please contact Kathleen Snyder ksnyder75@gmail.com.

ELECTION COORDINATOR: We just had our annual election for officers and Board members. It could have run smoother if we had one person to make sure all the details came together. This is a short term (March, April, May) job coordinating newsletter announcements, website updates, and running the actual vote. Please consider this if you are looking for a volunteer opportunity with limited commitment. Please contact Kathleen Snyder at ksnyder75@gmail.com

NEST BOX MAKERS: We want to replace the old nest boxes and add new ones out at Glacial Heritage Preserve. We can supply simple plans and reimburse for materials if you have an interest in making boxes. Please contact Mary McCallum at mccallum_mary@msn.com

PHOTOGRAPHERS: BHAS has a photo gallery on our website and an Instagram account (Blackhills352). We would love to add new bird photographs to these platforms. Please contact Quentin Phillips at gmp932@hotmail.com. He will give you the parameters for what we can use.

COMMUNICATION CHAIR: Are you plugged into social media and see the need for BHAS to step it up in that area? We would love to talk to you about doing just that. Please contact Kathleen Snyder ksnyder75@gmail.com

GLACIAL HERITAGE BLUEBIRD PROJECT

By Kathleen Snyder

As you may know, Western Bluebirds are not the only birds using the nest boxes out at Glacial Heritage and Violet Prairie. The species using the greatest number of boxes are the Violet-green Swallows. Above is a photo of a pair of swallows making use of Glacial Heritage box #13. Tree Swallows are a close contender for most box inhabitants, then the bluebirds, and finally we have six boxes being used by House Wrens.

As of June 17th, we had one clutch of bluebirds fledge from our location in Violet Prairie at the Center for Natural Land Management Nursery. Another brood fledged from Glacial Heritage but we still had five in production (my estimate of 8 bluebird nests last month was incorrect; we had 6 nests). None of the swallow nests had fledged by this time. The nesting period is around 3 weeks for all our species so lots will have happened by the time you read this. I'll keep you posted.

BHAS NEEDS YOU!

Our vital and effective organization needs new folks to step up and make a positive difference for our birds and our environment. We have a strong contingent of volunteers, a solid financial base, and very effective committees including Conservation, Education, and Avian Science. If you see the importance of acting locally to effect change in the world and understand the importance of building on our organizational strengths, we would love to talk with you about your future role with us. We are especially in need of people willing to become leaders on our Board of Directors.

Contact President Kim Adelson

pres@blackhills-audubon.org

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Name Change Survey

By Kim Adelson

After a year spent gathering data and deliberating, the National Audubon Society decided to retain the Audubon name. The question of changing the name arose once it was discovered that John James Audubon was a slave owner. (See [The Myth of John James Audubon | Audubon.](#)) They made the decision to retain his name because they believe that losing the name “Audubon”, which stands for “birds” not “slavery” in most people’s minds, would lower our name recognition, and hence clout, when advocating for birds. Concurrently, the organization announced a new \$25 million initiative to promote diversity and equity. (See [National Audubon Society Announces Decision to Retain Current Name | Audubon](#) for a more complete explanation of their decision.)

The way that Audubon is structured, each local Audubon chapter is largely autonomous and has the right to decide for itself what it would like to be called. Therefore, we are conducting a survey of our members to understand their position on this question.

This survey is now available on our website at this [link](#). The included questions are listed below for preview. The survey will close July 31, 2023.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

1. Do you believe that the Black Hills Audubon Society should retain our current name?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I very strongly believe the name should be changed	I believe that the name should be changed	I lean towards changing the name	Neutral/Don't care	I lean towards retaining the name	I believe that we should retain our name	I very strongly believe that we should retain our name

2. If you believe that the name should be changed, would you be willing to help do the work involved to make the change happen? (It would be a big job.)

1	2	3	4
No.	I would be willing to do a little work on the name change.	I would be willing to devote a good amount of time on the name change.	I would be willing to take on a leadership role to make the name change happen.

If you are willing to work on a name change, please include your name and contact information:

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3. Please feel free to add any comments you'd like, or to suggest a new name for our group.

FIELD TRIPS AND OUTINGS

BIRDS AND BREW

MONDAY JULY 17TH 4:30 – 6 PM

**LOCATION: BOSTON HARBOR MARINA
312 73RD AVE NE
OLYMPIA**

It's time to meet outside to enjoy the water and views from Boston Harbor. We will grab a table on the covered deck to enjoy each other's company and talk about birds. This is open to Black Hills members and non-members alike. Although it starts at 4:30 pm, it is a drop-in anytime event.

Our hosts are Craig and Vicki Merkel. Questions can go to Craig at quetsal48@comcast.net.