

*Program Meeting  
A Tale of Two Puffins  
Dr. Scott Pearson, WDFW  
Via Zoom, February 6th  
1:30 pm - 3:30 pm  
see page 2 and/or page 9 for access*

January  
February  
2022



# The Sandpiper



Photo, Northern Cardinal by Nelda Faulkner,  
Birds & Blooms

## Can I bond with birds and my kids

*By Rachel Buchholz, KIDS AND FAMILY Editor  
in Chief, National Geographic*

I'll admit that I'm not much of a birder. My mother, on the other hand, is an avid avian watcher. Trips have been planned around bird-watching events. Heck, houses have been bought based on her ability to observe as many birds as possible from the living room windows.

So when I was planning our first family vacation in two years (thanks, COVID!), I decided on a rental home with a wraparound porch overlooking West Virginia's New River Gorge National Park. Winter was fast approaching, but plenty of birds were still hanging around (or perhaps passing through). Over morning coffee or evening aperitifs on the deck, we'd watch northern cardinals, Carolina wrens, titmouses, and blue jays. And even though I still can't tell the difference between airborne hawks and turkey vultures, the bird-watching we did during this adventure provided some much-needed family bonding.

Winter is actually a great time to bond over birds with your kids. As this article explains, plenty of feathered fliers stay put during chilly months; others could be migrating to your region for their tropical getaway. Children might see fatter or fluffier birds that have adapted for cold temps, and bare branches means the aviators are likely easier to spot.

## About the Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Recently, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 25th annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 18, through Monday, February 21, 2022. Please visit the official website at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org) for more information and be sure to check out the latest educational and promotional resources.

"This count is so fun because anyone can take part—whether you are an expert, novice, or feeder watcher. I enjoy discovering the birds that occur in my own back yard and on my block and then comparing with others. Get involved and see how your favorite spot stacks up." - Chad Wilsey, V. P. and Chief Scientist of Audubon

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2014 GBBC data highlighted a large irruption of Snowy Owls across the north-eastern, mid-Atlantic, and Great Lakes areas of the United States. The data also showed the effects that warm weather patterns have had on bird movement around the country.

On the program website participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count. We hope you can join us!

## The President's Perch



By Janet Strong

Please hang in there, everybody, as we navigate the current Covid contagion. In WA cases seem to be peaking and heading onto the downward slope. I hope all of you are staying well and upbeat. Although we haven't been able to hold in-person programs for 2 years now, your chapter has not been idle. I'd like to summarize some of the activities of your Board and member-volunteers.

First, you are reading the excellent Sandpiper newsletter which comes together through the hard work of its editor, RD Grunbaum, and writing contributors, with judicious reminders of the deadline from our editor.

Next, we have continued to offer Member Programs every other month featuring excellent speakers and organized by our webmaster, Mary Lou Gregory, and others who sleuth out interesting and educational speakers. On Feb. 6 our presenter will be Scott Pearson of WDFW talking about puffins. See article. next column.

Further, the Grays Harbor Shorebird and Nature Festival, although still virtual, will run again this year in partnership with staff from Billy Frank Jr Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. There will be shorebird trip guidelines, children's activities and other attractive features, all safely conducted. As for the Christmas Bird Count in 2021, several birders from our chapter conducted surveys of 4 of the Grays Harbor circles, reporting data to eBird, adding to the national birding data collection.

BTW, the national Backyard Bird Count will occur on the weekend of Feb. 11 – 13 this year. Check it out and participate.

In addition, Linda, Mary Lou and Robin have been researching and organizing a special mural project in Hoquiam to highlight our local, everyday birds that we all see and enjoy. Stay tuned for information in the spring.

GHAS is cooperating with state agencies and others to improve fish access and nearshore habitat near Redman Slough on the South Bay, where our Ocosta properties lie. Information will come out as plans are firmed up, but old tire removal from the inner tide zone is the first step.

We have a few new volunteers among our membership interested in publicity, membership growth, programs and conservation. This fact portends very well for our chapter's future. We

hope you will continue to participate in whatever way you can, especially attending our Zoom Member Programs. We can't wait until we can all emerge from that annoying pandemic strait-jacket, but it will happen.

Happy New Year!



### Member Program

#### *A Tale of Two Puffins: Rhinoceros Auklets and Tufted Puffins in a Changing Seascape*

Join our zoom presentation of Dr. Scott Pearson who is a senior research scientist at Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife where he supervises the west-side research team and has been conducting research for over 20 years. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington and his M.S. and B.S. from the University of Michigan. His research is focused on assessing wildlife population status and trends, diet, habitat use and quality, evaluating the effectiveness of conservation efforts, and identifying mechanisms responsible for population declines. His current research includes examining harbor seal population status and diet (with an emphasis on impact to salmon), and research on a variety of birds of conservation concern including the marbled murrelet, tufted puffin, snowy plover, streaked horned lark, and marine birds generally.

Join GHAS Zoom Meeting,  
February 6th 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82118695964?pwd=dDVqOXFlbUJrakxLWXhLNTRQL1ovUT09>

Meeting ID: 821 1869 5964  
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photo by Troy Shelby

## What makes bird feathers so colorfully fabulous?

By Jason G. Goldman

The iridescent ruby-red throat of an Anna's Hummingbird, the stunningly bright blues and yellows of the (aptly-named) Blue-and-yellow Macaw . . . admit it, you get color envy every time you see a flashy bird. Birds rely on their coloration and feathers to communicate with others of their kind, especially during mating season. Male House Finches, for example, look flushed when they have better access to food while molting—important knowledge for a female that's seeking a healthy, resourceful mate. And male Eastern Bluebirds that sport ultraviolet hues and darker breast patches fledge more offspring—a good hint that they make better partners in the nest.

If you love the dark black of a crow or the brown stripes of an owl, you can thank a molecule called melanin: The same substance that provides color to our own skin and hair is also responsible for the darker colors on birds. These colors are especially prevalent on birds' flight feathers—for good reason. Melanin is very strong, and allows the hardest-working feathers to better resist wear and tear. That not only allows the bird to remain in tip-top shape, but according to a decades-old experiment, also allows it to be 4 to 9 percent more aerodynamic.

Melanin isn't the only pigment that leaves its mark on feathers. The next group is called carotenoids, and they create most of the reds, oranges, and yellows in birds. There are more than 600 types of carotenoids, and they all require photosynthesis to make, so birds have to borrow them from plants and a few types of bacteria and fungi. This, for example, is how flamingos come to be pink: Newly hatched chicks are grey and have to accumulate the pink from their diet; darker flamingos betray their love for algae, while lighter ones get their carotenoids second-hand, from shrimp and other crustaceans. Carotenoids are also seen in songbirds, but tend to be rare among game birds. Bright reds and greens come from special-edition pigments.

The last group of pigments, named porphyrins,

can only be found in a scant handful of birds. In 1868, British chemist Arthur Herbert Church discovered that some feathers are colored by a pigment he named turacin, after the turaco birds that he found them in. Turacin is about 7 percent copper, which is why it gives off such a blinding-red hue. Meanwhile, a similar pigment called turacoverdin provides green coloration. Parrots can also get their reds, oranges, and yellows from a special group of pigments called psittacofulvins. Cool colors and iridescence come from crazy micro-structures in feathers.

Keratin is a crucial protein in human nails, rhinoceros horns, pangolin scales, and of course, bird feathers. The way it's structured allows light to twist and separate into a rainbow of iridescence. Keratin allows feathers to act like a prism by scattering the longer wavelengths of light and reflecting shorter ones to emit gorgeous blues, violets, purples, and greens. Sometimes the feathers have air pockets, which allow them to display only one color at a time. That's how jays get their bright, tell-tale blue appearance. The light-bending protein can also be layered onto other pigments: for instance, mixing blue light with underlying yellow carotenoids makes green feathers.

Feathers face their fair share of damages, too. They accumulate dirt, are exposed to ultraviolet radiation, and get worn down by parasites and microbes. Perhaps this is why birds spend so much time grooming. Study after study has shown that male birds with well-maintained plumage are healthier, more socially dominant, preferred by more females, and have higher reproductive success than their more haggard counterparts. It's all thanks to preen wax, which is secreted by a gland near the base of the tail on every bird. The substance helps to keep keratin flexible, allowing feathers to stay water-repellent, providing protection against feather-degrading bacteria, and more. It also makes feathers appear more deeply saturated with color. Flamingos use the carotenoids in their preen wax to make the carotenoids in their feathers appear even more colorful. In a sense, the wax functions as a type of avian make-up.

This sort of cosmetic manipulation has been seen in at least 13 bird families. While most of them make their own ingredients, some use parts of the environment, like soil. Perhaps the best-known example of a bird that uses dirt as make-up is the Lammergeier vulture, a species known for its bright orange underside, neck, and head. At one time its color was attributed to carotenoids; but now it's widely accepted as being sourced from iron-oxide-rich soils. No one knows why the vultures bathe in filth, though it's evident that the ruddiest ones get the most respect.



Western Meadowlark Evan Barrientos

## **Bird protections restored, and key process advances to strengthen rules**

By Erik Schneider, Audubon Policy Manager

The most significant and damaging rollback of bird protections in our history is finally, officially, gone. This month, the Biden administration's repeal of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) rollback went into effect, and critical bird protections returned for the first time in nearly four years. At the same time, a crucial agency process took a key step forward that could provide stronger and improved MBTA rules to conserve declining bird populations and keep our common birds common.

Four years ago, on December 22, 2017, the Interior Department issued a legal opinion that instantly gutted the law and eliminated longstanding protections for birds. That MBTA policy, and the January 2021 regulation that doubled down on it, gave a free pass for bird deaths caused by industrial activities – often referred to as “incidental take”. It meant that companies no longer needed to take reasonable actions that minimize bird deaths, such as covering up oil pits or marking power lines to avoid collisions. Over the past four years, harm to birds from oil spills and other hazards went uninvestigated and without accountability.

Audubon and our partners fought the rollback of these longstanding protections every step of the way, including by going to court. We won a major victory last year when a federal court found the 2017 MBTA attack to be illegal. We worked with members and partners to highlight the widespread public opposition, including from more than 400,000 letters, and from hundreds of Audubon chapters and other organizations. State wildlife agencies, tribal governments, and our migratory bird treaty partner, Canada, expressed deep concerns. Earlier this year, the Biden administration began to reconsider the January 2021 rule, lead-

ing to an announcement of its repeal in September, which has now gone into effect.

That announcement also kicked off a critical new agency process to consider how to strengthen and improve the MBTA's rules going forward, beginning with a Fish and Wildlife Service public comment period that concluded on December 3, 2021. The rulemaking would codify these bird protections into the MBTA's regulations, and establish an authorization program, such as a permitting system, that could help advance practices that reduce harm to birds from industrial activities.

While important progress has been made in protecting and conserving birds since the MBTA's passage, bird populations continue to be at risk from growing and changing threats. Today, birds face a wide variety of hazards across our landscapes. Every year, millions of birds are tragically killed in avoidable ways from industrial activities that the MBTA can help address. If we are going to succeed in recovering the loss of 3 billion birds and protecting the two-thirds of bird species at risk from climate change, we need to use, and improve, all of our available tools to minimize threats to birds.

An efficient permitting system can help expand practices, technology, and resources that protect and conserve birds, and also provide greater legal certainty and clear and consistent standards to help companies abide by the rules. These assurances provide a key incentive to implement practices that minimize impacts to birds, and helps ensure actions are taken before negative impacts occur. This is the kind of proactive work that will be necessary to maintain and recover our bird populations.

**Support the Migratory Bird Protection Act**

Creating a successful program will require broad stakeholder engagement, and acting without delay. During the comment period, Audubon submitted a letter jointly with industry voices, including a letter with the Edison Electric Institute, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Large Public Power Council, and conservation NGOs, who wrote, “Addressing these unprecedented avian declines necessitates updated approaches that will deliver much needed conservation benefits. An authorization program under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) could provide just such an opportunity, while also providing a workable regulatory framework for industry.”

Thousands of letters from Audubon members and supporters that urged moving the process forward.

Now is the right time to advance this MBTA process.



## Which birds are the biggest jerks at the feeder?

By Andrew Van Dam and Alyssa Fowers, Washington Post

The interactions between birds in the park or at your backyard feeder may look like chaos, but they're actually following the subtle rules of a hidden avian social order.

Armed with a database of almost 100,000 bird interactions, experts known as ornithologists have decoded that secret pecking order and created a continentwide power ranking of almost 200 species — from the formidable wild turkey at the top to the tiny, retiring brown creeper at the bottom.

Their work illuminates an elaborate hidden hierarchy: Northern mockingbirds and red-bellied woodpeckers are pugnacious for their size, but both would give way if a truly dominant bird like an American crow descended upon the feeder. Tiny hummingbirds can't afford to lose precious seconds of feeding time and thus punch way above their weight, while the pileated woodpecker, whose fearsome bill and impressive build gives it the aspect of a holdover pterodactyl, actually proves docile for its size.

Among the most common feeder visitors, the American crow is king, while tiny chickadees get pushed around by just about everybody. The oblivious mourning dove outweighs many rivals but proves relatively peaceful. And lively goldfinches love to squabble but are limited by their half-ounce size.

"You see it at your feeder, and you're like, 'Oh, that woodpecker? He's a mean one!' and you ascribe these individual preferences to birds at your feeder," said Cornell University ornithologist Elliot Miller. "But if you zoom out, all these same interactions are happening millions of times in

cities across the continent, and the way they play out is predictable."

Every year since 1987, thousands of backyard birders from around the U.S. and Canada have reported the species they saw at their feeders during the winter as part of Project FeederWatch, a long-running data set from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada beloved by ornithologists. Since 2016, participants have also been able to report interactions, such as when one bird swoops in and chases another from a prime spot on the seed feeder.

Project FeederWatch leader Emma Greig, a Cornell ornithologist, said this competition for food makes FeederWatch uniquely suited to behavioral studies.

"The birds are at a food source, so it's a place where they're more concentrated and even more likely than usual to have these behavioral interactions," Greig said, noting the project's network of 30,000 citizen-scientists meant they could collect that data at a continental scale.

In a 2017 study in *Behavioral Ecology*, Miller, Greig and their collaborators fed the first wave of that data into algorithms to condense a web of relationships into a simple rank. That rank not only reflects the relationship of frequent combatant pairs such as the house sparrow and the blue jay, but also accurately predicts which bird will dominate when two distant species meet for the first time.

Now Miller has provided *The Washington Post* with a vastly expanded data set from Greig's citizen-scientists — 99,376 interactions between almost 200 species, up from 7,685 interactions in the 2017 study — and shared the methods needed to produce the most detailed bird power ranking yet published. Predators aren't included as their relationship with these birds is not one of social dominance. Miller said he's still in awe of the scale of the data. While getting his PhD, he spent two years studying honeyeaters in Australia and recorded about 400 interactions. The network of feeder watchers can generate that much data in a matter of hours or days.

The data set continues to grow as more birders report back to Project FeederWatch, and Miller expects it to prove useful not just in ornithology, but also in mathematical disciplines that study complex rock-paper-scissors-type competition and interaction.

Most interactions between birds end in a quick retreat, not combat. A widely recognized hierarchy helps birds avoid what could be very costly fights.

continued on page 6

### ***Feeder Bullies continued from Page 5***

“If it’s the middle of the winter and you’re a little chickadee barely scraping by — you’re smaller than a couple fingers balled up and it’s 10 degrees outside — the last thing you want is to get blasted by a woodpecker with its bill,” Miller said. “It’s just gonna suck.”

Body mass is generally a good predictor of bird dominance, but woodpeckers dominate even some birds that outweigh them. “They punch above their weight because they spend their lives hammering on trees,” Miller said. “Their entire morphology is built to enable striking hard objects. So another bird is really not an issue for them.”

The most chaotic birds overall are probably the goldfinches and their cousins the pine siskins, Miller said. “They show up in flocks and they get in tons of squabbles both with themselves and everybody else.”

A small minority of bird rivalries are too complex for a simple ranking. For example, the house finch almost always dominates the purple finch, and the purple finch almost always dominates the dark-eyed junco, but when house finch and junco face off directly, the junco often dominates. These tangled interactions are more common among invasive species such as the house finch, which is not native to the eastern U.S., Miller said. He speculated that these birds haven’t had millennia to find a clear place in the pecking order.

The database didn’t include interactions beyond the bird world. But if it had, experts say the data would have revealed the true king of the bird feeder: squirrels.

“Birds are made to fly — they’re light,” Miller said. “Squirrels just are way bigger, way freakier. They’ve got teeth. They’ve got claws. A bird is not going to take any chances near a squirrel. Squirrels will eat a bird no problem.”



### **The Cherry-throated Tanager has a shot at defying extinction - American Bird Conservancy**

A partnership among Rainforest Trust, American Bird Conservancy (ABC), and Brazilian conservation organization Instituto Marcos Daniel has established a 704-acre protected area of primary Brazilian Atlantic Forest — the latest success in the organizations’ work to save the last populations of

the Critically Endangered Cherry-throated Tanager from extinction.

The Cherry-throated Tanager had only been seen once after its discovery in 1870 and was believed to be extinct until 1998, when a small population was rediscovered in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest. The bird spends the majority of its life high in the rainforest canopy, searching for insects among the branches. Rampant agricultural conversion has forced it to live in highly fragmented habitat that is now also threatened by urban encroachment. Conservationists estimate that only 17 individual birds may remain.

“Securing critical habitat for the this bird is both an occasion for celebration and a cause for optimism,” says Bennett Hennessey, ABC’s Brazil Conservation Program Coordinator. “If we can save this tanager, which was unseen for many years but is now regularly spotted and surveyed, then we can save other imperiled species whose appearances have become less frequent. We aim to replicate this success across the Americas.”

The region is a prime location and priority for bird conservation. In addition to the Cherry-throated Tanager, the Endangered Vinaceous-breasted Amazon and several Vulnerable species — the White-bearded Antshrike, Golden-tailed Parrotlet, and Brown-backed Parrotlet — are all found in the same area. The site also provides essential habitat for the Critically Endangered Buffy-headed Marmoset; populations of the little-known and Near Threatened Brazilian Golden Frog are also in the area.

“Protecting the birds of Brazil has been a conservation priority for Rainforest Trust for many years,” says James Deutsch, CEO of Rainforest Trust. “Not only is this critically important habitat by its own right but it also plays an important role in increasing connectivity with nearby reserves for birds and other animals.”

Now that the land is protected, Instituto Marcos Daniel will develop a strategic plan for species conservation, including monitoring Cherry-throated Tanager populations. This reserve will open a path to protect the entire forested area for all species. A financial sustainability plan will also be developed for the reserve, featuring public use for birdwatching activities, scientific tourism and research, and a hotel to host visitors from around the world.

“The Cherry-throated Tanager is one of the rarest birds on the planet. It is hugely gratifying to collaborate in partnership with other groups like Rainforest Trust and Instituto Marcos Daniel to conserve this and other endangered species,” says Daniel Lebbin, ABC’s VP of Threatened Species.

### ***GHAS Mission***

The mission of the Grays Harbor Audubon Society is to seek a sustainable balance between human activity and the needs of the environment, and to promote enjoyment of birds and the natural world



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***News & Editorial***

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Copy deadline 10th of  
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***Program Meeting***

***A Tale of Two Puffins:  
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in a Changing Seascape***

***Dr. Scott Pearson, WDFW***

**Via Zoom 1:30 pm, February 6th**

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