

Program Meeting
Hoquiam Library Meeting Room
December 1, 2024 1:30 pm - 3:00 pm
Mount St. Helens
Alysa Adams, WA Parks
AVAILABLE VIA ZOOM see page 9

November
December
2024



The Sandpiper



photo by David A. Hoffman

How gophers brought Mount St. Helens back to life in one day

By Jules Berstein, *UC Riverside News*

When Mount St. Helens erupted in 1980, lava incinerated anything living for miles around. As an experiment, scientists dropped gophers onto parts of the scorched mountain for only 24 hours. The benefits from that single day were undeniable -- and still visible 40 years later.

Once the blistering blast of ash and debris cooled, scientists theorized that, by digging up beneficial bacteria and fungi, gophers might be able to help regenerate lost plant and animal life on the mountain. Two years after the eruption, they tested this theory. "They're often considered pests, but we thought they would take old soil, move it to the surface, and that would be where recovery would occur," said UC Riverside microbiologist Michael Allen.

They were right. But the scientists did not expect the benefits of this experiment would still be visible in the soil today, in 2024. A paper out this week in the journal *Frontiers in Microbiomes* details an enduring change in the communities of fungi and bacteria where gophers had been, versus nearby land where they were never introduced.

"In the 1980s, we were just testing the short-term reaction," said Allen. "Who would have predicted you could toss a gopher in for a day and see a residual effect 40 years later?"

In 1983, Allen and Utah State University's James McMahon helicoptered to an area where the lava had turned the land into collapsing slabs of porous pumice. At that time, there were only about a dozen plants that had learned to live on these slabs. A few seeds had been dropped by birds, but the resulting seedlings struggled.

After scientists dropped a few local gophers on two pumice plots for a day, the land exploded again with new life. Six years post-experiment, there were 40,000 plants thriving on the gopher plots. The untouched land remained mostly barren.

All this was possible because of what isn't always visible to the naked eye. Mycorrhizal fungi penetrate into plant root cells to exchange nutrients and resources. They can help protect plants from pathogens in the soil, and critically, by providing nutrients in barren places, they help plants establish themselves and survive.

"With the exception of a few weeds, there is no way most plant roots are efficient enough to get all the nutrients and water they need by themselves. The fungi transport these things to the plant and get carbon they need for their own growth in exchange," Allen said.

A second aspect of this study further underscores how critical these microbes are to the regrowth of plant life after a natural disaster. On one side of the mountain was an old-growth forest. Ash from the volcano blanketed the trees, trapping solar radiation and causing needles on the pine, spruce, and Douglas firs to overheat and fall off. Scientists feared the loss of the needles would cause the forest to collapse.

That is not what happened. "These trees have their own mycorrhizal fungi that picked up nutrients from the dropped needles and helped fuel rapid tree regrowth," said UCR environmental microbiologist and paper co-author Emma Aronson. "The trees came back almost immediately in some places. It didn't all die like everyone thought."

On the other side of the mountain, the scientists visited a forest that had been clearcut prior to the eruption. Logging had removed all the trees for acres, so naturally there were no dropped needles to feed soil fungi.

"There still isn't much of anything growing in the clearcut area," Aronson said. "It was shocking looking at the old growth forest soil and comparing it to the dead area."

"We cannot ignore the interdependence of all things in nature, especially the things we cannot see like microbes and fungi," said mycologist Mia Maltz.

The President's Perch



By Janet Strong



Member Meeting
Mount St. Helens, a landscape in transition

CONGRATULATIONS to all who had a role in bringing to completion the “Birds in Our Backyard” mural, ready for visits along 6th Street, just over the Wishkah bridge and to the left in downtown Hoquiam. Special thanks to Jenny Fisher, mural artist, to Craig Roffler, Jenny’s apprentice, to Linda Orgel and Mary Lou Gregory, project managers, to the City of Hoquiam, to Mark Swanson, wall donor and to all others who helped and/or cheered on this project. Result: We now have a giant beautiful mural celebrating the birds around town and in our neighborhoods, in addition to our own backyards! Hooray!

Another bright spot in WA: Anthony Novack, our October members’ meeting speaker, has a request. His employer, WA Department of Fish and Wildlife, has been working for years on a proposal for land acquisition of 13,749 acres of excellent habitat within 10 counties in WA, including Pacific and Thurston counties. This proposal will be presented to the WA Fish and Wildlife Commission for approval at their December 14 meeting in Cle Elum.

Anthony is asking for comments from the public, especially from GHAS members, to help push this ambitious project over the finish line. I’ve enjoyed looking up the individual projects, and seeing grand photos of these future protected areas on the DFW website. You, too, can view the acreage in each county at lands@dfw.gov. The website also tells you how you can make comments. If you have questions, you can call Ben Anderson at 360-902-0045.

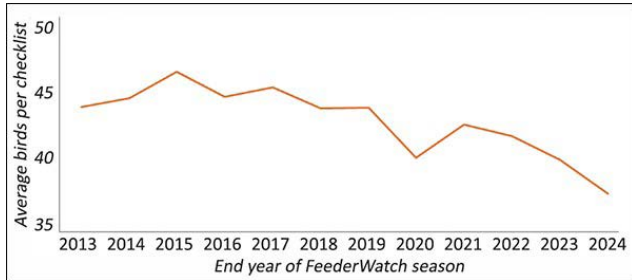
I encourage you to make a comment on this ambitious project, many years in the making. I plan to enjoy the wonderful photos and make a comment well before the 14th of December. I hope you all will, too.

Join Alysa Adams, Interpretive Ranger with Washington State Parks, as she shares stories of Mount St. Helens. She’ll briefly cover the 1980 eruption, and transition into the landscape transformation and flora/fauna resiliency post-eruption. You’ll learn about the important characters that played a remarkable role in life after the blast and get a glimpse into the world of birds within the National Volcanic Monument and nearby state park.

Alysa has worked with Washington State Parks and Recreation commission for over a decade, with the last 9 years running the Mount St. Helens Visitor Center. She’s passionate about connecting people to nature, and facilitating meaningful memories in a heartwarming, fun, and silly environment. She loves youth programming and is dedicated to inspiring a sense of stewardship and inclusivity in future generations. When not giving ranger talks, you’ll find Alysa romping in the woods with her dog Ember, living close to the land in her partially off-grid cabin, and on the pursuit to intimately know the plants and wildlife with which she coexists.

Alysa Adams (she/her/hers)
Parks Interpretive Specialist 2
Mount St. Helens Visitor Center
Upper Cowlitz Area
(Sequest, Lewis & Clark, Ike Kinswa)
Off Wednesday-Thursday

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Lowest bird abundance at Feeder Watch sites in ten years

Project FeederWatch, Cornell Lab

We often receive inquiries from participants asking, “where have all the birds gone?” and telling us that bird counts seem lower than in the past. Typically, these observations are localized and don’t reflect a wider trend, but in the 2023-24 FeederWatch season, average counts across the board were lower than in the recent past. That season the average number of birds per checklist was 37 individuals. For many participants, that is a lot of birds! But comparing that average to the FeederWatch average over the previous 10 years provides perspective. The 37 birds per checklist average was the lowest average since at least 2013.

Exactly why average bird counts were lower isn’t clear. The averages don’t control for the amount of time participants watched their sites or the experience of the participants this season compared to past seasons, which could account for at least some of the differences. An unseasonably mild winter in many parts of the U.S. and Canada may have allowed many birds to find natural food more easily, for example. Nevertheless, the lower counts could indicate that birds are declining broadly, which would be a worrying pattern.

Bird populations normally fluctuate from one season to the next and from one year to the next. Researchers have determined that the number of birds in North America has declined by nearly 30% in the last 50 years (read article from Autumn 2019 Living Bird), but for feeder birds, which are doing better overall than non-feeder birds, the declines have been gradual. If you are seeing a sudden, dramatic drop in bird numbers, most likely the cause is either local or seasonal. Although it’s impossible for us to know the cause of each specific increase and decline, there are several common causes for bird population fluctuations.

The most common cause for a dramatic drop in all bird species at a feeder is the arrival of a predator, such as a hawk (often impossible to see) or a cat.

Habitat changes frequently affect bird numbers. If there has been any change in your neighborhood—such as trees being cut down, new houses being built, or different crops being planted on nearby fields—that could be the reason you are seeing more or less birds.

Natural food supplies—such as pinecones, berries, seeds, and insects—fluctuate from year to year, causing birds to shift ranges to take advantage of food surpluses or to compensate for food shortages.

Weather fluctuations often cause birds to shift ranges, especially in winter, and in mild conditions birds often find plenty of natural foods that they choose over what’s available at feeders.

Seed freshness can impact how many birds come to feeders. Seed allowed to stay in a feeder for more than a week can grow stale or moldy, especially in warm, damp conditions. Be sure to empty, clean, and refill feeders frequently. And some seeds, like niger seed, grow stale quickly even when kept dry. Avoid using seed that’s more than a year old.

To see what birds FeederWatch participants are reporting in your region or to see trend maps for different species based on FeederWatch reports, visit the Explore section of our web site.



***The 25th Snow Goose Festival
of the Pacific Flyway
January 23 – 26, 2025
Patrick Ranch Museum
Chico - Durham CA***

Join in the search for winter birds of the Pacific Flyway on four days of action-packed field trips with experienced trip leaders, plus more.

Registration begins in early December

If you have any questions, you can reach us at info@snowgoosefestival.org or by calling the Festival Office at 530-592-9092.



In the field
field trips through the end of the year
by *Mary O'Neil*

Sunday, Nov. 17 - Ocean Shores

Those from Aberdeen/Hoquiam and points east meet at the (now vacant) Flooring Company parking lot in Hoquiam on the corner of 6th and Simpson. We can meet the Ocean Shores birders in the parking lot just before the Lighthouse Suites on the first beach access road (St. Route 115/Damon Rd). If we meet in Hoquiam at 8:30 am, we should arrive in Ocean Shores at 9:00 am.

Saturday, December 14 - Lake Sylvia, Montesano

Meet up at Tractor Supply Parking lot closest to Hwy 12 at 8:30 am. We can meet any who live east of town at the Monster Mocha in Montesano. This little coffee drive thru is just south of the Hwy 12 exit where the exit connects with Main Street. We should be arriving there around 8:45 am. Lake Sylvia State Park has just recently received a bit of a make over so besides looking for birds, it will be interesting to see the new face the park is showing.

Saturday, January 4, has been appointed for the *Christmas Bird Count*. Contact Dianna Moore at osdlm1945@gmail.com to let her know if you are interested in participating.

Wednesday, January 15, - Bishop Athletic Complex/Chehalis River Trailway

Meet at Southside Swanson parking area closest to coffee stand drive thru at 8:30 am. Anybody coming from Westport/Grayland can meet us at the Bishop Complex. This is an almost new trail to me. It will be mostly walking and stopping and looking. It will be interesting to see if any birds show up.

Wishing everyone happiness during the upcoming holiday season. I will be sending reminders for upcoming trips through my Birders email list. If you are not on it and would like to be, please email me at deed2et2et@yahoo.com

Your Field Trip Chairperson
Mary O'Neil



Photo by Steve Gifford

Ducks delay migration as climate warms

Barbara Frei is a researcher with Environment and Climate Change Canada, a government agency. She's found that as the climate warms, some waterfowl have started migrating along the Atlantic flyway later in the fall or even spending the winter farther north.

Frei: "They're taking advantage of that warmer weather. Why migrate if you don't have to?" She says the change is occurring in species that time their migration based on temperature and precipitation cues rather than changes in day length.

For example, mallards have been delaying their peak migration by about 18 days per decade.

Frei: "So that's a huge amount of time that they're dallying longer in our northern climates before going further south."

Frei says some hunters are noticing fewer birds. Frei: "They're planning their trips or their outings, going to places where they've seen loads of ducks in the past, maybe with their father or grandfather or friends, and they get there and it's just, year after year, there seems to be less."

So she says hunting regulations may need to adapt. And she hopes hunters – who have long worked on conservation – will also focus on climate change.

Reporting credit: Ethan Freedman / ChavoBart Digital Media



Here's how we'll navigate impacts of the new administration

Dr. Elizabeth Gray CEO, National Audubon Society

We recognize that the outcome of this election brings a new set of challenges and it's more important than ever that we stay united in our commitment to protect birds and the natural habitats they depend on.

A new administration under President Trump may bring renewed attempts to roll back the environmental protections we have fought so hard to secure. We understand that this news may feel daunting, but it also strengthens our resolve to fight for what we know is right: the preservation of our natural world for birds—and for all of us.

We have faced challenging times before, and each time, with your support, we have risen to the occasion. We will not let potential setbacks derail the progress we've made. Instead, we will double down on our efforts, working tirelessly to protect birds, their habitats, and the environmental laws that safeguard them.

Here's How We'll *Continue the Fight*:

Vigilance Against Rollbacks: We will closely monitor and respond to any attempts to weaken critical environmental regulations. Our policy experts are prepared to advocate fiercely in Washington, D.C., and across the nation to ensure that hard-won protections for birds and their habitats remain intact.

While federal policy may shift, our commitment to local and state conservation efforts remains steadfast. We will work with communities to build resilience, ensuring that conservation continues regardless of changes at the federal level.

Rallying for Resilience: We know that many of you share our concerns about the future, and we see this as an opportunity to come together like never before. In the coming months, you'll hear about ways you can take immediate action to support our work. Your voice, your involvement, and your donations will be more critical than ever.

We understand the urgency of this moment, and we're prepared to act.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to the birds we love and the places they need to survive.



Northern Mockingbird

By Natalie Wallington, Audubon Magazine

The Northern Mockingbird is one of North America's most beloved mimics. The skilled singer has also become inextricable from American popular culture, providing inspiration for the fictional "Mockingjay" of the Hunger Games franchise to being a central theme in the iconic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. John James Audubon was a fan of the mocker as well. Here are some facts you might not have known about this American classic.

There are a total of 16 avian species in the world with the name "mockingbird," but the Northern Mockingbird is the only one native to the United States. Other nearby species include the elusive Blue Mockingbird of Mexico and the island-dwelling Bahama Mockingbird, both of which can occasionally appear in the U.S.

The Northern Mockingbird is a year-round resident across much of the U.S., but an expansion into the northeast has been successful due in part to the multiflora rose, or rambler rose. Native to Asia, this invasive rosebush was introduced to the United States in the late 1700s as a root stock for ornamental roses. It makes an ideal nest site for mockingbirds because of its tasty berries and thick tangle of branches.

The mockingbird's latin name is *Mimus polyglottos*, which literally translates to "many-tongued mimic." A polyglot is a person who speaks many languages, referencing the bird's ability to imitate sounds from its environment. While mockingbirds are known to sing several hundred different songs, some research suggests that they might not learn to copy new sounds in adulthood, as previously thought.

A study released in October 2019 found that, in addition to mimicking the calls of other birds and manmade noises like music and machinery, Northern Mockingbirds have been known to imitate at least 12 different species of North American frogs and toads.

(for more see

https://www.audubon.org/news/10-fun-facts-about-northern-mockingbird?ms=digital-eng-email-ea-x-engagement_eng-email_mockingbird-fun-facts



*American Tree Sparrow,
Adam Bender via Birdshare*

Five Fresh Ideas for Finding Birds This Fall

Sure, the shiny bells and whistles of the bird world—those bright and cheery warblers—have mostly winged their way south to wintering grounds by now. But it's still fall, and migration's not over yet! There are still plenty of birds to see, with new arrivals every day.

Late fall means you have to venture out from those wooded warbler hot spots and into new habitats to find sparrows, waterfowl, and shorebirds. Here are a few places that could be hopping right through Thanksgiving.

Weedy Fields for Sparrows

Overgrown pastures, abandoned lots, fields gone fallow—all are havens for the next big wave of migrants to arrive after warblers: sparrows. Looking for sparrows along grassy trails cut in fields can be fun because your birds will flush as you walk and hopefully land on a branch just ahead of you in clear view. Keep an eye out for White-throated Sparrows in the East, Golden-crowned Sparrows in the West, Eastern Towhees in the South, and White-crowned Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows all over.

Mudflats and Marshes for Dabbling Ducks

Late fall is to ducks what September is to warblers—prime migration time. Dabblers are ducks that skim the surface of the water for seeds, aquatic vegetation, and invertebrates, so look for them in shallower waters. This group includes some handsome ducks: the Green-winged Teal with its iridescent green face mask, the Northern Pintail with its elegant tail plume, and the dashing Wood Duck. Females and young of these species tend to migrate earlier and move farther south, while males only move when the cold weather hits.

Bigger Lakes and Reservoirs for Diving Ducks

Divers are ducks that plunge underwater and paddle with their large feet to reach mollusks, invertebrates, fish, and submerged aquatic vegetation. Accordingly, diving ducks such as Common Goldeneyes and Common Mergansers favor deeper waters. The gales of November bring a bluebill wind out of the North, as rafts of Lesser and Greater Scaup sweep out of Canada. Hardy divers are pushed south by Old Man Winter; they migrate as their northern waters freeze over.

Coastal Beaches for Shorebirds

The waning days of autumn are too cold for sunbathing or building sandcastles, but if you're a shorebird it's the perfect time to snag invertebrates from piles of seaweed washed up on the beach. Large numbers of Sanderlings and Willets settle into their wintering grounds along seacoast beaches in November and early December. Likewise, huge congregations of Dunlins can be found in estuaries and muddy bays. Along the East Coast, it's the perfect time to add the stout little Purple Sandpiper to your life list, but don't be fooled—they're not purple, more gray and white. On the West Coast, look for Black Turnstones and Surfbirds that spend their days foraging on rocky coastlines.

Need Some Help Finding Nearby Hotspots?

eBird contains a Google Maps-like tool for timely birding. Just visit ebird's Hotspot Explorer <https://ebird.org/hotspots> enter your location, and you'll find a map with pinpoints of hot birding locations. You can narrow the results by date, too, if you like. Click through the pinpoints to see up-to-date lists of what local birders are seeing at these locations right now.



photo by Joanna Lee Osborn



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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****all area codes 360, unless otherwise noted****

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News & Editorial

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or email to
rd@olearycreek.com

Copy deadline 10th of
month preceding
membership meeting

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The Sandpiper

P.O. Box 470
Montesano,
WA 98563



Program Meeting

Mount St. Helens
Alysa Adams, WA Parks
recovery of flora and fauna
over the last 4 decades

Hoquiam Library Meeting Room
420 Seventh Street
(7th & K)

ZOOM LINK

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82118695964?pwd=dDVqOXFlbUJrakxLWXhLNTRQL1ovUT09>

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MEETING TIME

1:30 pm - 3:30 pm

December 1, 2024