

Riverview Wildlife Refuge with Snohomish Rising

January 18, 2020

By Jonathan Blubaugh

On Saturday, January 18th Pilchuck Audubon Society and the [North Sound Birders' Meetup](#) conducted a Snohomish Rising Weekend Bird Walk at the Snohomish [Riverview Wildlife Refuge](#) and Pilchuck Audubon Society Riverview Sanctuary. These preserves lie along the right bank of the Snohomish River surrounding and adjacent to the Snohomish wastewater treatment plant. The wide, flat trail brings you directly to the WTP perimeter fence, enabling close observation of the waterfowl. The levy between the fence line and the river also gives a great overview of both stream banks.

Strong attendance was obtained by several factors. Wendy Poischbeg of the City of Snohomish planned and organized the outing, posting it on the City's website. She recruited Andy Papadatos accompanied by his wife, Ingrid, to lead the walk. Pilchuck Audubon Executive Director, Brian Zinke, put it on the PAS website and I put it on the North Sound Birders' Meetup. I had about seven RSVP's from Meetup, of whom one was a returnee. Including myself and PAS Treasurer, Judy Hall, we had four from PAS. In total there were at least 38 people. The high turnout resulted in a good number of species sighted: 41.

Often on a bird walk some people see some birds, but most people do not see all the birds or other things that were seen by the group as a whole. However, this day practically everybody saw the most amazing event. First, there were plenty of waterfowl. Treatment ponds are an important resource that is typically fenced, as I alluded to, keeping the birds relatively safe. In this case the ponds are also surrounded by preserved lands. Across the river though are farmlands where seasonal hunting was underway. Every now and then we heard the shotgun blasts which inevitably resulted in flushing up huge flocks of geese and ducks. This cycle repeated about three times on our walk. After a couple of these shootings we all heard a third series of gunshots. We looked up at the rising flock of ducks and saw the most heart-stopping spectacle. Almost everybody saw a Peregrine Falcon catch a duck on the wing out the huge airborne flock! I'm pretty sure its heart stopped..... Within seconds the peregrine was set upon by a pair of raptors. They circled away in front of us towards our right with most of the waterfowl heading away to our left. At first many of us assumed the interlopers were a pair of Bald Eagles because we had seen them prominently perched earlier and there is a huge aerie within sight. They caused the falcon to drop the prey beside the levy path ahead of us. Many of us also saw the falcon drop the duck under pressure. Some observers who were closest and had a good look when the duck was dropped reported that it was actually a pair of Red-tailed Hawks that had stolen the falcon's meal. Until that day I had never seen a falcon catch a bird on the wing. I have seen a few epic life and death chases by raptors. I've seen them strike and kill birds and rodents on the ground and fish in the waters, but I'd never seen a falcon catch a bird. I have seen an eagle take a duck off Shadow Lake also very near Snohomish. So, we also witnessed the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat (to quote ABC Sports) up close on this trip.

Here's a list of most of the birds we encountered: about a hundred Snow Geese flew over, five Trumpeter Swans flew over, two Northern Shovelers, eleven Gadwall, about a thousand

American Wigeons, a couple hundred Mallards, eight Northern Pintails (I missed), about 150 Green-winged Teal, about 75 Ring-necked Ducks, about 40 Lesser Scaup, five Buffleheads, two Hooded Mergansers (I missed), four Common Mergansers, a Pied-billed Grebe (I missed), an Anna's Hummingbird (I missed), ten Ring-billed Gulls flew over, about a hundred Glaucous-winged Gulls, a Double-crested Cormorant (I missed), a Great Blue Heron, the Bald Eagles, the two Red-tailed Hawks, a Belted Kingfisher flew over, a Downy Woodpecker, a Northern Flicker, a Merlin, the Peregrine Falcon, three Steller's Jays, four American Crows, a Black-capped Chickadee, a Chestnut-backed Chickadee (I missed), a spectacular Golden-crowned Kinglet, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, two European Starlings, two American Robins, three House Finches, six Dark-eyed Juncos, a Song Sparrow, two Spotted Towhees, & fifteen Red-winged Blackbirds. Additionally, a couple of Bushtits were heard (I missed). This gave a species total of about 41. All were uploaded to eBird via the mobile application.

A huge thank you goes out to Wendy and Andy for organizing and leading this overwhelmingly successful Snohomish Rising event.

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At the end of the day several of us retired to the [Snohomish Bakery and the First and Union Kitchen](#) in Snohomish for a wonderful late lunch. The establishment is owned and operated our wonderful trip leader, Andy Papadatos and his wife, Ingrid.