

# Great Backyard Bird Count Trip

February 16, 2020

By Jonathan Blubaugh

On February 16th Pilchuck Audubon Society, Academia Latina, and the North Sound Birders' Meetup visited Ferguson Park and Blackman's Lake in Snohomish to celebrate the Great Backyard Bird Count with a picnic and birdwalk.

Attendance at these joint PAS/Academia Latina/Meetup birdwalks has been consistently strong with about 38 participants this day by my count. In addition to myself and PAS Treasurer Judy Hall in attendance, we had Academia Latina leader Rosamaria Graziani, her co-leader Allizon, Snohomish Rising trip Leader Andy and his wife Ingrid. We had at least two RSVP's on Meetup and Becky from Meetup joined us. Importantly, we were joined by Conor Courtney, a journalism student at UW writing a story for the Mill Creek Beacon about the Pilchuck Audubon chapter. We were delighted to welcome him to our birdwalk. He interviewed several of the attendees including me. We relish the opportunity to get word of our perspective out as many ways as possible. Many thanks to Mr. Courtney and the Mill Creek Beacon. He told me he will share the article with me and when he does, I will share it with you.

At the outset I ran into a tiny bit of difficulty. I had only been to Ferguson Park once before over ten years ago with PAS' Tuesday birding group. I must have had a day off. I didn't remember anything about how to get there or where to park. In researching the trip, I scrutinized the Google Map and aerial photo. Noticing a closed gate, I gave written directions to parking at the Blackman Lake boatlaunch. But people who were familiar with the park knew that there was parking on the other side of the closed gate. That's where most of them went. Plus, some people, rather than following my convoluted directions logically just put the address into their own navigator. That also led naturally to the other parking lot "behind" the closed gate. Clearly, I missed the parking lot "behind" the gate and its entrance drive in my research. Sorry. We ended up arriving at two different locations as a result. Plus, I was nearly ten minutes late, so I got to field a call from a participant who couldn't locate me. Fortunately, the two groups met up and we were able to do a little birding.

The park sits on the rising south shore of the lake nestled up against urbanized Snohomish on three sides. The park is landscaped, grassy with tall Douglas Firs. On the west side to my surprise is a small Ultimate Frisbee course. We started at the top near a picnic shelter and playground. We did pretty well in finding birds in the park, but when we walked the perimeter on the south and west there were no birds whatsoever. Neighboring properties on that side I would describe as mostly single story retail, commercial, and possibly very light industrial. Plenty of parking, paved alleys, and no birds. It didn't take long for guests to start mentioning, "Hey, let's go down to the lake, we saw some birds down there." I guess this was a tactical error on my part. I wanted to do a little bit of walking: after all it's a birdwalk. But walking the perimeter proved fruitless in this case. The lake was a very busy place with at least one mildly surprising species. People remarked at the hybrid ducks. I theorized (arm-waved as we geologists say) that they were probably Mallard x Muscovy ducks. They were very dark, but had clear traces of green heads amongst the drakes. I selected "Mallard (domestic-type)" in eBird for them.

The mild surprise was a flock of twenty Ruddy Ducks in non-breeding plumage found by Andy. Improvidently, they were on the far lakeshore, so I doubt too many of us saw them. The white cheek patch is distinctive, but that's about all I could say.

I seemed to have missed one Meetup participant. I found her email long after getting home. She couldn't find us initially. Thus, she made a comment online in the Meetup application that she was looking for us. That generated the email to me. In the process of continuous improvement then, I guess I could do a couple of things differently. I should mention that I really don't communicate with the Meetup application on the day of the trip or in the field. People should call me – I will have my phone with me for the eBird app. Second, when planning the next trip, I should put the address into the Google Map and see where it leads.

Here's a list of most of the birds we saw: four Canada Geese, six American Wigeons, about 110 Mallards, six cross breed ducks, two Buffleheads, the twenty Ruddy Ducks, a Pied-billed Grebe, about 50 American Coots, 22 Glaucous-winged Gulls, five Double-crested Cormorants, a Great Blue Heron, a Bald Eagle (I missed), a male Downy Woodpecker, a Peregrine Falcon, a couple hundred crows, two Black-capped Chickadees, a couple of Chestnut-backed Chickadees (I missed), about 10 Bushtits (I missed), four spectacular Golden-crowned Kinglets, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Bewick's Wren, four European Starlings, an American Robin, seven Dark-eyed Juncos flushed up by a toddler, and a Song Sparrow. We also heard a Northern Flicker, a Steller's Jay, and a Spotted Towhee. All were uploaded to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology via the eBird mobile application.

The Kids' Picnic for the month of March was cancelled well into its planning stage, but before an announcement had been released due to issues surrounding the viral outbreak. The Weekend Birdwalk for Saturday, March 7th will go on as planned. Then I will hold off planning additional Weekend Birdwalks until we can be reasonably certain that our groups will not be transmitting the disease.