



Vaux's Swifts — Next Steps

By Larry Schwitters

What began as an assessment of the bird significance of the Monroe's Wagner School chimney quickly evolved into an effort to locate all the North American Vaux's Swift major migratory roost sites and protect them. Audubon's Vaux's Happening has documented nearly six million swift roosting events in the last twelve migrations. The question remained as to why the birds want to spend the night together and why some chimneys are used and others ignored.

Before chimneys, there big trees with rotted out centers that swifts could use as roosts. Although Chimney Swifts (eastern USA) adapted well to a variety of brick structures as forests were cleared, the same is not true here. Our Vaux's like old and fairly large brick chimneys. In the early 1940s, stricter fire codes put an end to all brick chimney construction. New construction required a liner, usually of concrete or tile. This helped control chimney fires but did not help swifts.

Common bricks are as tall as a swift is long so the birds can hang onto every joint and have a nice shingle-like overlap. Of the twelve most significant known roost sites, ten are brick. If there is a hole at the bottom of the chimney or if the top opening is too large, swifts avoid it to reduce predation. Small chimneys work for nesting but have only moderate appeal for roosting. We have yet to discover a house chimney that hosts over a thousand swifts. We also have yet to discover a major roost site with a nest in it.

We got some answers when we dropped a temperature recorder halfway down the Wagner roost in early April. A month later we examined the data. It is close to 25 °F warmer inside the chimney than outside. Bricks, concrete, and stone absorb the heat of the day, then release it as the surrounding air cools. The bricks continue to release heat until sunrise. On cool evenings the swifts can huddle together pressed against a brick that is heating them up all night long. And on hot evenings, very few swifts enter the chimneys. I believe they are hanging on the bark of trees where it is cooler.

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March Program Meeting Friday, March 14, 7 PM

Avian Research at the UW Burke Museum

Dr. Klicka, Curator of birds, will explain the research done at the Burke Museum. This will include the questions asked, the methods used, the results obtained and why these results matter from an evolutionary and biodiversity perspective. Dr Klicka obtained his Ph.D. in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior with a concentration in evolutionary biology from the University of Minnesota in 1999. He comes to the UW from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas where he was Curator of Birds and Adjunct Professor. His research has ranged from using genetics to determine bird species to how neotropical birds evolved and dispersed. Please join us for a very enlightening and educational evening. For more information, leave a message at 425.252.0926.

Everett Firefighters Hall 2411 Hewitt Avenue, Everett



(Photo by Gary Cramer)

Get Ready

Bird-a-thon teams are starting to form. You can compete during any 24 hour period of the May 16–19 weekend. There will be prizes for many categories and the grand prize will be a three day stay in Ocean Shores!

All the details are on our website. You definitely will want to participate in this fast paced and fun event to benefit the programs of Pilchuck Audubon.

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President's Message

By Kathleen Snyder, Pilchuck Audubon Society President



I'm happy to announce that one of our long time volunteers has become our newest board member. **Kathy Piland** is now the Pilchuck Audubon secretary.

Having an undying love for the natural world, she finds herself drawn to organizations that encourage conservation and environmental stewardship. She's been a "salmon watcher" for King County and participated in fish flings, site restoration plantings and knotweed surveys in both King and Snohomish Counties. Kathy discovered Pilchuck Audubon in 2002 and has been a member ever since. Her volunteer activities included editing and updating the website, data and donations entry, and now secretary. Welcome and many thanks, Kathy.

I want to share part of the minutes I received from a recent National Audubon Board of Directors meeting. Our Northwest representative, **Marina Skumanich**, reported this on Hydraulic fracturing:

"While our goal is a carbon-free and sustainable energy system, there has been widespread promotion of natural gas fracking as a near-term alternative to coal and oil. This puts Audubon in a difficult position with important conservation goals in conflict. Fracking risks serious harm to habitats, including Audubon's targeted conservation initiatives. The process of assessing the extent of these threats has only begun.

Nearly two-thirds of US IBA acreage is on shale formations! Equally pernicious is the surface mining for sand that is required by the fracking process. As reported by chapters at the meeting's Chapter Forum, the upper Midwest area of Wisconsin and Minnesota is particularly subject to this threat due to the geology of the area. All these activities further forest fragmentation, pollute waterways and wetlands, and threaten progress on many conservation initiatives.

On the other hand, Audubon has identified climate change as the number one threat to birds, and has the data to support this view. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions thus becomes the highest priority. Unfortunately, there is no consensus over the net carbon benefit of fracked natural gas. For the present, NAS is trying to strike a balance between protecting regional habitat and promoting climate solutions. A thought-provoking discussion during the Conservation and Science Committee meeting among staff and board members focused on a draft Audubon position statement on Hydraulic Fracturing for Oil and Gas. It is apparent that much can be done to protect habitat and improve oversight at fracking sites. There is also the need to advocate for an outright ban on fracking in certain fragile areas. The draft position statement is currently under revision in light of the committee discussion."

This is a complicated issue which concerns us all. Please contact me if you would like further information.



About Pilchuck Audubon Society

The Pilchuck Audubon *Profile*, official newsletter of Pilchuck Audubon Society, is published monthly.

Pilchuck Audubon Society (PAS) is a grass-roots environmental organization with members throughout Snohomish County and Camano Island, Washington.

Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife for the benefit of earth's biological diversity.

Through education, advocacy, and community activism, PAS is committed to bringing people closer to wildlife in order to build a deeper understanding of the powerful links between healthy ecosystems and human beings, and to

encourage the involvement of our members in efforts to protect the habitat this wildlife depends upon for survival.

We serve as a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. PAS is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, nonprofit organization incorporated in the state of Washington.

Newsletter Submissions

Submit articles to newsletter@pilchuckaudubon.org

or mail to 1429 Avenue D, PMB 198, Snohomish, WA 98290-1742.

Submissions must be received by the 15th of the month preceding publication. We reserve the right to edit.

To contact Pilchuck Audubon Society, call 425.252.0926.

The monthly *Profile* is available online at www.pilchuckaudubon.org

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Trip Calendar

Check our calendar at www.pilchuckaudubon.org for the latest information

Tuesday, March 4 **Silvana Roads**

Meet at 8 AM at Quilceda Village Walmart west of Marysville (I-5 Exit 200). Park away from store, to the east, near Quilceda Blvd and next to I-5. Pipits, falcons, and all the winter LBJs. We may also visit the Port Susan Nature Conservancy site. Pack a lunch.

Trip Leader: Virginia Clark 360.435.3750

Tuesday, March 11 **Blaine, Birch Bay Semiahmoo, Drayton Harbor**

Meet at 7:00 AM at Quilceda Village Wal-Mart west of Marysville (I-5-Exit 200). Park away from store, to the east, near Quilceda Blvd. and next to I-5. Expect Harlequin and Long tail Ducks, Brant and lots of other seagoing avian species. We will eat lunch at Wilma's waterfront cabin. She will serve soup and dessert.

Trip Leader: Wilma Bayes 360.629.2028, Virginia Clark 360.435.3750 (call Virginia with questions)

Tuesday, March 18 **Fir Island**

Meet at 8 AM at Quilceda Village Walmart west of Marysville (I-5 Exit 200). Park away from store, to the east, near Quilceda Blvd and next to I-5. Expect almost anything, Golden Eagle, Northern Shrike, Tundra Swans, Merlin, etc. Pack a lunch.

Trip Leader: Virginia Clark 360.435.3750

Saturday, March 22 **Larrabee State Park**

This hike on the Fragrance Lake Loop Trail is approximately five miles with an elevation gain from sea level to about 1,200 feet at the lake. Depending on the weather, the trail could be muddy and if its too bad, we may divert to Anacortes. If the weather cooperates, we could make a side trip by car to the top of Chuckanut Mountain and down to the shoreline to look for little Green Rock Crabs and Little Brown Flatworms before getting lunch. Bring water, a snack for the trail, good hiking boots, foul weather gear, hat, and binoculars. Meet at 8 AM at Quilceda Village Walmart west of Marysville (I-5 Exit 200). Park away from store, to the east, near Quilceda Blvd and next to I-5.

Trip Leader: Jonathan Blubaugh, 425.244.7633, aracfi@msn.com

Tuesday, March 25 **Point No Point**

Meet at 7:20 AM at the Edmonds Wade James Theater parking lot. The theater's address is 950 Main Street, Edmonds, 98020, just east of 9th Avenue on the south side of Main Street. We'll take the ferry to Kingston and bird the voyage, the docks, Point No Point, and Foulweather Bluff. Waterfowl, shorebirds and passerines, and much beauty and serenity. Pack a lunch.

Trip Leader: Virginia Clark 360.435.3750

June 12-15 **Winthrop**

We have reservations to stay at Brown's Farm just west of Winthrop off of Highway 20. We will have two nice cabins in a very birdy setting. Terri Pieper from North Central Audubon, who lives in Twisp, will be joining us to make sure we get all to the local birding hot spots. We should see a lot of birds, wild flowers and other creatures in this wonderful area. Come and join us; sign up now by contacting Susie Schaefer at susie.schaefer@comcast.net or 425.771.8165.

Mukilteo Wildlife Week

Pilchuck Audubon is partnering with the Mukilteo Wildlife Habitat Project to co-sponsor Mukilteo Wildlife Week March 16-22. Highlights will be a garden tour of four certified wildlife habitat backyards on Sunday March 16 and a presentation by Howard Garrett of the Orca Network on "Orcas: Foraging Nomads of the Salish Sea" on Thursday, March 20. The garden tour will include Pilchuck Audubon members on site to help identify birds and talk about setting up bird feeding stations. Time is noon to 3 PM. The orca presentation will be 7 PM at the Rosehill Community Center in Mukilteo. All details are on our website home page www.pilchuckaudubon.org or call 425.252.0926 and leave a message.

2014 at the Demo Garden

The year started off with a bang in February with Alan Mearns training to help everyone prepare for the annual Great Backyard Bird Count. Other workshops planned for 2014 include frog awareness, native flowering plants and evergreens, birds, bees, and other pollinators, an evening bat program, and attracting birds to your yard.

Two special events will be given by the Puget Sound Bird Observatory; one on migratory birds and the other on Fox Sparrows. There will be a Native Plant Sale and Bird Walk at the Garden lead by Don Norman on May 17. This year local artist, April Richardson, will be doing two special art workshops; paper making using seeds and local plant material and suet making in pinecones. There will be work parties on the first Saturday of almost every month and everyone is welcome to come and help keep up the Garden so it will continue to be a great place to learn about wildlife and Native plants.

Look for the events on the PAS Calendar or get on the email list to receive announcements and flyers — if you are not already on that list email your name and email address to garden@pilchuckaudubon.org.

Vaux's Swifts...

(Continued from page 1)

Partners in Flight published their new land bird population estimates last year. They estimate there are 7,800,00 Chimney Swifts that migrate through North America and 340,000 Vaux's Swifts. I believe it is closer to 250,000. The shelters needed by this species are few, far apart, and crumbling. Their owners often don't care about wildlife conservation. Last year the swifts lost two of their chimneys, both to business decisions.

One was a chimney at an unused old hospital building in Ellensburg. From the beginning of Vaux's Happening, Kittitas Audubon did consistent observations during both migration directions. Located on the east side of the Cascades, the numbers were not as spectacular as sites to the west (northbound record high of 850 swifts and 480 southbound) but it had been there for the swifts since 1912. In early 2013 the property was sold, and over Audubon's objections, the building was demolished. That spring swifts circled the site debris before entering a nearby residential chimney. Migrating swifts were not located in September.



Our challenge is compelling. With large snags gone and old chimneys going, can we build structures specifically for the swifts spaced every 100-200 miles along the flyway? And if you build them, will they come? It's never been done with Vaux's but it has with Chimney Swifts. The following is a description from Central Minnesota using a Chimney Swift recording:

"Within five minutes of playing the recording, I had five swifts rattling through the yard chipping along with the CD, diving at the speaker! I placed the speaker about 10 feet away from my newly placed tower. After investigating the sound for about 15 minutes, a swift discovered the tower and after a few passes, plunged inside. Another followed it and they remained inside for a half an hour, chipping excitedly. The next scene is something that will be etched in my mind forever. Both swifts came out of the top at full speed and before they could reach the edge of the yard, were locked into the

classic "V" position chipping in joy....they found their new home!" – Jim Morrison

Vaux's Happening is working on making this a reality in Ellensburg. We think it is possible to build the first Vaux Swift tower for about \$5,000 if we can find a location. Reed City Park sits a few blocks from the old hospital site and Ellensburg Parks and Recreation is supportive. We are submitting grant applications now. It is an experiment and a gamble but how wonderful if it works!

If you are interested in this project, please contact me at leschwitters@me.com. We can use help during migration, i.e. counting, being a docent, event volunteering, or helping with grant writing and research. Save the date for the 2014 Swifts Night Out Celebration in Monroe at the Wagner Center, Saturday, September 13.

Annual PAS Meeting

The PAS annual business meeting and board election will take place at the April program meeting Friday, April 11, at 7 PM at the Everett Firefighters Hall. This year, the offices of President and Secretary are open. If you're interested in running for either of these offices — or would like to nominate someone — please contact us by phone at 425.252.0926 or send an e-mail through the "Contact Us" page at www.pilchuckaudubon.org

We will also take nominations from the floor. The business meeting agenda also includes:

- Summary of the year's budget
- Presentation of Volunteer of 2013 Award

Please plan to attend this important meeting.

Smart Growth Update

Things are heating up in Everett with many proposals on how to accommodate new growth and development for the next 20 years. Snohomish County wants to quickly amend their tree replacement standards for the Southwest Urban Growth Areas. That could either ensure more trees are retained and replaced in a way that creates more habitat, water retention and quality of life — or not! Click on the link to read more and how you can help <http://pilchuckaudubon.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page§ionid=150>.

Weekend Bird Walk Trip Report: Samish Flats

By Terry Nightingale, Pilchuck Audubon Society Vice President

On Saturday, January 25, seven weekend birders braved the cold and made our way north the Samish Flats to look for our favorite birds of prey, also known as raptors. We were excited to have Pilchuck Tuesday field trip leader Virginia Clark with us, who had graciously volunteered to show us the best raptor spots. The fresh batch of Virginia's famous home-baked cookies that she brought with her also did not go unappreciated!

After the familiar drive north on I-5, we turned left onto Washington Highway 20 and made our first stop at Big Indian Slough. The morning's fog was still thick, and it was hard to see much but we did spot a group of **Northern Pintail**, the males looking rather dapper in their bright white and dark brown breeding plumage. The first raptors of the day were two **Red-tailed Hawks**, which we had the pleasure of hearing as they called to each other.

Continuing our journey north, we stopped at the bayside portion of Bay View State Park, where the fog was not present and the plentiful waterfowl did not disappoint! Beyond the estimated 4,000 **American Wigeon** (with a bonus male **Eurasian Wigeon** thrown in just for extra fun), we saw **Bufflehead**, **Common Goldeneye** (unusual, but not unheard of for saltwater), and a **Common Loon**. The raptor count continued to increase, with four **Bald Eagles** in evidence. We also saw the first swans of the day, four **Trumpeter Swans**.

After this productive stop, we continued northward to the Samish Flats proper, with our first stop at Sullivan Road, a dead-end side road just off the main highway. Here on the flats, the fog had not yet burned off, so visibility was again limited. Still, there was much to see: more Wigeon and Pintails, this time with **Mallards** also mixed in. But the smaller birds were the true highlight of this stop. Virginia spotted a flock of **American Pipits** as they flushed from foraging on the ground and flew overhead. I have yet to see pipits when not with Virginia! Small flocks of familiar species, **European Starlings** and **Dark-eyed Juncos** were nearby the active farms on this road, as were our first shorebirds of the day, **Killdeer** and **Dunlin**. We couldn't see them, but true to their name, we heard the songs of the **Western Meadowlark** coming out of the fogged-over meadows.

Our next stop was the "crown jewel" of the Samish Flats, the West 90. This was where the variety of raptors really intensified: we found four **Rough-legged Hawks**, three more **Red-tailed Hawks**, six more **Bald Eagles**, and a **Great Blue Heron**, technically not a raptor, but while preying on frogs in the nearby fields, sure acting like one. For our best find here, credit goes to Virginia for scanning the distant dike with her scope until she found

a **Short-eared Owl** and several of us got nice looks through the scope when he perched.

If you ever visit the West 90, it's worth driving an extra mile or so to its sister site, the East 90. When our group did, our raptor count continued to rise as we were rewarded with views of two **Northern Harriers**, one of them a light-colored male, a **Cooper's Hawk**, and my favorite bird of prey, a **Northern Shrike**, which Virginia again spotted by careful scanning with her scope. At one point while we were scanning, we heard the distant but still cacophonous sound of **Snow Geese**, and looked to see a large flock of about 4,500 taking flight and pursued by what could only have been a Bald Eagle based on size and dark color. A flock of **Tundra Swans** flew overhead, honking in their higher-pitched voices so we could compare their sounds with those of the numerous Trumpeter Swans we had been hearing all day.

Next on the agenda was a delicious lunch in Edison, a small town just a bit further north, after which we scanned the neighborhood, including the nearby slough where we found **Green-winged Teal** and the nearby trees where we saw **Eurasian Collared-Doves**. Our northward journey done for the day, we headed back south, and on one of the power lines adjacent to the highway, we saw our last raptor of the day, and first falcon of the day, an American Kestrel. All in all, this trip was raptor-ific!



Killdeer (Photo by Rick Brauer)

Want to see more member submitted photos? Our website Photo Gallery is now featuring **Ray White**, a PAS member who travels the world for birding opportunities. Enjoy his newly posted photos from Ethiopia.



Pilchuck Audubon Society
1429 Avenue D, PMB 198
Snohomish, WA 98290

Pilchuck Audubon Society Membership Information

Support your local Audubon chapter by becoming a member. PAS dues are tax deductible (consult your tax professional for details). The PAS tax ID number is 91-6183664.

- New Member.....\$28
- Renewal.....\$28
- Lifetime Member.....\$1,000
 - 10 monthly payments of \$100
 - 4 quarterly payments of \$250
 - 1 payment of \$1,000
- Donation..... \$ _____

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Volunteer Opportunity of the Month

PAS is looking for a person to become our Donations Chair which involves sending out thank you notes to our donors in a timely fashion. Familiarity with Word documents and database entry would be helpful. Most work will be done in late May, late June/early July, and late December/early January.

Time commitment involves about five hours per week during those periods and shorter intermittent sessions throughout the year. Work can be done from home. No meeting attendance required! Contact Kathleen Snyder at 425.438.1505 for more information.