



Island Wings

- to enjoy, learn about, & preserve the diverse natural habitats of these islands & beyond

Volume 19 Number 2

September-October 2008

PROGRAM

Islanders on the Road

Birding and Photographing Rio Grande Valley & Texas Coast

7pm, Thursday, September 18, 2008
Land Trust Building 10014 SW Bank Rd.
Contact: Laura Bienen 206 567-4613

It wasn't five weeks in a balloon but twelve weeks in an RV. This birding excursion culminated with spending most of April on the Texas coast. Four members of Vashon-Maury Island Audubon, Jack and Pam Dawdy along with Dan Willsie and Carol Ferch, skipped this year's "winter that wouldn't end" by heading south. They birded through parts of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

The September 18th Audubon program will focus on the group's experiences in the Rio Grande valley and on the Texas coast. Jack Dawdy will present photographs taken from Falcon Reservoir to High Island. The Rio Grande valley and the Texas coast are world famous as a migration route for flycatchers, tanagers, orioles, vireos, thrushes, as well as warblers, buntings and kingbirds. Additionally, the beaches, islands and estuaries support a great diversity and density of gulls, terns, herons and egrets. This, along with the warm spring weather, makes this area a Mecca for birders and photographers.

This program is free of charge, coffee and cookies are provided, and all are welcome. Be Green. Bring your own cup.
Submitted by Laura Bienen



Black Skimmer

New Board Members Ready to Serve Island Audubon

Elected at the July 17, 2008 Members Meeting are the following Board members:

Co-President John Friars

Master Birder John Friars has more years birding than anyone else on Vashon (except maybe for Dan Willsie). When he started bird watching in junior high, John's initial I.D. source was Peterson's bird prints. In 1942, he replaced that heavy volume with Peterson's first guide book. Since his retirement from Boeing in 1991, he and his wife, Ellie, enjoy traveling and birding. He often co-leads field trips for Seattle Audubon. Seattle Audubon reports that John tries to "bird his age" on field trips, a feat that the 74 year old Master Birder says "gets harder every year!"

Education Program Co-Chair Amy Kitchener

My educational background is in Environmental Studies, Anthropology, and Public Health, culminating in an MPH from Columbia University. I am now a ceramic artist (go figure that one) periodically teaching kids and teen pottery classes through VAA. In 1994, I moved from Hoboken NJ to Vashon where I live with my husband Karl and 11-year old and major bird enthusiast son, Aaron along with our 12 chickens, 2 parakeets, cat, and gecko. Aaron and I began our

Photo by J. R. Dawdy

birding adventure five years ago while listening to a then-mysterious Varied-Thrush call in our yard. We started taking Birding-By-Ear classes with Steve Caldwell and have been hooked ever since.

.....*New Board Members cont. on page 2, column 2*

Caldwell Earns Scholarship



Spencer Caldwell and Audubon President Sue Trevathan.

Photo by John Sage, FinchHaven Digital Photography

At the Vashon Scholarship Awards ceremony, Vashon High School senior Spencer Caldwell received a \$1,000 scholarship from Vashon Audubon Society. The Island chapter praised him for his contribution to the Birding-By-Ear class and his wizardry with Power-Point presentations. Another Island project was his conversion of a VW Rabbit to an electric car which he then donated to the Vashon Land Trust. His parents are Steve and Susan Caldwell. He plans to attend the U. of Washington.

Shaylon Stalk, who was the recipient of our scholarship three years ago, was an intern at COASST this summer. She is in her senior year at Amherst College. In high school, she volunteered with the 4th Grade Birding Program and the Science Fair. Shay says that those experiences really fostered her love of birds and now plans to go for a PhD in ornithology.

To donate to the Island Audubon scholarship fund, mail check to PO Box 838, Vashon WA 98070. Please write Scholarship Fund on your check.

Vashon-Maury Island Audubon

Board Officers:

Co-President	Sue Trevathan	206 463-1484
	John Friars	463-9881
Secretary	Mary O'Brien	463-6209
Treasurer	Lindsay Hofman	463-5356

Board Chairs:

Conservation	Michelle Ramsden	406-3723
Co-Education	Kathryn True	567-5389
	Amy Kitchener	463-2921
Field Trips	Alan Huggins	567-5166
Co-Editor Island Wings	Barbara Chasan	463-2571
	Ann Spiers	463-9858
Membership	Randy Smith	567-5333
Programs	Laura Bienen	567-4613

Project Coordinators:

Publicity	Jean Aspinall	463-3178
Welcome	Fran O'Reilly	463-4255
Merchandise	Susan Commerece	567-5707

New Board Members cont. from page 1

Secretary Mary O'Brien

Mary O'Brien has lived on Vashon Island twice, this time for 17 years. Since her return she has been involved in Vashon-Maury Islands' horse community, helping maintain trails. She is a writer and an editor.

Membership Chair Randy Smith

Randy Smith likes to hike, photograph wildflowers, bird, and generally enjoy the natural world. He retired in 2004 from the Environmental Protection Agency, where he spent 24 years working on such problems as Asarco air pollution, Hanford cleanup, temperature problems affecting salmon, and other Superfund and Clean Water Act projects. He has lived on Vashon since 1991.

Need to Renew Your Membership?

If your renewal letter has been filed (or piled) away, go on-line to the Vashon Audubon website for a fresh form, the mailing address, and other information. On the form, cross out "New" and write in "Renew."

Visit our website

www.vashonaudubon.org

<VOLUNTEER TODAY>

Newsletter Editors for Audubon's Island Wings

For one person or a team. Easy layout, cooperative Island printer, interesting content, some writing, much editing and detail garnering, fun interaction with bird and environmental community. This is a board position. Excellent training by present editors.

A job easily divided into specific tasks for a team.
Ann Spiers: 463-9858 or Barbara Chasan: 463-2571

Volunteer Coordinator

The chapter needs someone to oversee our volunteer process. Someone to contact, record, solicit, train volunteers, and then link them to appropriate projects. Are you the one?

Sue Trevathan: 463-1484

Adopt-a-Road Coordinator

Clean up held twice a year. Tasks are to advertise, recruit, and lead road

clean up on Vashon Highway south of town.

For task details, phone past coordinator,

Ellen Kritzman: 567-4837

To volunteer, phone

Sue Trevathan: 463-1484

Purple Martin Numbers Echo Puget Sound Trends for 2008

From Rich Siegrist, Vashon, 8/14/2008:

Like the flood disasters in the mid-west this spring that affected so many humans, another type of disaster affected some of our bird populations. Our colder than normal spring also affected our flying insect population. Purple Martins rely almost exclusively on flying insects for their food source. With no or very little food, an unknown number of early arriving birds starved to death.

At two of the sites, Ellisport and Tramp Harbor, I removed nine dead birds from the boxes. For the past three years the island has averaged over 70 nesting pairs. As of this writing this year will be under 20 pairs. The four sites on the west side of the island took the hardest hit with only 2 nesting pairs. Three of the sites had no birds at all. There are 85 available nest boxes currently available at 7 sites around the island.

Talking to other nest box providers in the north sound area they are experiencing the same problem. Having started with only 3 nest boxes in 1994 I'm confident that the birds, with Ma Nature's cooperation, will rebuild to levels of the past few years.

From *Tweeters* Post by Ed Swan, Vashon 8/9/2008:

.....Checking the Office of the Washington State Climatologist website, this spring's temperatures were relatively cold. However, the spring of 2002 was also equally cool, yet Rich doesn't have the same sort of dip in his records.

Is more than the weather going on with the martin population or was there something particular about this year that made a difference?

From *Tweeters* Post by Stan Kosta, Arlington, 8/9/2008:

The other day I checked a colony in Snohomish County and found nine dead adult martins at one site that only has six boxes, only one box had an active nest--a second year female incubating three eggs at this late date. I never saw or heard a male bird the entire time I was there, even though the female exited her nest and alarm called, a vocalization that in my experience always attracts other martins.

At two other nearby sites I did not see or hear any martins, can only check those boxes by boat at high tide and I will be doing that soon, but admit I am not really looking forward to it.

.... My data does not go back quite as far as Rich's, but it does include 2002 and also shows no decline that year, in fact it shows a nearly 30% increase in the known population in my north Sound study area that year.

From *Tweeters* Post by Stan Kosta, Arlington, 8/14/2008:

Another note, hopefully my last, to add to all the dismal reports regarding Puget Sound martins this year. I had a rather surreal experience yesterday late afternoon and evening when I took the boat out to Hermosa Point. This site has been consistently the largest colony in Snohomish County since I started collecting data a decade ago, 16-17 pairs there in recent years, 12-13 last year but yesterday I saw or heard not even one

martin there at what would ordinarily be the height of the breeding season, none, a check of all box contents revealed that no pairs are breeding there this year, and once again, I came home with a bag of dead adults. All colonies I've been tracking have crashed, eight sites that supported 87 pair in 2006 now have 22 pair, three sites have been abandoned entirely, the one that's done the best is only down 50%, and, reproduction is not good, clutches of only two young in most nests where eggs hatched, many nests have failed entirely, others may yet fail as well before the season is over.

But, at this point in time I am not convinced of the ever present and widely accepted notion that the post 1940s martin decline in the Northwest was primarily a result of starling arrival. There had to be something else going on then, just as there was in 2006 and 2008. Perhaps it was weather then, too, or something else that reduced the food supply, or disease. But I cannot see how it could have been primarily starling competition, based on the observations I have made.

From *Tweeters* Post by Paul Webster, West Seattle, 8/11/2008:

Barbara and I have been monitoring goings-on at three Purple Martin areas in West Seattle this summer. We've spent about seven hours observing these locations and found the martin colony at Jack Block apparently reduced to a single pair. They have a nest with youngsters at the north end of the old wharf railroad(?) structure that has 19 gourds hanging along the boardwalk.

The active gourd is one of the two hanging from a bracket above the structure at the north end. One evening last week we watched the parents bringing food several times to the nest. The other gourds seem empty, some even have spider webs partially covering the entrances. Some of the gourds may contain dead martins.

August's Ebb Tide Program's dive off the Tramp Harbor Dock netted this octopus for the event's children and adults to observe.

Photo by Shelly Calabreze



Vashon-Maury Island Audubon Society
P.O. Box 838
Vashon Island, WA 98070

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LAST CALL!

Enjoyment of Birds

Birding classes begin in September.

This year's series starts with a beginners' session on 9/10, then becomes advanced intermediate courses held monthly on 2nd Wednesday nights from October through March. Field trips are also scheduled.

These popular classes fill rapidly.

For more information or early registration requests, contact Alan Huggins at alanhugs@comcast.net.

September/October 2008

Wednesday, September 10, 7-9pm -- Land Trust Building, 10014 SW Bank Road

THE ENJOYMENT OF BIRDS -- First of the Beginner Classes. Pre-register. *Alan Huggins alanhugs@comcast.net or 567-5166.*

Saturday, September 13, 8-10am -- Ober Park 'n' Ride

ISLAND AUDUBON FIELD TRIP -- *Monthly Second Saturday.* Bring binoculars/scope if you have them! *Alan Huggins 567-5166.*

Thursday, September 18, 7pm -- Land Trust Building, 10014 SW Bank Road

VASHON AUDUBON PROGRAM -- *Birding and Photographing the Rio Grande Valley and the Texas Coast* -- Jack Dawdy. *Laura Bienen 567-4613.*

Thursday, October 2, 7pm -- First Thursday every even-numbered month

VMIAS BOARD MEETING -- Phone Sue Trevathan for confirmation, 463-1484.

Wednesday, October 8, 7-9pm -- Land Trust Building, 10014 SW Bank Road

THE ENJOYMENT OF BIRDS -- Advanced Beginning Classes continue after Beginning Classes. Pre-register. *Alan Huggins alanhugs@comcast.net or 567-5166.*

Saturday, October 11, 8-10am -- Ober Park'n'Ride

ISLAND AUDUBON FIELD TRIP -- *Monthly Second Saturday.* Bring binoculars/scope if you have them! *Alan Huggins 567-5166.*

ED SWAN'S NOTABLE SIGHTINGS

What was seen:

June 28: Around 4 this morning my wife woke me to say she was hearing a "beep" owl. Unfortunately, we never got a good listen. The calls she heard before I woke sound like a possible screech owl. But then a few minutes later, I heard the neighborhood **Barred Owl** family in the distance. If what Linda heard wasn't them, it would have shut up as soon as they got going so as not to become their morning snack. While listening, I heard a **nighthawk**. The dawn chorus then started with first a **Western Tanager**, then an **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, then the robins followed by PS Flycatcher, Swainson's Thrush and towhee. This leaves out our neighbor's roosters, turkey and Common Peafowl. The Olive-sided Flycatcher went as steady as a metronome for at least a half hour without a break, every 6-7 seconds.

July 5: 4 **Least Sandpipers** were at KVI Beach this afternoon. These are the first reported of the season. I last checked KVI Beach last Monday and Fern Cove last Tuesday, so these came in the last few days--maybe I can use last a few more times. (July 16: About a dozen Least Sandpipers were present at Fern Cove.) Despite the rocket's red glare and the bombs bursting in air, the breeding plumage **Horned Grebe** was still present today that's been in Quartermaster Harbor's inner harbor since at least early June.

July 8: I saw a single **DC Cormorant** in inner Quartermaster Harbor; this is consistent with several other years' return dates. I also saw a **California Gull** off the Tahlequah ferry, which falls into the usual return range but it has been seen as early as the third week of June. (July 16: There were a dozen CA Gulls at Fern Cove.)

July 14: A **Common Loon** was in Tramp Harbor, which could be one that stayed around for the summer or possibly one returning early. (August 6: A Common Loon was in the harbor this morning.)

July 15: Rich Siegrist saw 6 **Surf Scoters** fly by in Tramp Harbor. (August 1: I saw a single Surf Scoter fly by off the Tahlequah ferry.) John Arum saw a flock of **Bonaparte's Gulls** off the PO boat. (July 16: At Fern Cove there were 2 dozen Bonaparte's Gulls. This is on the early side of the return range for Bonaparte's. August 5: 500+ Bonaparte's were in Paradise Cove and in Colvos Passage off from the cove this morning. Those sorts of numbers might attract a jaeger or two.) Gary Shugart saw **Rhino Auklets**. (July 19: I saw several Rhino Auklets off the Tahlequah ferry.)

July 16: Among other shorebirds at Fern Cove were 2 **Mew**. This is the earliest return by about a week for the Mew. Also present were a **Spotted Sandpiper** and 2 (90% sure but lighting wasn't good) **Western Sandpipers**.

July 19: Grace Oliver, an off-Island birder, describes a young **Merlin** begging for food at Mukai Pond. Confirmation and seeing if they are hanging out here and possibly nested would be interesting. Another off-Island birder reported a **RN Phalarope** on the Tahlequah ferry. (August 23: I've seen RN Phalaropes in the patches of floating weeds off the Vashon-Fauntleroy ferry

today and Tuesday this week).

July 20: This morning, a **Mourning Dove** flew over our house, a first for our yard list.

August 1: Two young **Red-tails** still learning to fly at the fields north of the Old Mill Rd pond.

August 2: A hatch year or a female **MacGillivray's Warbler** was in my yard briefly this afternoon. The female and juveniles look almost identical.

Talking to Rich Siegrist, he found 9 adult **Purple Martins** dead in their boxes at Tramp Harbor and Ellisport box sites. The presumable cause is starvation during the cold June period which probably cut down on the numbers of flying insects. He expects to find more as he continues to check the other boxes around the Island. Some areas of the Island were completely abandoned for nesting this year. To some extent, this appears also to be the case with **swallows**. They appear to be in lower numbers this year. Has anyone kept track of how many swallow nests they have this year as opposed to previous years? Also, the groups on the telephone lines along the road seem lower, though they won't have reached their peak yet.

August 5: Richard Rogers reported the first **Pelagic Cormorant** of the season at the Vashon ferry dock. This afternoon there was a **Semipalmated Plover** at KVI Beach (on August 6 Rich Siegrist found one at Fern Cove in the afternoon) as well as a few Westerns, Least, and **Killdeer**. No loons or RN Grebes in Tramp Harbor that I could see; they should be here any day now. While numbers remain low, shorebirding is picking up. Lots of young **cowbirds**.

August 6: Well I checked Tramp Harbor today off Portage and there were at least two flocks with 5-10 **Red-necked Grebes** this morning.

August 16: Moria Robinson and Bob Hawkins both saw **bobwhite** independently on Ellisport Rd. There were quite a few reports a month or so ago of others along the north shore of Quartermaster Harbor from Monument Rd. over to Judd Creek. Someone has to be hatching quite a few. Bobwhite were introduced to Vashon sometime in the late 1800s or early 1900s and survived into the late 1940s but died off probably through a combination of habitat change from farm to forests and from increased cat and dog predation.

Shorebird migration is really starting to pump the peep numbers up. Richard Rogers reported seeing peeps on the flats of Lisabeula. Last week he saw about a dozen Westerns and Least there. This is one spot that should be checked much more often than it is; maybe more birds go there than we realize, including some rare ones. Also last week, Gene Hunn saw the only **Greater Yellowlegs** of the season so far at KVI. KVI and Fern Cove should turn up some less common birds such as dowitchers and BB Plovers and others if watched regularly.