

Admiralty Audubon Pippings

AAS Imaginary Field Trips for May & June 2020

When it became clear that we wouldn't be having field trips for the foreseeable future, we asked our trip leaders to describe their favorite birding locations. Following here are two of those descriptions, for Fort Worden and Point Hudson. Perhaps these will encourage you to try a social-distanced, independent birdwalk. Connecting with our birdy world can provide great comfort in difficult times.

A Walk at Fort Worden

The best walk for me is the classic Fort Worden loop. I like to scope out birds (with my birding scope) at North Beach and at the Chinese Gardens lagoon. There are great views of a variety of ducks, and Yellow-rumped Warbler, from the little shingled city-owned building (Housing Authority) parking lot just south of the water treatment plant on Kuhn St. Then park your vehicle at North Beach and scope for possible views of our local alcids like Rhinoceros Auklet, Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot, and Common Murre. Look for all manner of scoters (large sea ducks) and oystercatchers along the rocky point.

Stow your scope in the car and head along the beach to Point Wilson lighthouse. Point Wilson is a remarkably rich area given patience. Be sure to look on the wire fence lines for birds, (sometimes recently fledged Barn Swallows wait for their parents), the posts for Western Meadowlark, the roofs of the buildings for tutorials on gulls, look for multiple species of swallows nesting around the east side of buildings and on the porches, check for Savannah Sparrows, Lincoln's Sparrow, even Pipit on the driftwood. Head toward the massive battery there at Point Wilson

- behind it (south of it) is a very rich songbird rose and
(continued on p.2)

photos: top - Orange-crowned Warbler, Kah Tai, April 2020; middle - Western Meadowlark, Point Wilson, October 2018; bottom left - Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Kah Tai, March 2020; bottom right - Yellow-rumped Warbler, Cape George, March 2020



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shrub thicket, many sparrow species use it, Orange-crowned Warbler, Bewick's Wren, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet nest there (listen for the rich warbling intricate lengthy song of the kinglet deep in the foliage).

Head for the campground sites at the base of the wooded hill. A couple of sites south of site 42 you will find a trail that takes you up to the cliff top batteries. Great place for Pacific Slope Flycatcher, Townsend's Solitaire, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, warblers literally of every stripe, and hummingbirds. You will make your way up, and cling to the trails that follow the edge, and then back down to your starting place at North Beach. You could do this walk in the other direction too, less steep climbing. You will get a painless bird-rich workout - the prescription for mental and physical health.

Monica Fletcher
Trip Leader

Addendum 1: There's one spot I'd add for Fort Worden birding, which I call the Secret Pond. I don't know if it has a real name. It's just east of the Chinese Garden Ponds, accessible by the trails that wind through the woods between the ponds and the Peace Mile trail. It's gotten overgrown and is a little hard to get a good look at, but we often see Gadwall and Green-winged Teal there, plus in late summer, the molting ducks like to hang out there.

Sue Thompson
Trip Leader

Addendum 2: This is an excellent and thoroughly detailed description of all the places that I go when I go to Fort Worden, I'd add that I recently photographed 2 Western Tanagers on the trail above the camp ground. Thanks for your great expertise/knowledge/sharing!

Beverly McNeil
Trip Leader

Photos p.2, top to bottom: Anna's Hummingbird female gathering cattails at Tukey Pond, March 2020; Western Tanager, Fort Worden, April 2020; Green-winged Teal, Nisqually NWR, November 2016. Photos p.3, clockwise from upper left: Brant feeding at Point Hudson, February 2019; Black Oystercatchers making more Oystercatchers at Point Hudson, 31 March 2020; Killdeer at Point Hudson, 3 May 2020; Pigeon Guillemots, PTMSC pier, April 2019.

A Walk at Point Hudson

My favorite bird walking spot is wherever I can go regularly and frequently, as this greatly improves my ability to know who I am seeing. This year, my go-to bird spot has been Point Hudson,



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just a short bike ride or walk from my Uptown home. Jutting out into the constantly moving waters of Admiralty Inlet, Point Hudson spit is a small but (among the birds) well-loved gathering place for many kinds of water birds.

Throughout the winter I have been able to watch the community of bird life ebb and flow, noting in my little field journal as well as in photos the “regulars” and occasional surprises.

In mid-December, I celebrated the annual arrival of the migratory Brant geese, who overwinter here, and delighted in watching their regal, gregarious feeding behavior along to shore. Then in mid-April I cheered on their spectacular departure, one morning witnessing two huge, very vocal, V-shaped flocks winging northward, each with at least 300 geese!

While the Brant flock feasted on sea lettuce and eelgrass close to the shore, Mergansers, Buffleheads, and Harlequins foraged offshore in their own ways. With a spotting scope or a tele-



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photo lens, I spied cormorants and the occasional sea lion perched on the red buoy far offshore. At low tides, mixed groups of busy Sanderlings and Dunlin, peppered with a few Black-bellied Plovers, probe the shoreline. Crows, Turnstones, and even the occasional Starling find edibles as they pick and tug at piles of seaweed washed



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up on the beach. Higher up the beach profile, a pair of Kildeer sounded the familiar alarm cry, striking various statue-like poses on the logs as they attempt to distract me from finding their well-camouflaged nest. This Spring I saw a falcon (probably a Peregrine) dive bombing the Black Oystercatchers preening on the spit, while Bald Eagles came to visit and peruse the ducks on the menu (they didn't get any that time). Point Hudson allows public access, there is free parking, and you can birdwatch or walk your dog (on a leash of course) while waiting to pick up your to-go order from Shanghai Restaurant.

Gary Eduardo Perless
Trip Leader



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Photos from a few other favored birding locations, including Kah Tai Lagoon Nature Park, Discovery Pond, Point Hudson, North Beach and Skagit.

p.4: clockwise from top: Bald Eagle pair set up housekeeping again in North Beach under the protective watch of their human neighbors, May 2020; Common Yellowthroat, Discovery Pond, April 2020; Marsh Wren, Kah Tai, April 2020.

p.5: clockwise from top: Northern Shrike juvenile, Skagit, November 2019; Crows, Point Hudson, April 2020; Great Blue Heron juvenile, Kah Tai, April 2020.

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The Butcher Watchman

Movement caught my eye, and I glanced up through the windshield. The flight seemed labored, heavy, something a little different, unusual in this robin-sized bird. The individual was 15 feet above the ground and flew across the grass field along Rawlins Road. It came right over the car. Maybe, it was headed for a large bush behind me. I stopped in the middle of this dead-end road on Fir Island, jumping out.

Sitting on a top of the bare bush was the unmistakable silhouette of a Northern Shrike, a plump body, a big head, upward stance. It glared out across the fields, moving its head back and forth. A week earlier, in November 2019, my birding group had found a juvenile individual along the dikes, not a quarter-mile from this location. I moseyed back along the road, keeping my eyes averted.

Sure enough, dark eye mask, the bill with a stout hook and a large tooth, black wings, scalloped cream breast feather, this was a perfect plumage juvenile. It was alert, hunting, but seemed to be ignoring me. This was my fifth trip to the Skagit in two weeks, and on each trip, we had spotted a Northern Shrike. On one trip, it was at Wiley Slough, on another at Hayton Reserve, once in the Samish Flats, and then here.

These were probably four different individuals, and all had been juvenile birds. Possibly, this was turning into an irruptive year for shrikes.

These birds nest across Northern Canada and Alaska, coming south in winter. Most winters a few can be found in Washington, but in some years, vast numbers will come south. Perhaps, this happens when they have had an exceptionally

successful nesting year or when northern winters become particularly hard, or food supplies low.

These are voracious predators, capable of taking small birds and mammals. They store prey by sticking it on thorns or barbwire, coming back later to eat more of it. Often, they sit and wait for a prey item to show itself before darting off the perch. This species occurs in Europe and Asia, too.

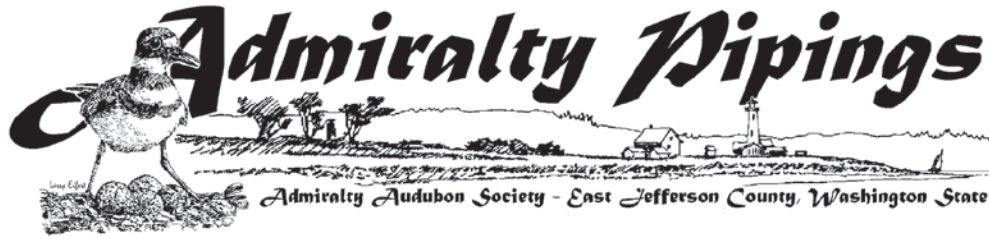
The bird bolted from the branch, dropping down to just above the field and flying rapidly away from me. I couldn't tell if it was chasing something or just heading to another hunting spot. It probably makes the rounds of a series of good lookouts. Their scientific name is *Lanius excubitor*, which translates as "Butcher Watchman."



Thomas Bancroft



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Whimbrel, North Beach, April 2020.

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We'll Bird Again Together - For Now, Stay Safe!

What do we put in a newsletter when we have no news besides the coronavirus effects on our lives? We opted to provide photographs and birding narratives from our talented chapter trip leaders and photographers. For those of us lucky enough to live here, we can be grateful for our relative safety but we cannot plan work parties,

or birding trips or community programs, all small prices to pay for the health of our families, friends and neighbors. There are many opportunities to help our community, whether you sew cloth facemasks, volunteer at the food bank, donate to support nonprofits that are struggling to survive, or help your friends and family stay afloat financially.