

## Admiralty Audubon Pippings

### AAS Birding September & October 2021 - all 'Firsts!'

#### **First Saturdays Nature Walk, Fort Flagler**

**4 September & 2 October 2021, 9:00 - 11:00am**

Meet at the boat ramp on the south side of the Beachcomber Cafe. We first walk to the end of the spit toward Rat Island. This takes about an hour. We then drive to Marrowstone Point near the USGS Fisheries lab. We walk to the point to scope birds. Optionally, we will visit the sewage ponds and finish up by noon. Dress for the weather. *Trip Leader Gary Eduardo Perless: 360-643-3529 or gperless@gmail.com.*

#### **First Tuesdays at Point Hudson**

**7 September & 5 October 2021 8:30 - 9:00am**

Meet at the raingarden by the beach at the very end of Jefferson Street (where there is parking). This will be a short walk to note what species are in our area. *Trip Leader Gary Eduardo Perless: 360-643-3529 or gperless@gmail.com.*

#### **First Fridays at Fort Townsend State Park**

**3 September & 1 October 2021, 8:30 - 11:00am**

Beverly McNeil is offering bird walks at Fort Townsend State Park on the first Friday of every month beginning September 2021. These walks will take 2 to 3 hours and include walking approximately 1.5 miles to look for shorebirds and birds in the woods along the bluffs. Please wear sturdy shoes/boots and extra jacket in case of weather changes. Bring binoculars and your own water. Group size is limited to five, and you need to email Beverly to register. We meet at the parking area just down to the left of where you register to camp. Meeting time is 8:30am. You will need your Discovery Pass. Please also notify Beverly if you cannot make it to the outing so that someone else can take your place. Social distancing and full vaccinations are required. Contact Beverly at [blmcneil59@gmail.com](mailto:blmcneil59@gmail.com).

*please check website & facebook for other birdwalks offered after printing deadline*

### AAS Workparties September & October 2021

#### **Salish Coast Workparty**

**Sunday, 19 September 2021, 9:00am - noon**

Depending on whether the autumn rains have started, our chapter's Plants for Birds project at Salish Coast Elementary will either get a planting party or a mulching party. Please bring gloves and weeding tools to the front walkway at Salish Coast and join us for this ongoing project to make beautiful habitat for our schoolchildren. *For more information, contact Rosemary Sikes at [ptrose53@gmail.com](mailto:ptrose53@gmail.com) or 360-385-0307.*

#### **Kah Tai Workparty**

**Sunday, 24 October 2021, 9:00am - noon**

We'll have a workparty at Kah Tai Lagoon Nature Park. We hope to plant some natives and pull invasives. No garbage pickup or refreshments because of COVID-19. All current Covid protocols apply. Please bring a shovel and bucket for soil. Look for the white pickup truck parked near the small lagoon next to the bridge. *For more information, contact Rosemary Sikes at [ptrose53@gmail.com](mailto:ptrose53@gmail.com) or 360-385-0307.*



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*Olympic Gull chick and egg - photo taken from the Coupeville ferry, July 2021.*



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*Western Tanager, Kah Tai Lagoon Nature Park, May 2021.*

## Merlin Nest at Cape George

by Varn Brooks & Karen Lull

On 29 April 2021 Karen was walking the beach between the Cape George Marina and Memorial Park. Before she reached the park she saw crows hazing a pair of Merlins. They appeared to be defending a nest. One stayed close to what we assumed was the nest, and the other went after the crows. They were chattering with each other as this happened, and both returned to the vicinity of the nest when the crows left. We returned to Memorial Park every couple of days over the following two months. In 41 visits from 29 April to 14 July we saw at least one of the pair on every visit except one. We observed behaviors consistent with laying, sitting, hatching, and fledging. During this time we were never able to see the nest, but inferred its location. In addition to the Merlins we saw many interactions with other birds, both prey species, and potential predators.

We took many photographs to document our visits. The distance was usually too great for our lens, the birds were just too fast and far away for good photographs.

Many sightings were made at the nest tree, a Douglas fir. We also frequently saw them use several other trees nearby. Immediately west of the nest tree above the beach is a Douglas fir with live branches up high, and mostly dead branches below (West perch). This was the first tree used by fledglings. To the SW along the bluff top there are several dead or partly dead trees including a dead Pacific madrone and a sparse Douglas fir (Beach perch). The most popular perching tree is SE of the nest tree (SE perch), one of the pair perched there on many visits. The nest and SE perch are readily visible from Memorial Park. The West and Beach perches are less visible from the Park, and require moving out onto the beach for best viewing.



4 May: female dives toward camera from SW perch.

### 5 visits from 29 April through 9 May:

- noisy activity concentrated near the nest; saw one or both birds on every visit
- aggressive hazing of any bird that crossed the area - kingfishers, Great blue herons, Bald eagles, crows, ravens and gulls
- prey exchange on long bare limb adjacent to nest

On 4 May after much activity, chatter, and hazing, both birds landed on the limb and copulated. This was the first time we could see them together well enough to distinguish the male and female. She was visibly larger and lighter colored overall, and had fewer dark breast

feathers. Face markings on the female were more distinct, the males head was darker over all. We assume this period of high activity was associated with establishing territory, mating, and possibly egg laying.

### 13 visits from 12 May - 5 June:

- activity much reduced, less chatter, sightings less frequent
- behavior change assumed to be because the female had stopped laying and begun incubating
- 12 May - no birds seen near the nest; remains of a freshly killed, partially eaten small hawk near the

beach; first thought to be one of the Merlins, but eventually decided it was a Sharp-shinned hawk. The only Merlin we saw that day was hunting about a half mile north of the nest. We thought it was the male.

Some days we would not see either bird for some time. Then we would hear brief calling, and the female would fly from the nest to meet the male. They would fly together to the perching limb on the nest tree, and the male would transfer prey to the female who would then disappear into the nest. This or similar behavior was



On 7 July the male brought a bird to these three fledglings in the Beach Perch. At the same time the female was feeding a fourth fledgling in the SE perch. Later that evening the male delivered a bird to the nest, indicating at least 5 young birds were alive at that point.

Merlins continued on p.3

*Merlins continued from p.2*

observed on 14, 20 and 28 May and 7 June. On May 16 we saw the female walk out from the nest onto an adjacent limb, stand on one foot, stretch her wings, then switch feet and stretch again. Afterward she perched and preened for 15 minutes or so until we left. On 7 June the male delivered prey and then went back hunting. A few minutes later he returned with a Goldfinch which he ate himself. He then sat quietly for half an hour or so. Some days the male would hang around and haze birds near the nest. This was not the noisy aggressive behavior we had seen earlier, he would simply follow at a distance. Other days he would continue eating or sit and rest while crows, eagles and gulls flew by.

**On 7 June, activity increased again:**

- female much more visible; commonly occupied the SE perch
- pair actively hunting and delivering prey to the nest
- nestlings quiet, adults did not call much except for alarm calls
- male more aggressive, especially toward crows
- female usually hunted close to the nest, stooping on prey from a high limb in the SE perch
- change in activity appeared to indicate eggs had hatched and they were now feeding nestlings.

On 27 June we saw the male fly into heavy foliage near the top of the West perch. This was associated with a lot of chatter including vocalizations that sounded like fledglings. We were pretty sure at least one bird had fledged and relocated to this perch which was about 150' from the nest tree. On the following day we saw the male fly into the same place again and this time we could see a lot of flapping in the tree. We couldn't see much detail but it looked and sounded like there were two or more fledglings perching in the tree. During this time the female remained perched in the SE perching tree, possibly hunting from the perch. Both adult birds were still delivering food to the nest indicating there were at least three young. On 30 June and 2 and 4 July they were still feeding fledglings in the surrounding area,



*Independence Day, first look at one of the fledgling Merlins. Note the tuft of down on top of its head.*

and returning to the nest. On 4 July we had our first good look at one of the fledglings that still had a tuft of down on top of its head.

On 7 July we saw both adults feeding fledglings. At one point there were three fledglings together in the West perch and one adult was still going to the nest, indicating there was still at least one nestling. There was a lot of activity in the SE perch at the same time. It looked like a fledgling was being fed there also, we could not see it, but we think there were four fledglings and one nestling. We continued to see multiple fledglings near the nest until 14 July. By then the fledglings were flying confidently, but staying pretty close to the nest.

In addition to the Merlins we noted a number of interesting interactions with other species. On most visits we saw Merlins carrying prey, or consuming it.

On one occasion when both the male and female were hunting we saw three songbirds either brought to the nest or consumed in under 90 minutes. We were able to identify juncos and a goldfinch and assume they took many other species. Juncos, robins, and other songbirds continued with fairly normal activity levels below the nest. They were wary of the Merlins, and would not flee in the open when approached, staying under cover whenever possible.

A pair of kingfishers were nested in the bluff below the SW perch. On several occasions (31 May, 5 June) we saw the Merlins dive after the kingfishers. The kingfishers would chatter noisily, and usually escape by flying for cover. On 16 June a Merlin dove after and chased one of the kingfishers out over the water. The kingfisher was silent and flew fast and straight, none of the usual chattering. We thought it was more like an attempt at predation, rather than the usual hazing. After that day we did not see the kingfishers again. They either abandoned the nest, or the Merlins may have taken one of them.

We saw crows around the nest on nearly every visit. During the first few visits the Merlins aggressively chased crows at every opportunity. The crows never

*Merlins continued on p.4*

Merlins continued from p.4

quit the area, and when the Merlins settled down the crows did also. Like the songbirds, the crows tended to stay quiet and keep cover between them and the Merlins. On at least two occasions we observed a Merlin stoop on a crow. On both occasions there was minimum verbalizing from the crows, they mainly fled for cover. On 7 June we saw the female sitting in the SE perch. We walked up the road to get closer for a picture, and were greeted by several crows who hazed us cautiously while checking the Merlin. We found a dead crow a short distance from where the Merlin was sitting. After we passed the dead crow most of the crows retreated, but one continued to follow us as it gave repeated alarm calls. As we passed under the perched Merlin it stooped after the crow which then fled for cover and joined its companions at some distance.

It was very interesting seeing how these different birds accommodated the presence of the others. Small songbirds that could only be prey were not discouraged from using the area. Perhaps their constant state of awareness helped protect them. Crows seem too large to be regular prey, and may have posed a potential threat to eggs or nestlings. We don't know if the Merlins could have killed one, but the crows certainly exercised unusual caution and fled to cover when threatened. We saw a lot, but feel we just scratched the surface of complex relationships between these fascinating animals.



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upper: common Raven, Hurricane Hill, July 2021.  
 lower: young Virginia Rail at Kah Tai, July 2021.

AAS Membership Form 2021  
<http://admiraltyaudubon.org>

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Would you prefer your newsletter by email?  paper copy?  amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Send \$20 annual membership to: Admiralty Audubon, PO Box 666, Port Townsend WA 98368  
 or pay online at the 'Join' link via PayPal or credit card**

*Membership includes 6 issues of our newsletter per year and the right to vote in chapter elections.  
 Chapter programs and field trips are free to the public. We always welcome donations! Dues and donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Admiralty Audubon is a 501c3 nonprofit organization.*

## Protection Island Cameras Needed

Chapter member Andrew Palmer wants to encourage us all to contact our legislators and ask for solar-powered cameras on Protection Island. Our chapter's Protection Island representative, Craig Wester, concurs. Andrew recommends using email on our legislators' websites and provides the following points to include:

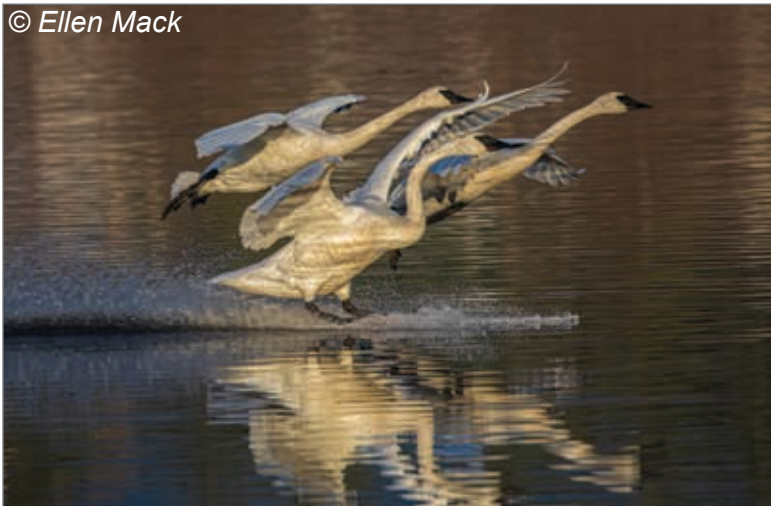
- Protection Island is home to 70% of the nesting seabirds in Washington's inland waters. Loss of the habitat would have major region-wide negative impacts on the entire Salish Sea
- A recent fire of human origin on the westernmost spit destroyed or damaged critical seabird nests
- Catastrophic loss of other critical nesting habitat was narrowly avoided this time, but the birds may not be as lucky in the future
- Signs currently posted by the USFWS on either end of the island are not effective in preventing people illegally landing on the island (this wasn't the first incident)
- USFWS needs to take immediate steps to improve the situation to prevent any chance of future damage from fires by installing solar powered remote cameras on both spits and made publicly accessible to the public through the internet. Please let the USFWS know that you are concerned about this situation
- Pursue funds that could be applied to this solution

<https://kilmer.house.gov/>

<https://www.cantwell.senate.gov/>

<https://www.murray.senate.gov/>

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left: Trumpeter Swans coming in for a landing at Kah Tai, sounding much like a band warming up according to photographer Ellen Mack, January 2021. right: Pacific-slope Flycatcher near Cappy's Trails, 6 July 2021.

## Orca Recovery Day

Saturday, 16 October 2021 is Orca Recovery Day, coordinated by the Puget Sound Conservation District Caucus throughout our region. Details are still being worked out, but generally I plan to recruit young people and join thousands of volunteers regionally in taking small actions that benefit the orcas: beach cleanups of trash, tree plantings along salmon streams, and rain garden maintenance. People may contact me closer to the day at [gperless@gmail.com](mailto:gperless@gmail.com) or Sierra Young [syoung@jeffersoncd.org](mailto:syoung@jeffersoncd.org) at our local Conservation District to join local events.

*Gary Perless*

AAS Education Chair

## Youth Engagement?

Our species will survive and thrive only if we each make a commitment to our children and youth to share the mission that our chapter founder Eleanor Stopps provided: *To initiate, promote, assist, and encourage the understanding and appreciation of nature and the conservation of wildlife and wilderness, natural resources, and natural beauty.* Here in East Jefferson County, we have the advantage of a wealth of nature in which to introduce our youth to conservation. We already have a few youth members in our chapter, but it would be more effective if our youth could begin to lead their own effort. Our Education Chair is already overcommitted so we would welcome some enthusiasm from new sources. If you would like to help engage our students, please contact Chapter President Rick Jahnke at [rjahnke@att.net](mailto:rjahnke@att.net).

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Red-tailed Hawk - probably a light-morph Harlan's, Larry Scott Trail, July 2021

## Admiralty Audubon Officers and Board

|  |              |   |
|--|--------------|---|
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### We need some active members

We are a small, all-volunteer Audubon chapter, so there aren't any paid staff to make sure things get done. Aside from webmaster services, volunteers do it all. We need some new blood in our leadership. Our Field Trips Chair is vacant. If you would like to get involved in any aspect of chapter leadership, please speak up. Your chapter needs you.

### Discovery Bay Action Alliance

The Discovery Bay Action Alliance is engaged in an effort to protect wildlife habitat and 'ensure that development in the rural Discovery Bay area of the Quimper Peninsula protects the health, well-being and quality of life for the environment, its inhabitants and for future generations.' You can follow and support their important current efforts to do so at <https://www.dbaa.support/>