

*Membership Meeting
Snowy in December
December 3rd, 1:30- 3pm
Hoquiam Library
Downstairs Meeting Room*

November
December
2017



The Sandpiper



Common Loon, *Gavia immer*. *The most easily seen wintering loon in Grays Harbor County is the Common Loon. A visit to the Westport marina from September thru early May will most likely include a sighting of this lovely bird and is an excellent place to study the variety of ages and plumages. The most important winter-plumage field marks are size, flattened head shape, irregular border between dark hind-neck and white throat, white crescents around the eyes, bill color, size and shape*

Our Wintering Loons

Identifying them in their non-breeding plumage is not always easy!

by Judith Rowe-Taylor

Loons, with their enigmatic, engaging calls and velvety, iridescent breeding plumages, conjure up poetic images of northern woods and lakes more than any other bird. How fortunate we are to live in a state where three of the five worldwide species of loons can be readily seen in winter. Common Loon – check! Red-throated Loon – check! Pacific Loon – check! Yellow-billed Loon – yeah, what good luck! Arctic Loon – please report that sighting, with photos if possible!

The five species are placed in the genus *Gavia*, family Gaviidae, and order Gaviiformes. All are fish-eating diving birds of the northern hemisphere. They also consume crustaceans, mollusks, aquatic insects and some plant material. Fossils of prehistoric Gaviidae have been found in California, Florida, and Italy, with unequivocal loon species existing from the Eocene epoch (56-33.9 mya).

Common Loons (COLO), *Gavia immer*, are easily seen in Grays Harbor County: along the coast, in marinas, on bays and rivers; they are even found on inland flooded agricultural areas after days of heavy rain, such as the fields along the Brady Loop. COLOs are present in Washington State year-round: common along the coast and Puget Sound from September thru May; fairly common in the Puget Trough during the summer months; variable presence year-round in different parts of the Cascades; rarer in Eastern Washington outside of migration, although I have seen and heard them in late June on lakes in north eastern Okanogan County.

The Red-throated Loon (RTLO), *Gavia stellate*, is found in western Washington. They are most commonly seen along the coast during migrations (Aug, Sept; Apr, May), yet still fairly common from October thru March. This species prefers more sheltered inland water during the stormier and colder winter months and is, therefore, common in Puget Sound from September thru early May. RTLOs are uncommon to rare in the state during summer (June thru most of August) as their breeding grounds are high latitude bogs, tundra wetlands, and forest ponds of North America and Eurasia.

Pacific Loon (PALO), *Gavia pacifica*, is a mid-sized loon formerly classified as Arctic Loon (*Gavia arctica*). PALO was split off as a separate species in 1986. This loon is common (migration months) to fairly common September thru May along the coast, but is more regularly seen during these month in Puget Sound. PALO is an uncommon sighting along the coast or deep-ocean during the summer months, rare in the Cascades and Columbia Plateau at any time of year.

Pacific Loons breed on freshwater ponds of the far northern tundra and taiga regions of arctic and subarctic North America, and are primarily marine water residents during the remainder of the year (There are some reports of winter sightings on inland lakes of the US.). I found one report of a vagrant, non-breeding PALO sighted in O'ahu in 1982. Along the west coast Pacific, Common, and ***Wintering***

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The President's Perch



By Arnie Martin

All of us on the Board of Directors of Grays Harbor Audubon Society (GHAS) wish you and yours a very Happy Holiday season and great good luck in the New Year.

For members and the public, GHAS offers peeks into many aspects of fascinating topics relating to birds – from archeology to migration routes, to bird identification to living stories of individual species. The chapter holds public meetings every other month featuring informative programs and speakers. We also publish a bi-monthly newsletter, *The Sandpiper*, which includes informative articles, event announcements and items of interest to birders and wildlife enthusiasts. Avid local birders organize field trips to local bird hangouts, both well-known and hidden.

GHAS does a great deal locally to protect habitat for all bird species in Grays Harbor County through its land ownership program. Shorelines of streams, rivers and the bay itself, saltwater marshes, wetlands of every type, mature and younger forests – these are examples of lands protected from degradation through this program. They are representatives of every kind of valuable habitat in Grays Harbor County and beyond.

This tremendous biological diversity makes our county a rich area for birds, wildlife and fish.

GHAS is the principal organizer of the annual Shorebird Festival, celebrating the spring migration of millions of shorebirds north to their nesting grounds. The festival attracts birders and other interested folks from far and wide to field trips led by experts in local avian hotspots. Talks and classes bring depth to the whole birding experience. The Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge has been designated a hemispherically important bird area and is vital to the survival of migratory birds.

Partnering with the Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge and local schools, GHAS volunteers bring school children into the amazing world of birds through classroom studies and field trips. Tomorrow's citizens learn the important role birds play in the natural world, especially along our Pacific coast.

Our board members, field trip leaders and habitat managers are all dedicated volunteers. Despite

this advantage, the chapter does incur significant expenses, especially in the care of its habitat lands, things like property taxes, new fences and gates, invasive plant and trash removal and general restoration costs.

If you are currently a member your renewal now will be valid through 2018. If you are not a member, we are inviting you to join us. You may also make an additional tax-deductible donation to the chapter to support the protection of our most valuable treasures in the Pacific Northwest.

Officers of the Board

It's time to elect GHAS Board officers for next year at the December meeting. The current officers have agreed to run again as a slate. If anyone else is interested in running for an office, please put your name forward - you would be most welcome!

The 2018 slate is as follows:

- President - Arnie Martin;
- Vice-President - Linda Orgel;
- Secretary - Mary O'Neil;
- Treasurer - Diane Schwickerath

GHAS Mission

The mission of the Grays Harbor Audubon Society is to seek a sustainable balance between human activity and the needs of the environment, and to promote enjoyment of birds and the natural world



Young Common Loon, *Gavia immer*. Note characteristic flat (angular) head. In the smaller, sleeker Pacific Loon the head is rounded and the plumage a more velvety gray in color.

Loons continued from page 1

Red-throated loons winter as far south as Baja, CA. PALOs from coastal eastern Siberia winter south to Japan.

The Yellow-billed Loon (YBLO), *Gavia adamsii*, is the largest of the five. Yellow-billed Loons are rare winter visitors on inland waters in Washington State, occurring only in small numbers south of Canada to Baja, CA. They winter singly or in small groups; a good place to look for them is around the inland islands, such as off the west-facing beaches at Deception Pass State Park on Whidbey Island. Best distinguishing non-breeding field marks are the pale yellow bill and larger size (length 35 inches as compared to 32 for COLO). YBLOs nest on large lakes in the arctic tundra of Eurasia and North America and are very territorial on their breeding grounds.

Arctic Loons (ARLO), *Gavia arctica*, are essentially a Eurasian species (after the 1986 split), although the subspecies *G.a viridigularis* breed locally in western Alaska. Sightings in Washington have been few – on inland waters; Oregon has a few accepted coastal sightings. The best distinguishing field marks for the Arctic Loon are a white flank patch (obvious from side view in resting position), thicker neck, slightly larger size (length 27 inches vs 25 inches for PALO) and more angular head (more like Common and Yellow-billed in this feature).

Across the 'pond', in Britain, Scandinavia, Europe and Asia, loons are called divers, with some differences for their common species-names (Common Loon is Great Northern Diver; Arctic Loon is Black-throated Diver; Yellow-billed and Red-throated differ only by the common genera moniker.).

Loons and Lead

Loons face many threats from both climate change and human activities. Among the saddest are ones that can be countered by educated awareness and positive action. Loons are susceptible to lead poisoning from ingestion of lead tackle used

by fisherpersons. The following quotes from Loon.org (<http://loon.org/loon-lead-faq.php>).

How do loons ingest lead fishing tackle?

The majority of loons that die from ingested lead tackle acquire it as a result of current fishing activity. They may 1) strike at bait as it is being retrieved through the water; 2) strike at a fish that is being reeled in by an angler; or 3) ingest a fish that has broken a line and has ingested or attached tackle. In some cases, loons may also pick up small pieces of lead tackle from the lake bottom. Loons normally ingest small pebbles as grit, and they may mistake a split shot or other piece of tackle for a small pebble.

How does lead tackle kill loons?

Once ingested, the lead tackle goes into the loon's gizzard. The acid and grinding action of the gizzard erodes the lead, which then passes into the bloodstream and organs and poisons the loon. Even a single small lead split shot sinker is fatal to loons, which will die within 2-4 weeks of ingesting a piece of lead fishing tackle.”

Besides making the users aware of the hazards of, and alternatives to, lead sinkers, we can remove the lead from the environment. Carry a small pair of scissors with you when walking along the beach at low tide (I am most familiar with the horrifying amount of fishing tackle/trash discarded along the south jetty at Westport.); check for fishing line caught in the rocks of the jetties, groins, and revetments, or left along the ocean beaches, even the marina parking lots. Snip off any lead sinkers and/or other tackle and bag them for hazardous waste recycling. Also gather up discarded fishing line when you find it; sometimes this is too entangled to safely remove from the rocks or pilings, but one can usually remove the lead with minimum effort. Visit the above website (The Loon Preservation Committee) for more facts about loons and fishing tackle hazards. The WDFW website also has information about lead-free alternative tackle.



Pacific Loon, *Gavia pacifica*. Pacific Loons are a smaller, somewhat sleeker version of the Common Loon. Field marks for winter-plumage identification include a more sharply defined back-of-neck-throat line; most have evidence of a chin-strap; head is more rounded and, in my sightings, head and neck had a more velvety-gray appearance than Common. PALOs are generally blacker on the back than other loons.



Field trip diary

by Judy Rowe Taylor

Field Trip Diary, October 2017

Our October 19 field trip day to Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge was a wet one...no surprise there. By the 11:30 start time no one other than myself had arrived, but the rain had abated somewhat so I decided to go ahead and see what birds were around. The weather was actually comparatively nice for about an hour and a half. And glad I was that I did take the walk along the hangars and around the boardwalk. Geese were well represented: Greater White-fronted Goose (28), Snow Goose (17), Canada Goose (lots), Cackling Goose (at least 2); good numbers of Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, and Mallards were on the bay, mostly staying close to the near banks and vegetation. Afterward, just as rain started up again, I stopped by the sewage lagoons and spotted an Eared Grebe in the middle pond - easily told by dark auriculars and the shape of its bill. Gadwall and scaup were added to the duck tally. Predominant gull, both on the estuary and loafing around the back of the sewage lagoons, was California.

I am rescheduling this field trip; the new date is November 28, a Tuesday. We will start earlier this time, near high tide. It should be a good day to get some exercise after Thanksgiving feasting! Showers are predicted, but maybe they will not happen! Best prediction is low wind. Meet at the GHNW Refuge kiosk at 9 a.m. and plan for several hours of birding the refuge, airport, and sewage ponds.

December is an excellent time to visit the marinas, especially from noon onwards when sea birds have returned to shelter there, after feeding out on the ocean in the morning. I have selected the winter solstice - December 21, a Thursday - for this event. I hope it will be a nice break from any hectic early Christmas preparations, and a relaxing day before the last minute rush. Meet at the north end parking lot of Westhaven Marina (Westport) near the observation platform (and Harbor Resort) at the end of Neddie Rose Drive, just past the condos. We will bird Fisherman's Walkway, then work our way south around the marina, end-

ing at Float 21.

Meanwhile, I hope you take advantage of any sunny and rainless part-of-the-day days as they occur to do some birding! I did just that a few days ago. A visit to Bottle Beach, 2-3 hours past high tide (10 feet that day) gave wonderful views of thousands of Dunlin, more than 100 Black-bellied Plovers, and by rough count, at least 500 Marbled Godwits. Several hundred ducks were near the waterline, as well.

Another suggestion for rainy days is the Brady Road loop! The agricultural fields from Montesano to Elma are flooded after all the recent downpours, and these good birding spots can be done from the warm shelter of your vehicle. Also, follow Keys Road south to the river, and take the small road under the bridge to where there is a parking area (Discovery Pass required). This is often a good place to see mergansers.

November Dusk

*The gray sky clutches its tattered clouds,
Light openings appear, then disappear,
Swaying conifers grow dark, lean in toward me.
Leaves, red and gold, dull now,
Cascade down upon me in the slightest breeze.
Friskier winds exert their power,
Bringing sideward drops, messengers
Of tomorrow's storm.
Just as night descends heavy on all things
Far out in the blackening sky,
Honks prick the silence,
Then pierce the somber cloak at close range.
The night crew is checking in!*

--Janet Strong

Next Field Trips

Tuesday, November 28, 2017

Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge

Meet at the kiosk at 9 a.m.

I am rescheduling the October field trip to Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge; the new date is November 28, a Tuesday. Although I was the only person to show on the rainy October date, the weather did clear and I walked the hangar road, boardwalk and visited the sewage ponds anyway. Birding was good, so I think it will be good, if not better this month. It should be a good day to get some exercise after Thanksgiving feasting!

We will start earlier this time, near high tide. Showers are predicted, but maybe they will not happen! Best of all, the prediction is for low wind. Meet at the GHNW Refuge kiosk at 9 a.m. and plan for several hours of birding the refuge, airport, and sewage ponds. As always, dress for the weather and bring water/thermos of coffee and whatever snacks you might need for 2-3 hours of birding.

DIRECTIONS: The entrance to the refuge is signed. Take Paulson Road (a turn to the south off of Rt 109/W Emerson Avenue at the west edge of Hoquiam (just west of Hoquiam High School); turn right onto Airport Road and continue west to the kiosk.

Thursday, December 21, 2017 (Winter Solstice)

Westhaven Marina, Westport

Meet in parking lot at the north end of Neddie Rose Drive at 1 p.m.

December is an excellent time to visit the marinas, especially from noon on when sea birds have returned to shelter there, after feeding out on the ocean in the morning. I have selected the winter solstice - December 21, a Thursday - for this event. I hope it will be a nice break from any hectic early Christmas preparations, and a relaxing day before the last minute rush.

Meet at the north end parking lot of Westhaven Marina (Westport) near the observation platform (and Harbor Resort) at the end of Neddie Rose Drive, just past the condos. I drive a blue Ford Ranger, with a white canopy on the bed.

High tide will be at 2:05 p.m. that day. We will bird Fisherman's Walkway, then work our way south around the marina, ending at Float 21. As always, dress for the weather and bring water/thermos of coffee, and whatever snacks you might need for about 3 hours of birding. Harbor Resort is usually open and they do serve espresso; other places along the marina boardwalk will probably be open, as well, so bring some cash if you are interested in making a refreshment stop!

Contact: Judy by email 10ksandpipers@gmail.com



**Membership Meeting December 3rd at
Hoquiam Library 1:30 - 3:00 pm**

Snowy in December

The tiny beach-loving Snowy Plover will star at GHAS' December Members' Meeting. Cyndie Sundstrom from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will regale us with stories from her many years researching and monitoring the lives of these rare shorebirds. Cyndie, head of the Snowy Plover Recovery Program at WDFW, and GHAS Board Member Judy Taylor will showcase their photos of these little beach residents, their chicks and nests. We will learn the details of Cyndie's dramatic rescue of Snowy Plover chicks, abandoned and buried in sand.

Here is our chance to get a great close-up look at these rarely-observed birds, learn more about their current status and peek into their hectic lives. We will discover their nesting habits, migrating schedule and why their population is so vulnerable as they try to raise their chicks. Importantly, we will also learn how Cyndie and her agency are trying to improve the survival of snowy plover populations along the Washington coast.

To get the most enjoyment from Cyndie's presentation, please re-read the front-page article on the September-October Issue of *The Sandpiper*. By the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport, it unfolds the story of two Snowy Plover chicks rescued, raised and released at Midway Beach, WA. You will cheer Cyndie for her role in this story.

Enjoy holiday refreshments and hear about the Christmas Bird Count, too



Red-throated Loon, *Gavia stellata*. Molting bird pictured here shows overall browner plumage, and speckled rather than barred back; white face of full winter plumage is not yet evident. Red-throated is the smallest of the five loon species. They have a comparatively slender, dainty appearance and a spotted back, where as the other four species have barred backs. In non-breeding plumage, the white-face (with white extending behind the eye), white speckling - or more v-shaped speckling in case of juveniles - on the back, and overall more brownish appearance are distinguishing features. RTLOs also tend to hold

Where Is That Bird Going With That Seed? It's Caching Food For Later

By Shailee Shah

However you like to watch birds—in the woods, at your feeder, or on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's live streaming feeder cams – you will often see them flying with food in their beaks. If it's in the spring, the food could be destined for their young. But what about in the fall or winter? Why does a bird fly off with its food instead of eating it on the spot?

There are at least three reasons: the birds could be trying to stay safe; or they might need to work on the seed in order to open it; or they might be caching the food item to save it for later. Small birds like the ones that visit feeders are constantly obsessed with finding safety from predators. If food is at a risky, exposed location, such as a feeder, birds must remain vigilant, continuously scanning their surroundings for threats. Birds such as finches and grosbeaks, with their seed-crushing bills, can eat and scan simultaneously, looking down only briefly to grab another seed. Birds that must look down and hammer at seeds, however, prefer to fly to a safer place with their food instead of working on it in an area exposed to predators. This is why you often see chickadees flitting back and forth from feeder to trees or shrubs and back with their seeds.

Some foods—such as shelled seeds and nuts—

might even require specialized methods to crack them open. True to their name, nuthatches often wedge seeds into bark crevices and hammer at them with their bill to “hatch” them open. Blue Jays use a similar technique, but they manage to wedge the seed between their toes. Looking down to work on a seed is still risky, however, and you will often see Blue Jays quickly scan their surroundings before hammering away.

But arguably the most fascinating reason is “caching”—the behavior of storing up food supplies in a safe place for later. This is one of the main reasons you see birds fly off with their food instead of eating at the feeder—they are setting up a personal “insurance policy.” Lots of birds—and even mammals such as squirrels, beavers, and bears—cache food for consumption later on, during lean times.

How many peanuts can an American Crow carry? Crows have a special pouch in their mouth that helps them carry multiple food items at a time.

When do birds cache food? Some birds cache year-round, although the behavior is most apparent in the fall when an abundant food source like a bird feeder or a natural seed crop enables birds to quickly fulfill their daily energy needs while leaving ample leftovers. Once winter sets in, it pays to have food “squirreled” away instead of competing for an unreliable or scarce source.

Caching is like a giant game of concentration. Caching isn't as straightforward as it might appear. A bird must not only fly back and forth, one or a few seeds at a time, over hundreds of trips. They also have to make sure the caches aren't stolen and remember where all the food is hidden when hunger comes a-calling. Most common North American feeder birds can have anywhere from hundreds to thousands of separate caches scattered around their home ranges. Species in 15 bird families cache food in various ways, and so do many mammals and arthropods, so it seems to work well as a survival strategy.



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If you would like to join Grays Harbor Audubon Society (GHAS), please fill out the form below, **make check payable to Grays Harbor Audubon Society** and return it with your check to:

**Grays Harbor Audubon Society
P.O. Box 470
Montesano, WA 98563**

Chapter Memberships include a subscription to *The Sandpiper* newsletter. All Chapter Memberships above the Sandpiper category provide financial support to our Chapter. The Grays Harbor Audubon Society is totally self-supporting.

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News & Editorial

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Westport, 98595-1044
or email to
rd@olearycreek.com
Copy deadline ongoing

Membership Meeting

Snowy in December

December 5, 2017

1:30 pm - 3pm

at

***Hoquiam Library
Downsairs Meeting Room***

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The Sandpiper

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