Echo

SOUTH SOUND BIRD ALLIANCE
EST. 1973

September 2026
Olympia, Washington

The Power of Connecting: How Shared Curiosity Leads to Scientific Discoveries

Maria M Ruth, Rachel Holland, Melinda Wood

Thursday, September 10th, 7 p.m.

(Social time 6:30 p.m.)

Temple Beth Hatfiloh

201 8th Ave SE, Olympia

OR

Via Zoom, registration required at:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/poY0n7mhR06Kxp0yJF4Irg

The Power of Connecting: How Shared Curiosity Leads to Scientific Discoveries

Join author Maria Ruth and SSBA board members Rachel Holland and Melinda Wood for a triple header presentation on how birders of all skill levels and interests can make important discoveries about our local birds.

All three speakers met each other through serendipitous bird-related activities in 2023. Soon after, they began collecting data on Pigeon Guillemots

on Eld Inlet through a long-running community science project known as the Salish Sea Guillemot Network.

Their connections to each other and their curiosity about the natural world have played critical roles in their discoveries about the Pigeon Guillemots as well as the Vaux's Swifts.

By documenting their findings, all three speakers have transformed "merely anecdotal" observations into valuable scientific information that has been published in books, scientific outlets, and online. This presentation will inspire you to share your observations and anecdotes and help tell the stories of the birds around us.

Maria Ruth is the author of several books of non-fiction natural history including *The Bird with Flaming Red Feet: Seasons with an Uncommonly Common Seabird*. Rachel Holland is an SSBA board member, editor of "The Echo," contributor to Vaux's Happening, and is the compiler for the Lewis County Christmas Bird Count. Melinda Wood is an SSBA board member and is on the staff of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Black Lake Quarry Decision in Our Favor!

We are happy to announce that on 8/17/2026, the Western Region Growth Management Hearings Board (GMHB) decided in favor of our petition to overturn the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners' 4-1 decision to rezone the Black Lake Quarry parcels to Rural Resource Industrial (RRI). (It had been Rural 1 Unit per 20 acres, or R1-20.) The GMHB found that the rezone conflicted with Thurston's own Comprehensive Plan and failed to comply with Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA). The Board also granted our request to invalidate the County ordinance.

The Black River Corridor is a remarkably intact river and wetland system that provides habitat for Oregon spotted frog, Olympia mudminnow and approximately 150 species of birds. The river flows through the Black River Unit of the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and past the Glacial Heritage Preserve before eventually joining the Chehalis River. This interconnected landscape provides wildlife habitat, water-quality benefits, flood storage and other ecosystem services that are increasingly important as our climate changes.

The County designated these parcels R1-20 in 2007, limiting development to help conserve the sensitive environmental value of this area. The attempt to replace that low-density designation with RRI zoning would have opened up the property to a substantially more intensive range of industrial uses.

As the County reconfigures their land use ordinance to fix the GMA violations confirmed by the GMHB, we suggest that they either return this area to its original low-density zoning or find other creative ways to permanently protect the Black River Corridor from degradation. We support conservation of this area for its value to wildlife and the environment.

The County will draft revisions to the ordinance and hold public hearings before adopting a new ordinance by February 17, 2027. We will be closely following the County's response and working with our allies to ensure that the problems identified by the GMHB are genuinely corrected rather than simply repackaged in a new ordinance. We will keep SSBA members informed about opportunities to participate as hearings and public-comment periods are scheduled.

Additionally, SSBA is still seeking donations to cover the significant legal fees required for this lawsuit. Please click here to donate.

The Conservation Committee did not pursue this alone; we'd like to recognize and thank our co-appellants, Bob Metzger and Gordon White, as well as Ronda Larson Kramer, for helping lead and support this effort in so many ways. Our gratitude and admiration go out to our legal team — Claudia Newman and Zak Griefen of Bricklin & Newman LLP — for their guidance, knowledge and expertise. We thank the SSBA Conservation Committee, other committee volunteers, and SSBA Board for sticking with us and helping. Finally, we thank all the generous donors who have helped defray legal costs and supporters who gave us invaluable insights, and all the SSBA members who support conservation, now and for the last 20+ years. We could not have been successful without all of you. Thank you.

For further reading:

View the GMHB Decision below, or follow the link: https://southsoundbirds.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/2026-08-17-Final-Decision-and-Order.pdf

Black River Unit of Billy Frank Jr Nisqually NWR Conservation Plan 2017

Thurston County 2045 Comp Plan Ordinance

PHOTOGRAPHS WANTED

If you have traveled this summer and have come home with some good photographs of birds, we would love to feature them on our Instagram account. Those of us who haven't been able to travel would enjoy seeing part of your adventures.

Please email them with the location and the name of the species to Drew Walker at drewjwalker98@gmail.com. You do not need an Instagram account as Drew can do the posting. If there is a short story to accompany the photo, that would be wonderful. In case you come back with dozens of good photos, please select your top three or four for us. You can find us on Instagram at southsoundbirds.

OUR NEW FACEBOOK ADMINISTRATORS and COMMUNICATION CHAIR

Mark DeLaurier has been competently handling our SSBA Facebook page for years and has increased our "followers" to over a thousand. Mark is ready to embark on a new teaching career and asked to step down from his Facebook duties. Thank you, Mark, from the bottom of our collective hearts. You have truly been a joy with whom to work.

Stepping up to take over these responsibilities are two volunteers, Jeannette Barecca and Janine Bogar. We are so pleased to welcome these gals to our Communication

Committee. They will be splitting up the work of posting articles by each taking half a month at a time. As we all know, having an organization's presence on social media is essential to reaching a wider audience, especially the younger crowd. Thank you, Jeannette and Janine.

Also new to the Communication Committee is Allan Holland. Over the next few months, he will be taking over the Chair of this important committee. He will be in charge of SSBA's Facebook, Instagram, Meetup, Echo newsletter, the website, our public phone, and email account. It is an important role and Allan has the skills needed to be effective and creative.

Our SSBA organization is thriving because volunteers like Allan, Jeannette, Janine and Mark are willing to step up and take leadership roles. Thank you!!

MAKING OUR SSBA PRESENCE KNOWN

The SSBA Membership Campaign had two displays in Thurston County in August. One was a general display of birds and our organization which was put up in the foyer of the Lacey Timberland Library. It was there for the month of August.

The other is in the sidewalk windows of Harbor Heights, on Capitol Way N, between A Ave NW and B Ave NW. This set of posters and feathered hats explains the history of avian conservation which arose when bird populations were being decimated by "feather hunters". The feathers were sold for women's fashion articles. It's a fascinating story that includes a martyr who lost his life trying to stop feather poachers. The hats were lent to us by Olympia Little Theater. This display will be available until the end of September.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2026 AWARD WINNERS!

The South Sound Bird Alliance annual picnic was held at Squaxin Park on June 28th. Besides being a wonderful time to connect with fellow Alliance members and enjoy good food, we celebrated the volunteer efforts of two amazing people. Shown above are Lynn Fitz-Hugh and Simon Hamilton, along with their awards.

Lynn was the recipient of the Jack Davis Conservationist of the Year Award to honor for her work with Thurston Climate Action Team, Restoring Earth Connections, Friends of Trees, and advocacy of state forests and promotion of local tree codes. She has been active in conservation issues for decades and it was an honor to thank her for work.

Simon was given the 2026 SSBA Volunteer of the Year Award. His computer and database skills were essential for the successful online election in which Black Hills Audubon was renamed South Sound Bird Alliance. Now Simon is hard at work on the Membership Committee to modernize our membership database. Simon's special skills are greatly appreciated.

By the way, the after-picnic bird walk folks spotted a Barred Owl and heard its nearby fledglings, following last year's sighting of two Great Horned Owlets and their parent after the picnic!

AUDUBON COUNCIL OF WASHINGTON 2026

Bellingham is the location of our biennial "ACOW" event and the host is North Cascades Audubon Society. This 3 day conference is a chance for Audubon chapters to meet with other chapters from across the state. It is open to anyone and includes the following schedule:

Friday afternoon	Gathering of Audubon conservation committees for policy discussions
Friday evening	Pizza and Keynote speaker: Jill Deppe, Senior Director – Migratory Bird Initiative on **Why Birds Matter: Celebrating World Migratory Bird Day**
Saturday early	Bird walk
Saturday	Meetings, break-out sessions, networking opportunities
Sunday	Field trip

To register, please visit https://act.audubon.org/a/acow-2026 . There is a $60 registration fee which could be refundable through the South Sound Bird Alliance membership development budget. For more information on that, please email ksnyder75@gmail.com

Armchair Birding: William Lovell Finley: Champion of Oregon's Wildlife Refuges, by Joe R. Blakely

~ Anne Kilgannon

This review is just a glimpse… an introduction to a Bird Hero we, who live in this state, should get to know. It's also an exploration of the path that created a birder then and what helped shape the early conservation movements.

William Finley was born in 1876 in Santa Clara County, California where his parents had migrated from the east with their families as children. Looking for more opportunity, they moved to Portland, Oregon in 1887, a fortuitous stroke of wonder located squarely under the Pacific Flyway. William was fascinated by birds from a child; he was an early collector of eggs and nests and later bird skins as aids in learning everything he could about the many species. This was a common approach in his time as guides for western birds were as yet unknown. Ruthless hunting for both sport and for profit was also common, either for the meat markets or the feather industry. This depredation was so pronounced that the state passed its first law addressing the slaughter of its wildlife in 1872, an Act for the Protection of Game and Fish—but with no accompanying funds for enforcement, it was ineffective, and the killing continued. Finley still collected wild bird eggs and sold them to dealers, but his interests now included capturing birds with his camera.

The art of photography had advanced since its widespread introduction during the Civil War; cameras were by then more portable for field studies and print-making had improved in ease and quality. Photos could also be published with better results, making them a new way to share images and document nature. The book includes a wide selection of photos taken by Finley over time, including some of him working his camera which helps visualize some of his feats of incredible ingenuity and daring.

He was still a high school student when he helped form a new club, the Northwestern Ornithological Association in 1894 with a friend, Arthur Pope. Pope promoted the group in *The*

Oregon Naturalist magazine, an organization that facilitated the growing culture of nature study, both locally and nationwide. One of the group's early projects was to compile a first-time list of birds found in Oregon—252 and still counting. William also began writing for the magazine, breaking into print for the first of a lifelong profession. He also became the next president of the club at age nineteen, introducing a new constitution and more structure with a focus on science-based operation, moving beyond mere collecting. He emphasized, "He who would know a bird must visit it in its own haunt and train his ear to distinguish it by its varied notes… Bird life can only be studied among living birds… A true ornithologist will work on the line of the protection of our birds in every way." He ended all his collecting and focused solely on photography as a method for learning. His longtime friend Bohlman joined him on excursions into the mountains and up the rivers seeking untrammeled wilderness.

An emerging crisis of plume hunters devastating flocks found the club's response weakened by the death of Arthur Pope, the folding of *The Naturalist* magazine, and Finley's departure for more schooling at University of California, at Berkeley in 1899. In these years, Oregon created its first State Game and Fish Protector position, but still skimped on funding enforcement. Market hunters continued their wholesale slaughter, saying, "we didn't think the bird supply would ever give out." Finley thought otherwise and poured his energy into photographing birds "to preserve them for all to enjoy… showing the lives, habits and characteristics of birds." He also began to collect bird stories to share his passion with a wider audience. While winning over some, meat and plume market hunting continued, decimating populations of birds. The state's game laws and enforcement were too weak to address the carnage.

While in California, Finley contributed to the local conservation journal, *The Condor*, which introduced him to Joseph Grinnell, a conservation-minded respected biologist, and an important mentor. He was developing his skills in reaching out with his bird lore. The nation was beginning to awaken to the plight of birds, passing the Lacey Act in Congress, but enforcement was still weak. In a different effort to change the hunting culture, Frank Chapman, another crusader for bird protection, promoted his idea for a Christmas live-bird count instead of a boast of dead birds bagged. That tradition still engages bird lovers throughout the country.

When Finley returned home, he and his friend Bohlman planned one of their greatest adventures: to "study and photograph the sea birds that live on Three Arch Rocks", sentinels on the Pacific coast. They had learned that boat excursions for hunters would regularly sail to the area and shoot nesting birds for thrills. No one counted the bodies or thought about the young left to starve. The basalt rocks rose nearly vertically from the crashing waves, with a few footholds where sea lions hauled up, but was mostly a 200 to 300-foot guano-slippery climb while carrying the heavy camera equipment of the day. Their trials, from landing their boat amidst the heaving waves, to hoisting food, fresh water and equipment for their stay, to

counting birds and documenting the life there as well as possible, make for a hair-raising read. That they succeeded and returned to dry land with heart-opening photographs is one of the greatest bird-study stories of the century.

The outcome from that adventure was tremendous in a different way. Finley made copies of the best photographs and was able to invite himself into the White House and show them to President Theodore Roosevelt, who was so impressed he was reported to say “Bully! Bully! Bully!” and ask for more images. The President had earlier declared Pelican Island in Florida as a bird sanctuary to save the pelicans and egrets and other “plume” birds from slaughter; now he was moved to declare Three Arch Rocks a sanctuary and stop the senseless shooting there.

This triumph for Finley was only the beginning of his years of dedication to document bird life in Oregon—and Washington State*—and create reserves to restrict hunting. There isn’t space here to recount all his efforts, trials and wins, but just to mention his long battles and some successes to save Malheur and the Klamath area wetlands from destruction from ill-planned drainage and rampant hunting. His story is worth a read and our lasting gratitude and admiration.

*Early Audubon records document Finley’s work here in Washington; he was a link between the headquarters in the East with development of bird knowledge and protective efforts here. He was generous with his time and strategies with the emerging movement in this state, but his primary involvement was with Oregon.

You can also find a good chapter-length description of Finley’s work in *The Feather Wars*, by James McCommons.

The emerald ash borer has arrived in Washington!

by Kim Adelson

In August of this year, the emerald ash borer officially arrived in Washington state. As someone who lived through this insect’s invasion of Ohio in the early 2000s, I can attest as to what a disaster this could become. Emerald ash borers (EABs) killed literally tens of millions of trees in Michigan and neighboring Ohio during the last decade that I lived in the Midwest: estimates are that 80-99% of all the ash trees in northeast Ohio and southeast Michigan were destroyed; about 1/3 of the ash trees across the entire state of Ohio are now gone. While we

are not as ash-heavy here as those Midwestern states, there are areas where they are quite common.

EABs have been slowly moving towards Washington since they arrived in the U.S. in 2002. This first sighting was in Vancouver, WA when two observant individuals spotted one on their car windshield. The EAB has been detected in Oregon since 2022 and in Vancouver BC since 2023.

We have only one native species of ash tree in Washington, the Oregon Ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*), and it does live in Mason, Lewis, and Thurston counties. It likes damp feet, and so is usually found along riparian corridors, in wetlands, in floodplains, and along lakeshores rather than in more upland forest. Developers and gardeners have also planted numerous Green Ash (for their fast growth) and White Ash (for their beautiful fall color). Fortunately, our beloved Mountain Ash, with its bright red-orange berry clusters, is *not* a true ash: it is in the rose family, whereas true ashes are in the olive family. So, fortunately, it is *not* endangered by EABs.

Is there anything each of us can do to slow the spread of this dangerous invasive insect? YES!

First, work to attract bark-foraging birds, which feed on EAB larvae. It is the larvae, not the adults, that directly harm ash trees. Local birds that will eat them include:

- Downy Woodpeckers
- Hairy Woodpeckers
- Pileated Woodpeckers
- Northern Flickers
- Red-breasted Nuthatches
- Brown Creepers

While healthy bird populations will not eradicate EABs or entirely stop their spread, research shows that they can remove up to 40% of EAB larvae. In order to attract these birds to your yard, you can: plant and maintain native conifers such as Douglas firs; leave dead wood (snags) in place; provide suet feeders, especially those with tail props, or peanuts; install appropriate nest boxes (you'll have more success if you put clean wood shavings inside for woodpeckers to "excavate"); reduce your pesticide use.

Second, report EABs if you see them! This is critical, because early detection greatly helps containment. If you find an EAB, contact the Washington State Department of Agriculture at their EAB hotline, 1-800-443-6684.

Third, don't transport firewood or deadfall. EABs move very slowly on their own, but they hitch rides (our first sighting was on a car windshield) and this lets them move much faster. They originally came to the U.S. from eastern Asia via a wooden pallet or crate. In February 2026 it became illegal to transport untreated firewood across state lines into Washington, but the confirmed presence of EABs suggests it would be wise to stop relocating untreated wood within the state as well.

Next, if someday you have an infected tree on your property, remove it promptly. Alternatively, if it is a new infestation and the tree is not yet badly damaged, emamectin benzoate injections are 90+% successful at eliminating EAB larvae. These treatments are expensive however – several hundred dollars per individual tree—and they must be repeated every 2 to 3 years.

Finally, do not plant new ash trees, since every new ash is a point from which they can establish themselves and then spread. Instead consider Western service berries, Columbia hawthorns, or mountain ash, all natives.

The emerald ash borer is not a yet a problem in our region. However, taking steps now will reap enormous benefits in the future. Hopefully we will be able to avoid the environmental deterioration that has already occurred in other states. More than 50 local species of animals – butterflies, bees, grosbeaks, Wood Ducks, finches, squirrels, beavers – utilize Oregon Ash trees in some way. They will all benefit from early EAB attenuation efforts. Photo credit: Emerald Ash Borer, APHIS.gov. Public Domain.

Birding with Breakfast

Date: Saturday, September 5

Time: 7:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Leaders: Stella Barringer and Sam Merrill

Description: Birding at Nisqually National Wildlife refuge for a walk through varied habitats. Birding with Breakfast walks are especially appropriate for beginning and intermediate birders.

Meeting location: Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the **visitor center** at the Billy Frank, Jr., Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge overlook (100 Brown Farm Rd. N.E., Olympia). Breakfast afterwards at Panera Bread, 1320 Marvin Rd. NE.

No registration needed.

SHOREBIRD FIELD TRIP

WHEN: Saturday, September 5, 2026

Meet at 7:45 AM at Mud Bay Park and Ride. Leave for Bottle Beach at 8 AM. Westport Marina midday, Tokeland in the afternoon. Return to Olympia late afternoon.

All day trip to Tokeland, Westport and Bottle Beach. This will be a great day for seeing the shorebird migration. Hundreds, if not thousands, of shorebirds will be in fall plumage. Spotting scopes will be available to help see the birds. This is a great opportunity to work on shorebird identification. Beginning birders welcome!

BRING:

Binoculars and spotting scope (if you have one),

Lunch, snacks, drinks

Layered clothing – it can be cool and windy by the water

Shoes/boots that can get muddy at Bottle Beach

Discover Pass is required

LEADER: Lin Stern and Miles McEvoy

Trip limited to 12 participants. Contact Lin Stern at lindseysarahstern@gmail.com to sign up.

Shelton Birds & Brew

High Steel Beer Company

233 South First St., Shelton

Thursday, September 17th, 5:30 – 7 pm

September's question is **"Do you have (or have you had) any plants in your yard that attract birds? What are they?"** Hosts are Kristen McCarty and Anthony Freiss. You can contact Kristen for more information at mccarty.kristen.e@gmail.com.

Birding at Ocean Shores, WA

When: September 20th, 2026 from 8 – 12 PM

Trip leader: Timothy Leque

Registration: Email Tim Leque to register at timleque@hotmail.com

Description: We will start the morning at Oyhut Wildlife Area, meeting at the entrance and parking area at Tonquin Ave at 8:00 AM. A Discover Pass is required to park at Oyhut. From the parking area we will walk to the lagoon where we have a chance of encountering roosting shorebirds. September is a great time to look for golden plovers at Oyhut, and a number of other shorebird species are possible, including rare migrants.

Next, we will move down the road to the Pt. Brown Jetty. This is a reliable location to observe rockpipers and other shorebirds, as well as gulls, waterfowl and occasionally even pelagic species can be observed here in September. We will plan to wrap up birding by noon.

If there is interest among participants to keep birding, an optional stop at Bill's Spit will also be on the table.

Walking Distance = Approximately 3-5 miles over the course of the morning, with most distance occurring at Oyhut Wildlife Area. Pace = 2, Terrain = B.

Restrooms: There are portable toilets at Pt. Brown Jetty, and several locations with public restrooms in Ocean Shores.

What to bring: Binoculars. Water. Comfortable walking shoes. Fog or rain is always a possibility on the outer coast any time of the year, so bringing extra layers is strongly recommended.

Directions: The meeting location is at the south end of Tonquin Ave SW, near the southern tip of the Ocean Shores Peninsula. The starting point is 1 hour, 40 minutes from Olympia. Carpooling encouraged.

Parking: A Discover Pass is required at the meeting place at the Oyhut Wildlife Area. There is a large pull-out at the Ocean Shores STP. The Pt. Brown Jetty has free public parking.

Olympia Birds & Brew

MONDAY SEPTEMBER 21ST, 4:30 – 6:00ish

BOSTON HARBOR MARINA

312 73RD AVE NE

OLYMPIA

Stop by and enjoy the gorgeous scenery from Boston Harbor and the last day of summer. Birds and Brew is a social time for folks to gather and talk all things avian. This is open to South Sound Bird Alliance members and non-members alike. Although it starts at 4:30 pm, it is a drop-in anytime event. The topic for this meeting is **"Describe a recent bird outing: where, when, and what did you see?"** Our hosts are Craig and Vicki Merkel. Questions can go to Craig at merkelcraig@gmail.com

Birding with Breakfast

Date: Saturday, October 3

Time: 7:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Leaders: Cori Halverson and Debby Johnson

Description: Birding at Woodard Bay Conservation Area. Especially appropriate for beginning and intermediate birders. Habitats include mixed evergreen and deciduous forest, tidal stream, and shoreline.

Meeting location: From Olympia: take Boston Harbor Road north, then right on Woodard Bay Road, crossing Libby Road. There is a small parking area requiring a Discover Pass on the left just before crossing the bridge over Woodard Bay; or drive across the bridge and up the hill to a County parking lot that does not require a Discover Pass — a short walk down to the lower parking lot.

For this location, bring your own breakfast or snack to eat on the trail.

Next Book for SSBA Book Club: Kingbird Highway

***Kingbird Highway: The Biggest Year in the Life of an Extreme Birder*, by Kenn Kaufman**

Meeting Tuesday, October 20th; Time and Location TBD

As summer's end draws near, we hope to extend our fun and relaxation a bit with a classic: *Kingbird Highway*, by renowned author and illustrator Kenn Kaufman.

Description from the publisher:

"At sixteen, Kenn Kaufman dropped out of the high school where he was student council president and hit the road, hitching back and forth across America, from Alaska to Florida, Maine to Mexico. Maybe not all that unusual a thing to do in the seventies, but what Kenn was searching for was a little different: not sex, drugs, God, or even self, but birds. A report of a rare bird would send him hitching nonstop from Pacific to Atlantic and back again. When he was broke he would pick fruit or do odd jobs to earn the fifty dollars or so that would last him for weeks. His goal was to set a record—most North American species seen in a year—but along the way he began to realize that at this breakneck pace he was only looking, not seeing. What had been a game became a quest for a deeper understanding of the natural world. Kingbird Highway is a unique coming-of-age story, combining a lyrical celebration of nature with wild, and
sometimes dangerous, adventures, starring a colorful cast of characters."

We will keep you posted on if our meeting will be in person or via Zoom, and if in person, where
we shall meet. Discussion questions for the book will be sent via email closer to the meeting date.

To receive the questions we will be discussing and more information as needed, please email Rachel at lightningdash09@yahoo.com to be put on the mailing list.

Drawing Birds for Identification in the Field

Ms. Missy Maxwell, Instructor

Cost: $60.00 which includes all materials

December 2nd, 2026, from 6 – 8 PM

Rainwater Brewing

2442 Mottman Road SW

Tumwater, WA 98501

Learn a beginner friendly method of drawing birds for identification taking into account their color, body type and anatomy. Each participant will receive a set of supplies which can be taken home at the end of class.

Limit of 12 participants. We will be meeting in their side room.

Register by emailing Deb Nickerson at debranick@gmail.com

Payment can be made online at our website (link coming soon) or by check and must be received to confirm your space in the class.