

One Step at a Time

Newsletter of the Mountaineers Naturalist Group
December 2015

Winter nights are high,
long is the moon
returned the goldeneye
and the elusive loon
the flash of vermilion
Anna's long tongue
pervasive the junco
teal mating song sung
Look back a year
back a year, up and away
to mountains that beckon on sunnier days
all gone now and resting in bud or in ground
waiting, just waiting,
til spring comes around..



Pre-winter photos from our November hike-of-the month

In the Garden

Walking in our species garden, most plants are senescent. However, there are still blooms..

Cooley's hedge nettle

pearly everlasting (to the dying end)

Richardson's penstemon



yarrow



hairy manzanita



Oregon sunshine

and Gary Brill's favorite plant *Taraxacum officianale* (aka dandelion) also, some ferns are shining this month, especially licorice and deer fern, also maidenhair

*******Request for Help*******

I hope you enjoy the newsletter. Right now I'm pretty much doing it by myself, but I'd like help. Mainly I'd like your input. I'd like people to come up with articles about hikes they took, birds they saw, ideas they have, that can be shared. Basically this newsletter can serve for mutual education, information, social contact, whatever we want. Many of us travel and hike year round, not always in the northwest. I'd like to hear about these activities, since they contribute to our knowledge and understanding about the natural world as well as a forum for what we are doing. I include a brief article on a trip I took to Costa Rica with Jeff Nystuen and Stewart Hougen this past month. I'd like more articles like this.

December Hike of the Month

Our hike of the month for December, the last Saturday of the month (December 26th). This month our plan is to go to Hansville Greenway and Point No Point. We will combine walking with birding. Vern Brown led a naturalist trip to the greenway and they saw a bear. Exploring this area we will be joined by Kitsap naturalists. There are several lakes along the Greenway and Point No Point always produces rare birds, in part because there are so many scopes there. The loop is about 4 miles round trip, and a loop including Point No Point is 7 miles. We will choose. We take a ferry to this hike so carpooling is important. Check out the study group on your profile to see the hike listing and sign up.

Naturalists Lecture Series:

January 13, 2016, 7-9 p.m. Seattle Program Center, Goodman A

Why have Eastern Washington wildfires been so explosive and hard to control?

Paul Hessburg, a research landscape ecologist with the Forest Service, will focus on the natural role of wildfires in the pre-settlement era, and **how human actions have unwittingly conspired to change that role**. Decades of fire suppression have created a dense, fuel-laden landscape that Hessburg says is far from natural and is driving extreme wildfires.

Study Group members free. Guests \$5. No need to register.

More information here:

https://www.mountaineers.org/about/branches-committees/seattle-branch/committees/seattle-naturalists-committee/course-templates/copy_of_naturalist-leaders-first-aid-seminar/naturalist-lecture-series-2016-2-paul-hessburg

Washington Native Plant Society talk:

Mark Egger, Pacific Paintbrushes: A Photographic Synopsis and Celebration of the *Castilleja* Species of the P.N.W.

Mark's program will begin with a brief introduction to the anatomy and terminology associated with the genus *Castilleja* (the Indian Paintbrushes). Mark will then summarize the numerous changes in the taxonomy of this genus and the other closely-related groups since the publication of Hitchcock and Cronquist's Flora of the Pacific Northwest. The program will feature selected images of all of the paintbrush species found in Washington, Oregon, and southern British Columbia, including several new *Castilleja* species described since the late 1990's. Information will be provided about the range and ecology of these species, as well as tips concerning their identification.

Mark Egger is a recently retired science teacher and a Research Associate at the Herbarium at the University of Washington-Burke Museum. Mark has devoted much of his free time over the last 32 years to studying the genus *Castilleja* throughout North America, Mexico, and Central and South America. In addition to being an authority on the genus, Mark is also a highly accomplished photographer. He is a long-standing member of the Central Puget Sound Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society having joined in 1983.

Thursday, December 3, 2015, 7:30pm,

UW Center for Urban Horticulture, 3501 NE 41st St, Seattle

Seattle Audubon Society field trips:

Registration is open for all Field Trips listed below. Sign up by calling 206-523-4483, Monday through Saturday from 10am - 5pm. For more information about field trips and registration procedures, [click here](#). To [download](#) a [PDF](#) of the current field trips and classes click [here](#).

Saturday December 5, 2015 - Limit 10

South King County Puget Sound

Leaders: Matt Bartels & Dasha Gudalewicz (cell # day of trip only: 425-785-0812)

7:00 AM, Greenlake (Ravenna) P&R

We'll look for loons, grebes, alcids and ducks, keeping an eye out for such hard-to-find birds as Ancient Murrelet. We'll work our way south along the Puget Sound coast checking several good viewing points. Bring lunch & snacks, and dress for weather. Scopes & 2-way radios a plus. Over by late afternoon. Carpool cost \$22.50 per car, shared by riders, not driver.

Sunday, December 6 2015 – Limit 10

Samish Flats and Fir Island

Leaders: Penny Bolton and Sarah Peden (cell # day of trip only: 206-819-5643)

6:30 AM, Greenlake (Ravenna) P&R

The Samish Flats and Fir Island offer some of the best winter raptor and waterfowl viewing in the state. Join Penny and Sarah for some great birding fun. All skill levels welcome. Expect to see Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Harriers and Bald Eagles. With luck we'll find a Peregrine Falcon and perhaps American Kestrel, Merlin and Short-eared Owls. On Padilla Bay we will see the various loons, scoters, mergansers, grebes and ducks aplenty. Bring a scope if you have one. You can borrow binoculars from the Audubon office if you need them. Dress for cold, wet and windy conditions. Bring lunch, snacks, liquids, and a Discover Pass if you have one. Return to town at 6pm at the latest. Carpool cost \$50 per car, shared by riders, not driver.

Tuesday, December 8, 2015 - Limit 12

Magnuson Park, Seattle

Leaders: Joe Sweeney and Mike Freund

8:30 AM, Promontory Point Environmental Learning Center, Magnuson Park

Magnuson Park offers a variety of habitats, including ponds, forest, fields, and a lake named after a president. This outing is very suitable for beginner bird-watchers. We will walk 2-3 miles on mostly level terrain, searching for birds and bathrooms along the way. Bring binoculars, hat, snacks, layers, rain gear and a sense of humor. Please leave your pets at home, even if they have a good sense of humor. Over by 11:30 am.

Directions: Magnuson Park is in NE Seattle. Take bus #30 or #75 to the park entrance at NE 65th St and Sand Point Way NE. Meet at the Promontory Point Environmental Learning Center, which is the red-metal-roofed shelter next to little drive-in road at the west edge of parking lot #E-1. It is marked with a pink square on the [Magnuson Park map](#).

Saturday, December 12, 2015 – Limit 10 in 3 cars

Birch Bay, Semiahmoo, Blaine Marina

Leaders: Carleen and Neil Zimmerman (cell # day of trip only: 206-200-6700)

8:00 AM, North Jackson Park P&R (a.k.a. NE 145th Street P&R)

These areas are great places for loons, Brant, diving ducks and alcids. Long-tailed Ducks are also normally seen. We'll start at Birch Bay and make our way to Semiahmoo, Drayton Harbor and the Blaine Marina. [Drivers](#) will need a Discover Pass for Birch Bay S.P. Dress for cold/wet weather, bring drinks, lunch and snacks; scopes will be very helpful but not required. Return by late afternoon or early evening. Car [pool cost](#) \$60 per car, shared by riders, not driver.

Sunday, December 13, 2015 - Limit 8

Discovery Park

Leaders: Evan Houston and Jen Kunitsugu (cell # day of trip: 206-327-5352)

8:00 AM, Discovery Park MAIN parking lot (3801 Discovery Park Blvd)

This is a trip to an urban oasis, for birders who are strong walkers. We'll aim to sample Discovery Park's diverse habitats, from mixed forest to open fields to saltwater. This should yield a variety of species, with the possibility of a surprise or two. Expect to walk up to 5 miles with up to 500 feet of elevation change with steep hills. Bring binoculars, water and snacks. Dress to stay warm, dry and protected from the wind, anticipating exposure to the wintry elements. Scopes useful if you're willing to tote (leaders will have one). Over by noon.

Saturday, December 19, 2015 - Limit 11 in 3 cars

Birding in Kent

Leader: Julie Monahan (cell # day of trip: 206-753-8717)

7:30 AM, Tukwila P&R on Interurban (Exit 156 on I-5 South)

The area around Kent Ponds provides reliable birding for waterfowl, passerines and raptors (American Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon), and usually a surprise or two every fall and winter (including Red-shouldered Hawk and American Tree Sparrow). We'll hit the highlights including the Grassy Knoll at the Green River Natural Area, the Puget Power Trail, Boeing Ponds, and the fields along 204th Street at Frager Road. Over by noon, prepare for some muddy footing. Rain gear and boots recommended. Car pool cost \$10 per car, shared by riders, not driver.

Odds and Ends

Ptarmigans show camouflage strategy.



Is Costa Rica, the Rich Coast?

Heading south during the fall-winter period gives us a chance to see where many of our migratory summer breeders go. They fit in, often inconspicuously, to a habitat quite different than their summering grounds; hot, humid, and, as our area, under siege. As Latin American countries go Costa Rica is more enlightened in recognizing the tourism opportunities of their abundant fauna and flora, and it also has become a premier retirement location for Expat Americans who live in mostly beach communities, in a style close to the American life they left. Costa Rica has moved to develop their eco-tourism and to attempt less dependency on oil. They have extensive wind farms and mining is illegal throughout the country. It is also largely malaria and yellow fever free. Jeff's family had arranged this trip and I came along as an afterthought, for which I am grateful. We flew into Liberia in the west of the country, a new international airport that avoided noisy, busy San Jose. We spent all of our time fairly close to Liberia, visiting in 10 days (Jeff and Stewart had an additional 4 days) a volcanic rain and cloud forest near Arenal Volcano, a western beach community at Bahia Grande, and a town in the Southern Nicoya Peninsula (Nicoya), where we had access to beaches, riverine areas and 'dry' as well as rainforest regions. We saw lots of birds, frogs, reptiles (snakes and iguanas, and crocodiles), monkeys and coati mundis and the variable squirrel, which looks just like our grey squirrel except it is oddly multicolored. We had good opportunities for hiking, though mostly rainforest hiking is an exercise in frustration for bird-watchers, since so much is in the canopy. The best birding was along roads, on mangrove and river boat tours, and at eco-lodges where many colorful birds are attracted to feeders. This was my first time in Costa Rica and I am thankful that Jeff was so knowledgeable about birds there, and that he used the same methods he teaches in the Intro Class of describing what we see before looking at any guide book. I continue to be impressed with the breadth of his birding knowledge. There were many enjoyable moments. The most impressionable experience was watching a green turtle on a beach laying eggs. These mammoths, over a meter long, seemed to take forever to scoop out a holding area for their eggs. The wait was worth it. I felt like I was experiencing something primal, and was quite emotional during the experience. We also had great, close views of two of the turkey sized birds, the crested guan and the great currosaw. I enjoyed seeing eastern US warblers and figuring out what they were, like prothonotary and chestnut sided, and other old summer friends like house wrens and yellow warblers. I was impressed with the large number of tanagers, many with extremely gaudy colors, such as the blue dacnis and passerini's tanager, as well as US migrants such as the summer tanager and baltimore oriole. I generally liked being in Costa Rica. The food was OK (great fruits such as bananas, watermelon and pineapple), but way too much meat for me, and I do get tired of the pervasive

beans and rice. Costa Rica, unlike many other latin american countries, is not inexpensive. If you want to go, it is good to be able to speak Spanish. You can arrange a lot beforehand and its easy to find hotels of all types. Its good to know about local tour options. We took several tours, including a couple of boat tours (well worth it) and a tour to see the turtles lay eggs. Generally it was easy to link up to these tours, though the knowledge of the guides is variable. We did meet one very knowledgeable guide, who we did not go out with. I probably would have seen more with him (I know I would have), since I met him after walking a trail he was heading into where he told me he knew there would be toucans, by some wild avocado tree in fruit. I probably couldn't have found that tree and those birds even if I knew there was one on the trail. But, for me, I like the feel of the hunt and the unexpected. The toucans we did see we saw on our own. I was quite excited to see the exquisite keel billed toucan. I suppose I'm a hiker who likes to see birds, rather than a birder who is willing to hike.



Scarlet macaw, green iguana (male), feel for the rainforest with bromeliads, crested guan

