Order additional copies at $9.23 each plus tax = $10.00

Telephone or write to

Piichuck Audubon Society
1803 Hewitt Avenue Suite 108
Everett, WA 98201
425-252-0926

Printed on Recycled Paper

Snohomish County Birding Club
River Meadows County Park

River Meadows Park you is on the South Fork of the Stillaguamish River. There is a large meadow area where you will find Northern Harrier hunting the fields while a Turkey Vulture has been known to fly overhead. Bald Eagle may be in the trees near the river. At the north end of the meadow there is a trail that will take you down to a sand and rock beach. Across the river at this point is a bluff with a narrow beach in front of it. Great Blue Heron have been observed here, but even more exciting is finding the Green Heron. The Double-crested Cormorant also fishes these waters. The fields may have Western Meadowlark in early spring with the trees having Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Bushtit, and Black-capped Chickadee. Both Red-tailed Hawk and Northern Harrier circle the fields searching for prey. Pileated, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers are present in the wooded area. A trail goes north along the river as well.

Getting There Map E 6
From the city of Arlington, travel east on State Highway 530 which crosses the Stillaguamish River. After about one mile you will see a turn off on the right that will say “Arlington Heights - Jordan Road.” These two roads divide later, so take the Jordan Road. The distance is 4.9 miles from Arlington.

Boulder River

You need to be prepared to trail hike for one mile, for at the end of that mile is a 150 foot waterfall. The best time to see the falls is in the spring when water is at its most voluminous. A bench has been placed on the trail across from the falls from where you can patiently scope out the falls to determine if there is an American Dipper nest. Between the rock face and the falling water, the American Dipper delights in making its nest on a ledge. If you do not find a nest, you may catch a glimpse of a Dipper flying by or bobbing along the rocky shore of this steep canyon.

Another bird using the same habitat of cascading water is the Harlequin Duck. A Harlequin has also been observed further upstream nesting under a rock outcropping near the waters edge. This is a place where the trail goes down to the river with a large boulder hanging over the water. At this point you can look both up and down the river. No songs represent the Boulder River Wilderness Area better than the thrush family. Over the din of the cascading river, you may hear Varied Thrush, American Robin, and Hermit Thrush. Their loud, clear voices announce their presence. Wee Winter Wren sounds off with a voice nearly the equal of the thrushes. In deep forest it is often easier to identify birds by their songs rather than by sight, for the deep three dimensional forest makes sightings difficult. With patience you may be able to observe Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Bushttit, and Black-capped Chickadee.

Getting There Map E 2
From Arlington take State Highway 530 toward Darrington. From the bridge crossing the South Fork Stillaguamish River in Arlington drive 18.7 miles to the mile post #41, turn right on French Creek road, and follow a dirt/gavel/rock road for 4 miles to parking at the end. A sign at the highway turn-off warns that a trail parking pass is required.
Fortson Pond

Fortson Pond needs somebody to love it. A volunteer steward from either the fishing community or the birding community would make a difference. The state of Washington’s Wildlife Viewing Area resides in a beautiful setting with Whitehorse Mountain and its long flowing glacier gracing the view. This vista from the north side of two upper ponds stirs your senses with all its calendar-like perfection. However, a few slobs continually dump their trash cluttering the area. Unfortunately, it doesn’t take but a few to disgrace all of us, as well as the beauty of nature. Out of season shooters lacking the ethics of good sportsmen give fresh evidence of their presence with spent shotgun and rifle shells. These antics put ducks on the ponds in jeopardy, making them react to your presence in a skittish manner, as well they should. In December the mill pond itself becomes alive with salmon from the Stillaguamish River. The spawners find their way up this small tributary and over the fish ladder to their narrow spawning grounds.

A floating log near the shore of the third pond provides a place where Common Merganser may line up along its length. Virginia Rail use the brushy area near the shoreline. Several pair of Wood Ducks nest in the middle pond in boxes provided for them. The ponds are familiar territory to Bufflehead and to many species of dabbling ducks including Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon, and Green-winged Teal. American Dipper utilize the short stream from the Stillaguamish River to the fish ladder. The Dipper appears by its actions to be nesting in that vicinity. Winter Wrens sing year around, but in early spring seem to be everywhere. Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, American Robin, and Marsh Wren also in in the chorus. Birds around the huge alder, maple, and cottonwood trees include Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Red-breasted Sapsucker,

Black-capped Chickadee, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Bushtit, Pine Siskin, and Brown Creeper. The Northern Pygmy Owl has been observed sitting on branches and hunting during the day. Birds at ground level observed here include Fox Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, and thrushes. Owls and other raptors are well-represented at this site.

One Pilchuck Audubon Society leader, Darryl Thompson, has made periodic forays to Fortson Pond over the years listing the birds he has located. Within the woodpecker family he has observed the Black-backed Woodpecker, a rarity on this side of the Cascades. Another member of the woodpecker family on his list and seen rarely in the state of Washington is the Red-naped Sapsucker.

Pileated, Hairy, and Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flicker and Red-breasted Sapsucker are listed here as well.

Squire Creek County Park

Squire Creek offers not only a good birding site, but also one of the best places to view spawning salmon. Near the picnic area, where you park your automobile, a valuable gravel bar creates an environment for salmon redds (nests) and thus affords an almost perfect bed for spawning. Around the first of November, you may find chum which first arrive late September. Later may come the kings. Look at the gravel. Dark gravel is algae covered. But note that some gravel looks fresh and clean. Fresh looking gravel results from the males using their tails and turning over the gravel to make nests for the female. After the male places his sperm on the female’s eggs, he covers the redds with gravel. Now the interest heightens for the viewer, since the male fights off other males attempting to find a place to build their nests. The intruder could easily scrape up the redds causing deposited eggs to end up floating down current.

The spawning provides an interesting occupation for birds. At the end of
spawner’s activity, diving from his lightly water-covered rock to catch floating eggs escaping the nest. This is a prime source of food for the dipper in mid-winter. We saw as many as 25 spawned-out salmon carcasses in that small area. Hearing but not seeing the bald eagle, we knew why it was there. Also, we scared up a dozen Ravens along the park side of the river. These, too, were using the salmon as a food source.

A number of water birds will fish or hunt in these same ponds in spring and summer. Included among these are Wood Ducks which prefer the quieter water of this pond and Common mergansers built for fishing the quiet as well as faster waters. The Bufflehead may drop by to see what is at the bottom of the pond. Winter Wren, seemingly everywhere, lives up to his seasonal name, while yet continuing to sing for a good part of the year. The elusive Virginia Rail hides on the land adjoining the backwater and coves of the stream. Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, American Robin join in possession of the area.

The huge alder, maple, and cottonwood trees and some of the big fir trees are home to species including Red breasted Sapsucker, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flicker, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Black-capped Chickadee, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Bushtit, Pine Siskin, and Brown Creeper. Suggested activities include attempting to bring out the Northern Pygmy Owl, but not during the nesting season. Birds at ground level observed here include Fox Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, and thrushes. Owls and other raptors are also be found here.

All in all, Squire Creek offers many opportunities for birders. The forest is rich in bird activity in the spring thus bringing out species you would expect to see in a mature forest.

Old Sauk River Trail

Old Sauk River Trail has a history going back to the days when Native Americans used it as a route into the hills. Today’s remnant trail is three miles long. Mount Baker- Snoqualmie National Forest manages this as part of the Skagit Wild and Scenic River System. Washington Trails Association helped to relocate and rebuild portions of the trail that had been washed out by floods. Down river from the city of Darrington there is a Bald Eagle rookery just beyond the Snohomish County border. In winter the rookery provides about 300 eagles to the Sauk and Suiattle Rivers. A small number of these migrating eagles navigate up river to be seen from this part of the trail. A few resident eagles can also be spotted from time to time. The best time to observe them is in December and January when the salmon spawning is at its height. The Nature Conservancy purchased the rookery area. Their report indicates that the eagles arrive here before arriving at the Skagit preserve.

Winter is one of the better times to view other birds on the trail, since this is a low elevation trail with easy walking and many resident birds. However, you need not travel the three miles for birding purposes. Access to the Sauk River can also be obtained near the parking area for forest edge birding. The forest was logged about seventy years ago thus there are now large evergreen trees covering this forest along the river providing a special kind of birding habitat.

An Osprey nest has been observed here in the past, but the tree was taken down recently by a slide. The Osprey is likely to return again for the river fishing. Belted Kingfisher let you know that this is its select fishing grounds. Tree Swallow swoop and feed above the surging water. Look for whitewash under the trees along the river trail for tell-tale signs of owls and other raptors. The Hairy Woodpecker and the Northern Flicker use the dead and ancient trees. Two birds common to the rushing waters of the Sauk are the Common
Merganser and the American Dipper. In years past a Harlequin Duck and a Wood Duck were seen within minutes of each other on the same stretch of river. Common are Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Bushtit, Black-capped Chickadee, Pine Siskin, Song and Fox Sparrows, Spotted Towhee, Winter Wren, and Brown Creeper. The musical calls of the thrush family are well represented by the Hermit and Varied Thrushes and Robin. Included are White-crowned Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Dark-eyed Junco, House Finch, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Woodpecker evidence is prevalent with Pileated and Hairy Woodpeckers taking advantage of dead trees. Also, drilling small wells in deciduous trees is the Red-breasted Sapsucker. Around the forest edge you will find many of these same birds as well as Killdeer, Red-tailed Hawk, and Northern Harrier.

Robe Valley/Robe Gorge County Park

Can it be possible that a young teenager identified a Red-headed Woodpecker in the Robe Valley? This is a bird normally found east of the Rocky Mountains. I tend to believe she did identify this wayward vagrant, since she also had the Red-breasted Sapsucker on her list near the same time. In addition, she was a product of Pilchuck Audubon's Master Birder Class and, including our adults, was one of our star pupils. Many other rarities far out of their habitat have been recorded in Snohomish County. This is a good area, since it lies at the northern base of Mount Pilchuck. On Mount Pilchuck Marbled Murrelets have been recorded winging toward their nesting trees. Along the South Fork Stillaguamish River there have been Mallards, Bufflehead, Common and Hooded Mergansers, Ruddy Duck, and Wood Duck. The Robe Gorge presents excellent habitat for American Dipper. With a concentrated effort in spring, one would not be surprised to see a Harlequin Duck using this part of the Stillaguamish River to nest. Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Spotted Sandpiper, and Killdeer also take advantage of the river. Hawks, falcons, owls, and eagles use the valley including Sharp-shinned Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Bald Eagle, and Great-horned Owl. Spruce Grouse have been identified feeding off the needles, buds, and seeds of conifers. The Red Crossbill feeds on cones from the few pines that are in the area.

The list of passerines is long and varied in both the gorge and the valley. Rufous Hummingbirds, Downy and Pileated Woodpeckers, and Northern Flicker nest in the area. The Olive-sided Flycatcher is here, as well as the Pacific-slope Flycatcher. Being close to Mount Pilchuck makes possible sightings of Mountain Chickadee. Black-capped and Chestnut-backed Chickadees have also been observed in the valley. The Red-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Varied Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, and Brown Creeper find this area excellent habitat. The Varied and Hermit Thrushes may come down in winter, since these birds have been recorded in past books on Mount Pilchuck. Not necessarily a great area for warblers, nevertheless, among the warblers having been identified here are Yellow Warbler, Myrtle Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat.

Getting There Map E 7

From Granite Falls drive State Highway 92, the Mountain Loop Highway, until you see a sign for Robe Gorge. Opposite this parking site along the road is a side road to Green Mountain. For the rest of Robe Valley drive east on the Mountain Loop Highway to the Verlot Campground and Ranger Station.

Big Four Meadows and Ice Cave Map E 8

Further up the Mountain Loop Highway from Robe is the parking area of Big Four Mountain. Although this stop has not attracted birders in the past, it should be looked at as a good source for birding. Go there for the impressive view of Big Four Mountain, but while there check it out for the presence of birds. The ice caves extend up the northern slopes of Big Four Mountain. With the limited birding that has been done here, the results reported have been very good. Crossing the meadows, you will find them essentially wetlands. Belted Kingfisher, Steller's Jay, Gray Jay, Common Raven, Common Bushtit, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Varied Thrush, American Robin, European Starling, Song Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and Rufous Hummingbird.

In June of 1999 an American Tree Sparrow was sighted at the parking lot.
Among other species found are a host of warblers: Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, Orange-crowned, Nashville, MacGillivray's, Yellow Rumped (Audubon's), and Townsend's Warblers. Add to that list other passerines: Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Bewick's Wren, Pine Siskin, Red Crossbill, American Dipper, Cedar Waxwing, Evening Grosbeak, and Black-headed Grosbeak. One of Pilchuck Audubon Society's mid-week birding trips in June 2000 on the Mountain Loop Highway and at Big Four added to that list Swainson's Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, American Dipper, Violet green Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Western Wood Pewee, Olive-sided and Willow Flycatchers, and Black-throated Gray Warbler.