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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service notes that the red knot is around nine inches long with a wingspan of 20 inches. This little shorebird, part of the sandpiper clan, weighs less than a cup of coffee. But every year of its life, it goes on a very long migratory journey. There are two North American subspecies.

The *Calidris canutus roselaari* breeds in Siberia and western Alaska and migrates south each fall to winter in Mexico, Florida and South America. The *Calidris canutus rufa* nests in the Canadian low arctic and migrates more than 9,300 miles south to the tip of South America's Tierra del Fuego for the winter. The migration is one of the longest in the animal kingdom. One red knot, banded in May 1987, was seen on Delaware Bay in May 2000. During those 13 years, the bird had flown about 242,350 miles, a distance farther than it is from the earth to the moon.

The bird band identifying that red knot is a true boon to tracking birds. It is a non-invasive numbered ring attached to a wild bird's leg or wing, providing ornithologists with information about the bird's migration and life history without harming the bird. And it's been done for centuries — think homing pigeons. The North American Bird Banding Program is run jointly by the U.S. Geological Survey and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Banding is an indispensable way to study the behavior, movement and survival of birds and is also essential to bird conservation.

"Today lightweight devices such as geolocators are revolutionizing the tracking of migratory birds and, in the process, documenting astonishing new records for distance and endurance," wrote Jessica Snyder Sachs in a 2011 article for the National Wildlife Federation. A geocator weighs 1.1 grams, or less than two M&Ms. "The first surprising discovery came in 2007, when wildlife biologists used surgically implant-



NEAL MAINE/PACIFICLIGHT IMAGES

Great blue herons are year-round residents of the Columbia-Pacific region, commonly spotted near the shores of open water or in wetlands.

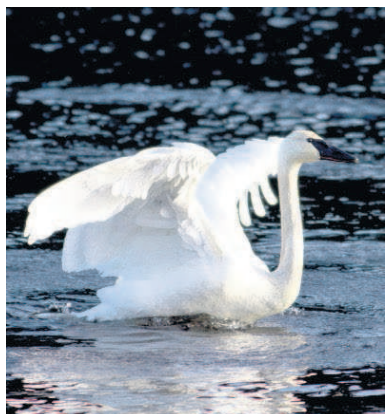


PHOTO BY ROY WESTERN

A trumpeter swan spread its wings on Black Lake in Ilwaco, Washington, in late December. Seventy percent of all trumpeters breed and nest in Alaska, then winter in the Pacific Northwest, including here along our coastline.

ed satellite transmitters to show that migrating bar-tailed godwits fly from Alaska to New Zealand without once stopping to refuel. At 7,100 miles in just over 8 days, the migration was, and remains, the longest nonstop flight ever recorded."

Purple martins, birds that comes to visit the Columbia-Pacific region, have been geo-tagged in northern Pennsylvania. Stay tuned for tracking updates.

Tom Anderson, a part-time Gearhart resident and ardent birder, documents his daily sightings by taking mental notes and then entering them on a list on his iPhone. His iBird and Merlin Bird ID apps



NEAL MAINE/PACIFICLIGHT IMAGES

Over the last hundred years, the Eurasian collared dove has colonized the bird world, spreading from its native warm temperate and subtropical Asia across the world. Introduced in North America in the 1980s, the collared dove is now found in nearly every state in the U.S. and is an example of a new bird taking up residency in the local area.

## JOIN A BIRDING CLUB

The Shoalwater Birders meet four times a year at the Ocean Park Timberland Library in Ocean Park, Washington, and generally hold field trips once a month, taking birders all over the Long Beach Peninsula and the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge as well as further afield to the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge, Astoria, Cannon Beach and more. Membership is \$12 a year. For more information, visit [shoalwaterbirders.com](http://shoalwaterbirders.com) or email [info@shoalwaterbirders.com](mailto:info@shoalwaterbirders.com)



PHOTO BY MADELINE KALBACH

Whimbrels like this are among our region's more dramatic shorebirds.

help him identify birds. Currently, Anderson's favorite neighborhood bird is the western bluebird.

"They haven't, until recently, been a common visitor to the Gearhart neighborhood. I think the tree removal on the (Gearhart) golf course has been beneficial to this population, along with locals placing nest boxes in appropriate locations," he said. "The western bluebird has been declining in population due to competition for nest sites by starlings and house sparrows. A great winter activity for interested birders would be construction and placement of nest boxes designed for this bird," said Anderson, who welcomes any-

one interested in contacting him regarding his idea.

Wendy Watson-Beisner, co-owner of Lyles's Garden and Pet Center in Seaside, has a steady stream of customers seeking her advice about all things birds, both wild and caged. A backyard birder herself, she has fly-bys, new-to-the-area birds and regulars at her bird feeders all year round. "I have some winter thrushes and finches hanging out in my backyard right now. The finches are early this year, usually not start showing up until late February or March," said Watson-Beisner.

This area is truly "for the birds": So much for us to learn, so

much to see flying right around us.

If you find yourself needing a break from our long, wet winter days, here's a suggestion: Check computer websites to see if birds have a sense of smell. My computer listed 6,250,000 related web results. Which led to wondering if birds can taste? 8,600,000 results pop up: yes, no, some can, most can't — whatever your conclusion, it's evidently something lots of people have been wondering about for a long time. Since birds can't people-speak, step outside or find a well-placed viewing window and watch them. Draw some of your own conclusions. Just like the birds, time will fly.