An "Anytime, Anywhere" Celebration of Nature in the City

Simple citizen-science project reaches urbanites of all ages
Ithaca, N.Y. Nature has the power to soothe and enthuse. More people are finding that out as they join the free, year-round "Celebrate Urban Birds!" citizen-science project from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. From all different walks of life, participants are reaping the benefits of a closer connection to the natural world and a new appreciation for city birds.

We can all participate in Celebrate Urban Birds through...
First Saturday BirdWalk begins the field trip schedule each month, with one or two additional trips for bird viewing. But the month of June this year had four choices in different locations, partly to explore areas that are listed on Kittitas Audubon’s new county bird map.

On the first Saturday of June the morning was cool, but sunny. The weather must have kept some people home, but seven faithful birders did have a good time finding 34 species at our local hangout, Irene Rinehart Riverfront Park. The highlights all seemed to be dressed in yellow, i.e., Western Tanager, Yellow Warbler, American Goldfinch and Bullock’s Oriole! Many flycatchers, all of which (after extensive study) turned out to be Western Wood Pewees, were busy hawking insects. Always a pleasant stroll in the morning hours, this BirdWalk is fun.

On Sunday, June 8th, eight birders were lead by special guest leader, James Begley of Roslyn to several locations in that area. Road 'B' off the Coal Miners Trail, and Stream 'C' Corridor very near Suncadia, were scoured. Because the weather was a bit blustery and sunny, we ate our sack lunches while sitting in one of the many Roslyn Cemeteries. After an ice cream treat, we birded around Cle Elum on our way back to Ellensburg. Thirty-two species were seen, highlights being Black-throated Gray and Orange Crowned Warblers, along with Warbling and Cassin’s Vireos.

Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge was our destination on Saturday, June 21st. The mileage is far but worth the concentrated effort to find the Bobolinks. At a distance in a field, this target bird was seen by all six participants through the scope. On to Fort Simcoe under the oak shelter trees where the Lewis Woodpeckers were feeding their young as we lunched. We were surprised that few people were at the fort, but what began as a very hot day turned out to be quite pleasant with no wind. Returning through Union Gap we stopped to see what the Popoff Trail along the Greenway would hold. While we were looking for ducks and shorebirds on the first pond, out of the sky came a mature Bald Eagle. Could one suggest they are nesting in the area? Forty-two species were seen this day.

Gold Creek Ponds near Hyak on Saturday June 28th was the fourth trip in the month. We were treated with two leaders from the USFS, Sonny Paz, Wildlife Biologist, and Sally Bankson, Information Specialist, at the Summit. The pond was beautiful as it reflected the Gold Creek Basin, Kendall Peak, and Rampart Ridge. The resident nesting osprey flew over the lake adding more beauty. A great morning to be in the hills. Only one remaining patch of this winter’s snow remained as the ten participants circled the lake. After leaving the lake, Chris Caviezel took us on a tour of his yard at Hyak with his many hummingbird feeders. In the weeks prior he was supplying as much as 265 ounces of nectar per day to mostly Rufous Hummingbirds. Chris also showed us the John Wayne Trail in the area. Leaving Hyak, we traveled to Lake Easton State Park for lunch where there were many people and few birds. In Cle Elum we checked the NP (Northern Pacific) Ponds, and while scanning for birds we were invited by the summer hosts to a tour of the Yakama Nation’s Cle Elum Fish Hatchery. Lots of information and a great addition to the Salmon recovery program. Total bird species for this varied educational day was twenty-five.

After four June outings, there was only one trip in July, the First Saturday BirdWalk. Temperature in the low 70’s with overcast made the walk comfortable, and eleven people saw 4 mammals species and 35 bird species! Mammals included a cottontail rabbit on the golf course, a marmot who climbed at least fifteen feet into a tree (we did not know they climbed trees), a deer, and a busy muskrat who kept slipping in and out of the bank vegetation. The more unusual birds seen were three types of swallows (the Rough-winged, the Bank and the Barn), Brown Creeper, House Wren, Great Horned Owl, and the Spotted Sandpiper. Join us on August 2nd for the next exciting First Saturday BirdWalk!

J & G Baldi

Another Field Trip report on Page 6!
The Singing Life of Birds, the Art and Science of Listening to Birdsong

By Donald Kroodsma, Professor Emeritus, University of Massachusetts; Visiting Fellow at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Pub. 2005

Donald Kroodsma has studied the vocalizations of birds for over thirty years and has discovered some amazing things. He’s recognized by The American Ornithologist’s Union as “the reigning authority on the biology of avian vocal behavior.” His landmark 2005 book includes a fascinating CD of various bird songs, many of which are within the same species but cataloged as to differing function or intent. Of particular interest are the determinations of how various species acquire specific songs, and how, given different settings and situations during their learning period, the same species pick up significantly different song patterns. The CD makes this book’s content particularly relevant as we hear, for example, the songs of a wood thrush using both of its voice boxes to create unique harmonies. Chapter headings include: How Songs Develop, How and Why Songs Vary from Place to Place; Extremes of Male Song, The Hour Before Dawn, and She Also Sings.

Some intriguing details: there’s clear vocal evidence that there are not one but two species of marsh and winter wrens. Dr. Kroodsma catalogs over 2400 distinctly different songs from the Brown Thrasher. More fascinating than that spectacular bit of info is that the thrasher he recorded created 1800 of these distinct vocalizations in one two-hour recording session, with evidence that perhaps this species rarely repeats itself and may, in fact, have a repertoire of over 3500 songs, possibly infinite! He then offers valid and supportable speculation on just why such variation occurs. Is it to attract a female (why else do we males sing out?). The section on the hermit thrush boggles the mind: repetition patterns that are at once complex, highly colored and intense, yet repeated with specific precursor songs. Another thrush located a few hundred yards away provides distinct variations. Programmed territoriality? Dr. Kroodsma’s very creative and thorough analyses of song and component repetitions borders on fantastic, and will amaze those who perhaps had not ever pondered just what these birds are doing, their intent in such patterns and both ingrained and learned behaviors.

Accompanying sonograph depictions within the text provide a stunning graphic representation of what you’ll be listening to on the CD. In my research past, we used what now appears to me to be a very primitive stylus and drum sonograph to record some aggressive mammal sounds. The representations Dr. Kroodsma provides obviously were created in the “digital age”, providing detail and cross-reference that simply wasn't available in my “time”. Science, and its revelations, continue to amaze! The book's graphics are well presented and understandable, and his writing is similarly easy, often humorous and logical, but also scientifically valid and defensible.

The good doctor sums up his wonderings: “Can I know why I and others like me are so affected by the music of nature?” and “I think that within each of us resides an innate love of nature, and especially birdsongs, perhaps... because our ancestors emerged from their primate origins to the accompaniment of... birdsongs.” He also concludes what many of us who have spent time studying natural phenomena have also realized: that our animal co-inhabitants truly can and do enjoy life, and want to sing about it!


Don Wooldridge

Editor's Note: My brother gave me this book for my birthday in April. Don’s review has inspired me to actually begin reading it!!! You can order this book at Jerrolls’ bookstore and have it in a few days with no shipping charges. Support our local businesses!
A famous migrant, *Buteo swainsonii* inhabits our shrub steppe and grasslands in summer, and nests in Kittitas Valley. This year a pair is raising a nest along Old Vantage highway. The light morph male and a dark morph female can be seen hanging out together on a favorite perch (photo).

Soaring, Swainson’s has a distinctive wing pattern: a light-colored leading edge and dark trailing edge — a contrast to the “framed-in-black” wing pattern of the Redtail. The dark morph is coffee-colored where the light morph is white. A frontal view shows the rounded brown to rusty bib and white highlights around the bill: remember those “Make mine milk” billboards? (thanks to Deb Essman for that image!)

These hawks migrate from North America to the Argentina grasslands — for an endless summer that requires a 10,000 km journey twice yearly. Huge numbers can be seen in the fall migration through eastern Mexico and Central America. When not breeding, the hawks eat insects: grasshoppers and dragonflies.

Swainson’s hawks have adapted to living in farm country, where they forage aerially for prey — ground squirrels are preferred in Eastern Washington. In farmland habitats they are vulnerable to agricultural changes and conditions: pesticides caused serious mortality in the 1990’s in South America. Urban development is restricting habitat, as in California, and some desert and prairie populations have declined because of rodent and insect control or farmland conversion.

**William Swainson**

By July, upper county woods are haunted with the “taking-off-flying-saucer” song of the **Swainson’s thrush**, and if we are fortunate, a **Swainson’s hawk** is raising chicks in a large stick nest in one of our KValley farmland trees. Together with a third North American bird, the **Swainson’s warbler** of southeastern marshlands, these species honor William Swainson, an English naturalist of the early Victorian era, a friend (and critic) of Audubon, and a pioneer scientific illustrator (1789-1855). After early positions as a customs officer and an army assignment in the Mediterranean, he retired on half-pay to pursue natural history, beginning with a trip to Brazil at age 26. Returning with a huge collection of insects, shells and bird skins, he joined scientific societies and embarked on a prolific bibliography of publications in zoology and botany. Many were illustrated using lithography, the B&W prints colored by hand in their final form. Swainson’s North American collection came from travelers William Bullock and his son who visited newly independent Mexico to explore and collect. Swainson named the Bullock’s oriole after its finders in 1827. Nine or more species, including an African sparrow, a South American flycatcher and a toucan honor Swainson’s name, and the Swainson’s warbler was conferred by Audubon himself.

**THANKS TO CRICKET!**

For the past few years, Kittitas Audubon’s editor for the *Hooter* has been Cricket Webb. She has invested many, many hours of time, in addition to having to produce each and every month. We have enjoyed her Bird of the Month, her creative humor, and the special articles found in various media outlets. We will miss you, Cricket, and can only offer you the biggest of “THANK YOU’S”!!!

….keep us supplied with your great bird photos!

Not only can Cricket put together a great *Hooter*, but she can tear apart an old fence. Here she is on a mission to clear away barriers on the trail to Umptanum Falls in May of 2005
Celebrate Urban Birds, cont. from front page

dening, cultural activities and citizen-science. For the citizen-science part of the project, participants watch city birds for 10 minutes, check off 15 target species of birds, and send the information through the mail or the Internet to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Once enough data are gathered, scientists hope to learn more about how birds survive in cities and how they use urban green spaces such as parks, rooftop gardens, and even potted plants on balconies for food, resting sites, and shelter.

Individuals can participate on their own or through public events organized by local groups. Celebrate Urban Birds has partnered with more than 2,000 organizations to hold special "birdy" events featuring the arts, science, gardening, or other ways to draw people into bird study and observation. While supplies last, everyone who signs up will receive a Celebrate Urban Birds kit in English and Spanish with two colorful urban birds posters, educational materials about birds and urban greening, a data form, and a packet of sunflower seeds to plant in pots and gardens. More than 60,000 free kits have been distributed.

Learn more about Celebrate Urban Birds and sign up at www.CelebrateUrbanBirds.org

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a membership institution dedicated to interpreting and conserving the earth’s biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds.

Visit the Lab’s web site at http://www.birds.cornell.edu

(Thanks to Cricket Webb for this article)

THE BIRTH OF A HUMMINGBIRD!

This is truly amazing. Be sure to click on NEXT PAGE at the bottom of each page; there are 5 pages in all. A lady found a hummingbird nest and got pictures all the way from the egg to leaving the nest. It took 24 days from birth to flight. Because you’ll probably never in your lifetime see this again, enjoy; and please share.

Open this link:
http://community-2.webtv.net/Velpics/HUM/

Photo by Chris Caviezel

Thanks to Marte Fallshore for sending this to me, so I could share it with you all.

From the new editor’s desk:

My hope is for this to be a “community” project, with members contributing articles and field reports, personal experiences and sightings, book reviews, news items of interest. I will welcome any suggestions, corrections, comments about the format and/or content of the coming issues of the Hooter. I’ve enjoyed getting this first issue ready and look forward to your submissions!

Jan Demorest

NEXT MEETING (in September)

Birds of Costa Rica

DATE    THURSDAY  September 18, 2008    TIME  7:00 PM
PLACE   ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL ~ ROOM 232

Cricket Webb will present a program on her spring 2008 travels to Costa Rica. Details in the September Hooter! Mark your calendars. All Audubon meetings and field trips are open to the public, so feel free to come and meet us with us. Stay after the meeting for juice, treats and conversation.
Klickitat County, May 18

Eight Kittitas Auduboners ventured to the sunny south to spend a pair of days finding birds in Klickitat’s unique habitats. Perhaps it is the Columbia Gorge that allows a bit of Garrey Oak and some unique grasslands to slip through the mountains into our east-side sea of sage-steppe.

We met our overnight hosts Don and Judy Thomas in Goldendale, forming a party of ten en route to Rock Creek, an oak-cottonwood corridor cutting the Bickleton plateau. Airborne insects ensured a look at Rough-winged swallows, Western kingbirds and a target bird, the Ash-throated flycatcher; vocal Cassin’s vireos and Lazuli buntings entertained us in the trees. Wild turkeys crossed the road, and the TV’s were looking for them. A Canyon wren gave us a good look and Lazuli buntings and Western tanagers added color and song.

We then moved west out of farm country onto the grassy landscape of the Columbia Hills, part of which is preserved as a DNR Natural Area containing a vintage ranch, with oak groves, grassy expanses and rocky ridges, a beautifully green but warmish (90’s) experience this year. The grasslands contained Horned larks, Lark sparrows, and blackbirds; wetter and brushier spots hid a heron and some California quail. Among the oaks we found Western wood pewees and the chatter of orioles.

Sunday’s outings departed from last year’s Klickitat Canyon itinerary to focus on the Trout Lake wetlands and the marshes of Conboy NWR. A morning arrival at Trout Lake provided several warblers close-by, including Yellow, Nashville and Common Yellowthroat, and lakeside views of a Barrow’s goldeneye, waxwings on a favorite snag, and vultures hanging out to dry. Commotion in the firs at our backs gave brief looks at our first woodpecker, a Pileated. There were lots of warbler music, calling wood pewees, black-headed grosbeaks, song sparrows and a clucking Wilson’s snipe for aspiring ear-birders. The marsh-forest border at Conboy showed us three warblers, tanagers, Chipping sparrows, and a brilliant look at a Red-breasted Sapsucker in bright sunlight.

In the afternoon, Susan VanLeuven, manager of the Klickitat Natural Area for the WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife, joined us along the Klickitat River amid riverside oaks echoing with Lazuli bunting and Black-headed grosbeak calls. Susan led us to a place we’d love to go back to: the old Natural Area headquarters site, perched on a bench part way down the canyon, in meadows bordered by oak and pine woods. On parking the vehicles, a “ka-beer” call led to a second Ash-throated flycatcher. Other calling birds stayed hidden but a sunning rattlesnake definitely caught our attention!

Don and Judy’s yard provided Western bluebirds and swallows at the nest boxes, and three species of finches and pine siskins at the feeders, but no White-headed woodpecker this trip, though Judy saw them several times in the next few days. Our dividend for the weekend was more than 60 species and many colorful and tuneful bird-song memories.

BIRDKITT: Bird sighting postings in Kittitas County now on the Internet!

Kittitas Audubon now has a listserv for all birders interested in finding birds in Kittitas County. Called BirdKitt, it can be found at groups.yahoo.com/group/birdkitt. Please read the preamble and follow the guidelines for posting.

What is a listserv? Listserv (as defined by /www.teach-nology.com/glossary/terms/l/): Computer program that automatically distributes an e-mail message to individuals who are part of a list; messages can usually only be sent or received by members of the list. Non-members can read postings.

How do I subscribe/unsubscribe, etc.? Easiest way to subscribe: send an email from the account where you want to receive the BirdKitt emails to birdkitt - subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Reply/Send to the first email you receive from yahoogroups. To unsubscribe: send email to birdkitt- unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Thanks to Beth Rogers and Cricket Webb for getting this up and running! This is a great resource for finding places to look for birds in the valley.
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$15.00 American Goldfinch $100.00 Great Blue Heron

$50.00 Red-tailed Hawk Other - Donations in any amount are appreciated!

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