

EARTHCARE

FALL 2019

NORTHWEST



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THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF SEATTLE AUDUBON SOCIETY

LETTER FROM THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings Seattle Audubon members,

As summer in Seattle ends and we head into fall, I hope you will enjoy this special, urban-conservation edition of our quarterly newsletter, *EarthCare Northwest*. Seattle Audubon's recent turn toward urban conservation came about as a result of our current strategic plan, *Seattle Audubon 20/20: Sharpening our focus*. Still, many members of our community often ask, "Why urban conservation? Why not simply conservation?" Great questions!

The increasing urbanization of the United States, and in fact the world, is well documented. As of the 2010 census, 84% of Washingtonians lived in urban areas and that number is expected to jump again in 2020. This means that urbanites will be the key to a healthy future for birds. It's why we're so excited to bring you an entire issue focused on the topic of urban conservation.

Within these pages you'll hear from Seattle Audubon's Urban Conservation Manager, Joshua Morris, about the many unique challenges that birds face in a city landscape. From the obstacles created by buildings and the risk of window strikes, to the staggering number of birds killed by free-roaming cats every year—cities can be pretty unfriendly places for our feathered friends.



Thankfully, our local birds have you, our members, as their champions. As you read this issue, you'll gain a deeper appreciation for the role that we all have to play in building a strong local coalition committed to improving the habitat we share with our winged neighbors, starting with a call to our elected officials to strengthen Seattle's tree protection ordinance.

In other news, we've just wrapped up another successful summer of Nature Camp, now in its 37th season in Northeast Seattle and 2nd in West Seattle. Turning the corner into fall, I hope that many of you will join us for the community science projects that are recruiting this time of year, like the Puget Sound Seabird Survey. Email science@seattleaudubon.org for more information or to sign up!

On behalf of all the city birds and even the birds who are just passing through, thank you. None of this work would be possible without your support.

For birds and nature,

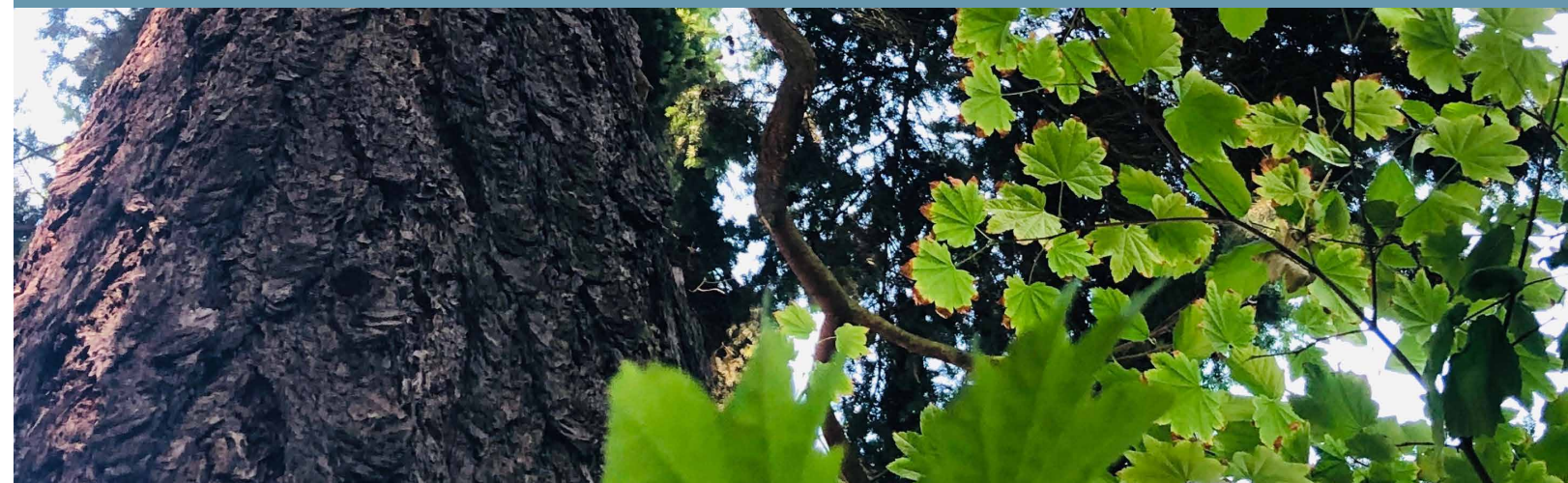
Claire Catania
Interim Executive Director/Development Director



URBAN FOREST IN DECLINE

Working with the City to Strengthen Seattle's Tree Protection Ordinance

By Joshua Morris, Urban Conservation Manager



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My friend Michelle loves beautiful things: crushed velvet curtains, tropical leaf wallpaper, her National Audubon Society singing bird clock with no numbers on the face but images of birds instead. The clock isn't broken, she tells me, just confused. At Belted Kingfisher o'clock, the American Robin sings. Her favorite color is 'the backlit light green of sunlight through leaves.'

This year, she's seeing less of it.

Nearly half the trees outside Michelle's window were removed to make way for a new low-rise apartment building. This is a familiar story in Seattle. Our city is booming, and we are struggling to deal with a housing affordability and homelessness crisis.

Zoning and accessory dwelling unit (ADU) laws have changed in response. To some extent, tree loss may be inevitable as the city becomes denser and we work to include more neighbors in more parts of the city.

But we don't have to lose so many trees. It is easier and cheaper for developers to scrape lots bare and landscape afterward than it is to create site-specific designs that incorporate and respect existing trees. We should expect them to consider the trees. And we should be tracking the trees we're losing, their kind, and their caliber. Currently there is no way to know if developers are replacing trees as required by law, and if they are, if anyone is ensuring they stay alive.

continued on page 6



MALE RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD, LIKELY VICTIM OF A WINDOW STRIKE.

BIRDS IN A HUMAN WORLD

Understanding Urban Hazards

By Joshua Morris, Urban Conservation Manager

Cities are relatively new in the history of the world. Urban areas expose birds to novel pressures that did not previously exist in their evolutionary histories. Seattle Audubon's Urban Conservation Program is raising awareness of these threats and working with partners to mitigate their impacts.

WINDOW STRIKES

Has this ever happened to you? You're sitting in your home or office, perhaps reading your copy of EarthCare Northwest, when suddenly: THUD! A bird hits the window and it's time for an impromptu feathered funeral.

If so, you're not alone. This is a common occurrence that can happen anywhere. Birds did not evolve with transparent or reflective surfaces in their environments and cannot see them. And to be fair, humans have the same problem. Just Google "people walking into glass" the next time you're in need of a laugh.

Birds of all stripes are affected, from Anna's Hummingbirds to Peregrine Falcons. And the impact, forgive the pun, is staggering. A 2014 study estimated that 600 million birds meet their end on a pane of glass each year in the U.S. This makes windows the

second greatest human-related impact that directly kills birds. (We'll get to the first in just a moment.) Nearly half of those deaths occur at single-family residences.

Luckily, there is a simple solution to make our glass more bird-friendly. The trick is to add "visual noise" to the outside surface of our windows. Products like American Bird Conservancy's BirdTape or Feather Friendly's bird collision deterrent window films break up window reflections and provide the visual cues birds need to avoid disaster. When applying these products, make sure there are no gaps exceeding 2 inches between the visual elements. This will help keep even the smallest hummingbirds safe.

Please note that single or small groups of stickers, like hawk or leaf silhouettes, do not work, unless you apply so many of them that there are no gaps larger than 2 inches between them. Yes, this will probably obscure your view, but your morning coffee will no longer be disrupted by that telltale THUD.

CATS

I love cats. Seattle Audubon loves cats. Our Interim Executive Director is fond of sharing photos of her

own indoor cat, Professor Phinnaeus, around the office. My partner, Matt, and I are thinking about enrolling in Seattle's foster cat program. When we do, we'll be keeping the fluffball inside.

That's because cats top the charts when it comes to contributing to the decline of Earth's biodiversity. They are on the IUCN's list of top 100 invasive species. They've been linked to the extinction of 40 bird species, 21 mammal species, and two reptile species around the world. One 2013 study, published in the journal *Nature Communications*, estimated that domestic cats kill around 2.4 billion birds each year in the U.S. alone.

2.4 billion. That's not a number that we can easily wrap our heads around. If all outdoor, free-roaming cats in the U.S. focused on hunting a single species at a time, it would take them just a month to work through all American Robins in the country. Twenty-two days later Red-winged Blackbirds would be gone. Thirteen days is all they'd need before we never heard a Western Meadowlark again, and after four days we'd have said goodbye to the last American Goldfinch. By the end of the year, 33 species would be lost and cats would still be on the prowl.

This is a HUGE problem, but it is also one with a relatively simple solution. If you are a cat guardian, the most important thing you can do for birds and wildlife, and for the health of your kitty, is to keep the cat inside. For those looking to balance safety with access to the outdoors, leash training your cat is a noble pursuit, as is the construction of an outdoor enclosure or "catio" for your feline friend. Indoor cats are conservationists!

RODENTICIDE

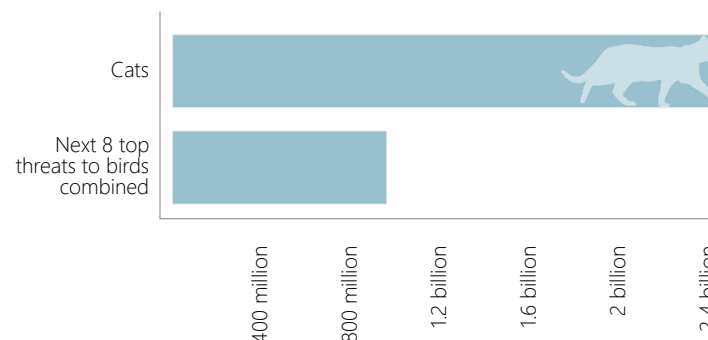
Seattle is the 14th rattiest city in the U.S., according to Orkin Pest Control's latest analysis. This comports with my personal experience. I live in Capitol Hill, and whenever I take a moonlit stroll through Cal Anderson Park, I am escorted by a troop of rodents. I like animals, but sometimes I'd prefer to walk alone.

I support efforts to control rodent populations, but the widespread use of anticoagulant (blood-thinning) rat poisons is a serious threat to birds. The poisons cause internal bleeding and it may take several days for a poisoned rodent to die. Meanwhile, the sickened animals make easy meals. Raptors that consume too many poisoned rodents may themselves become poisoned and die. This kind of secondary wildlife poisoning in raptors seems to be common in North America, but no studies have been done in the Puget Sound area. Our friends at the Urban Raptor Conservancy are working to fill that knowledge gap by sampling dead raptor liver tissue for these poisons. These data will be critical for understanding the scale of the problem in our region and for effective advocacy against anticoagulant rodenticide use. Please check out their website at urbanraptorconservancy.org for more information and to learn about alternatives to anticoagulant rodenticides. ●

Joshua Morris is Seattle Audubon's Urban Conservation Manager. He coordinates Seattle's Urban Bird Treaty City Coalition, is a member of the Capitol Hill EcoDistrict Steering Committee, and serves on Seattle's Urban Forestry Commission. He's been a project scientist, a high-school chemistry teacher, a legal assistant, and, for one curious month, a chocolate vendor on Monterey's Cannery Row. He holds a master's degree in International Environmental Policy and is a certified naturalist.

INDOOR CATS ARE CONSERVATIONISTS

Outdoor, free-roaming cats are estimated to kill 2.4 billion birds in the U.S. each year.



This is more than double the damage done by the next 8 leading human-related causes of bird mortality combined, including window collisions, vehicle strikes, electrocution on power lines, and others.

The consequence of our development boom, weak tree protections, and other factors is declining tree canopy cover. Using historical and current aerial images of Seattle, Seattle Audubon's Urban Conservation Program categorized 500 randomly selected locations as either "Tree," "Lawn/Shrub," "Development," or "Water." We found a 2% decline in tree canopy cover from 2009 to 2019 and corresponding 2% increase in development. That's a transformation of 1,200 acres of tree cover—greater than twice the area of Discovery Park—into concrete and steel.

When we lose a tree, we don't just lose a tree. We lose shade under bus stops on hot days. We lose the cleaner air trees provide and benefits to those with respiratory illness. We lose cooling and heating efficiencies in homes and offices that reduce energy use. We end up with more polluted stormwater runoff that harms already endangered salmon and orca populations. We lose a connection to place. We lose birds.

Some species, like Pileated Woodpeckers, Brown Creepers, and Varied Thrushes, aren't observed in areas of low canopy cover. Seattle Audubon's own Neighborhood Bird Project data shows this. Approximately 80% of Seward and Carkeek Parks are covered by tree canopy. Our volunteers frequently encounter forest-dependent birds there. But at Genesee or Magnuson, where the canopy cover is approximately 20%, we hardly ever see them, if at all. As neighborhoods lose tree canopy cover, charismatic forest species so characteristic of the Pacific Northwest may become scarce and human-associated species

such as American Crows, House Sparrows, and Rock Pigeons may move in.

Seattle's trees support Seattle's birds. That's why Seattle Audubon is working with the Urban Forestry Commission and Seattle City Council to update our tree protection ordinance. Of the 215 bird species our volunteers have documented, over half of them rely on trees. A tree ordinance update will not be a panacea that re-leaves bare lots, but it could help slow tree loss and incentivize developers to design with trees in mind.

This effort has broad support from numerous environmental and social organizations, Seattle City Councilmembers and candidates, and thousands of individuals. We are waiting, however, for meaningful support from the mayor's office. A contingent from the Urban Forestry Commission met with Deputy Mayor David Mosely on July 30th. He seemed warm to our efforts and even asked his staff to outline next steps and prepare a timeline with a goal of introducing an updated ordinance to council this fall. Surprisingly, he recently called to tell us that the update wasn't doable this year and gave no indication that he'd like to see our efforts continue. The most important thing we can do for our urban forest is to maintain the trees we have now.

We all have a role to play in advocating for the trees that support our birds. Take a moment to appreciate what we often take for granted. Plant yourself under your favorite tree and tilt your chin up. 'Sunlight through leaves' just might be your favorite color, too. ●

SEATTLE AUDUBON NEEDS YOUR VOICE!

We're working to pass an effective tree protection ordinance. Let's encourage our city representatives to move quickly on this. **Write to the mayor and city council.** Tell them what trees mean to you and why you want stronger tree protection this year.

Visit our website for suggested language tinyurl.com/SeattleTrees



NORTHERN FLICKER © MICK THOMPSON

BIRDING BY BUS

9 Easy Options for Urban Exploration

By Jennifer Lang

Audubon's Birds & Climate Change report found 189 bird species in Washington State are projected to lose 50% or more of their habitat by 2080, as a result of climate change. This existential threat should be on the forefront of every birder's mind and we should strive to reduce our impact as we pursue our passion. Next time you go birding, consider the bus! Many Seattle area hotspots are easily reachable via public transportation.

1 SHOREVIEW PARK

Situated on a steep hillside, Shoreview Park offers trails that wind through tall trees, small creeks, and wildflower fields, and many opportunities to explore the birds that occupy these habitats. *Bus routes: 5, 304*

2 CARKEEK PARK

Carkeek Park is 220 acres of lush forest, meadows, wetlands, creeks, and beach and serves as home to over 100 bird species. *Bus routes: 40, 28, D Line*

3 MAGNUSON PARK

Here you'll find walking trails along the shores of Lake Washington, around wetlands, grassy fields, and evergreen and deciduous trees and brush. The proximity to fresh water and variety of habitats provides opportunities to see over 185 species of birds. *Bus routes: 71, 62, 75*

4 UNION BAY NATURAL AREA

The "Montlake Fill" is one of the premier birding sites in Seattle. Diverse habitats attract about 200 resident and migratory bird species throughout the year. *Bus routes: 65, 75*

5 DISCOVERY PARK

Discovery Park is the largest park in the city of Seattle and contains varied habitats that make it an ideal place to view over 270 species of birds, just three miles north of downtown Seattle. *Bus routes: 19, 24, 33*

6 LUTHER BURBANK PARK

Located on the northeast end of Mercer Island, Luther Burbank Park encompasses 77 acres and has been mostly left undeveloped to foster a variety of wildlife, including 135 species of birds, 50 species of waterfowl, raccoons, beaver, muskrats, tree frogs, and rabbits. *Bus routes: 550, 554, 216, 204, 894*

7 ALKI BEACH

This long beach strip offers spectacular views of the Olympic Mountains, shorebirds, and marine birds that migrate into Puget Sound. *Bus routes: 56, 57, 37*

8 SEWARD PARK

With a variety of habitats including old-growth forest, open woodlands, and shorelines, over 100 bird species call Seward Park home, including Anna's Hummingbirds, Barred Owls, Pileated Woodpeckers, and Bald Eagles. *Bus routes: 50*

9 LINCOLN PARK

Lincoln Park's 135 acres include a variety of habitats for birds and other wildlife. Switchbacks featuring mixed deciduous and conifer forests in the north, and gentle trails to the south connect a mile of seawalls and rocky beaches to a bluff of grassy forests and meadows. *Bus routes: 116, C line*



● Birding by Bus Hotspot

— Metro Transit Bus Routes



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THE NATURE SHOP

Now Open Sundays

WE'RE EXPERIMENTING WITH SUNDAY HOURS

Effective through December 2019, The Nature Shop will be open Sundays from 12 to 4 p.m. Results from this trial run will determine if we continue Sunday hours in 2020, so invite your friends and visit!



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