

EARTHCARE

NORTHWEST

SUMMER 2022



GREAT BLUE HERON | SHARON WADA

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AUDUBON



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LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Seattle Audubon Members,

Most of the birding I enjoy is within the Seattle metro area, so it's easy for me to be an advocate for birds in the city. Currently, I'm invested in a pair of Spotted Towhees that I suspect are nesting in my backyard. I think many of you are the same way. Nature in the city is valuable to me personally, but it's especially important to the conservation movement as a whole.

Some people have the privilege to travel and experience exotic birds in faraway places, with memories of wilderness and rich biodiversity that instill a conservation ethic when they return home. With our focus now keenly on urban conservation, those of us at Seattle Audubon are asking ourselves, "What about everybody else?" What experiences and memories can the average city-dweller call upon to inspire conservation action? Cities are where a majority of people now live and are projected to live into the future. Cities also pose unique challenges for wildlife.



You've heard the phrase "out of sight, out of mind." Urban birds offer a rare opportunity to keep conservation front and center for everyone. Urban birds are all around us, their sights and songs a daily reminder to take action on their behalf. Not only are our urban habitats critical waypoints for migratory birds, for many birds, cities are their home and ultimate destination. In the pages of this issue of EarthCare Northwest you'll read more about the many ways Seattle Audubon staff and volunteers are building a more inclusive urban coalition for bird conservation through hyper-local programming. I might also suggest that this issue would make an excellent companion for a brief rest on a city park bench in the sunshine.

For city birds and nature,

Claire Catania
Executive Director

OUR MISSION & VISION

Seattle Audubon advocates and organizes for cities where people and birds thrive. We envision our local cities integrating and valuing nature, minimizing threats to birds, and protecting habitat.

OUR TEAM

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Special thanks to Jennifer McKeirnan and Susan Marks, who recently ended their service on our board.

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HOME AMONG THE TREES

When the Ellenbert Apartments' paint is fresh, it is white with blue trim. The paint was not fresh when I lived there. Neither were the hardwood floors. One spot in front of the bathroom was worn so smooth from 100 years of marching feet, it was as slippery as ice.

The floorboards were almost certainly split from the giant trees that once covered Western Washington. Sadly, what remains of Seattle's old-growth forests are mostly in the floors and walls of old homes. While it's not my favorite way to experience ancient trees, I appreciated the connection the floor created between the home I lived in and the land I lived on.

Home and land are on my mind a lot lately. More and more folks are putting down roots in Seattle, but the city is tightly space constrained. A 2021 analysis found housing supply is not keeping up with demand, that housing costs are increasing faster than incomes, and that if current trends continue, Seattle will become increasingly exclusive to higher-income households.

I feel that personally. Increasing housing costs could quickly make Seattle unaffordable to my partner and me; both of us work for nonprofits. People with lower incomes should also be able to call Seattle home. We need more housing for all types of earners.

At the same time, I hold the loss of Seattle's original forest in my mind. As the city grows, it may come once again at a cost to our trees. I believe we can become both denser and greener, but it won't happen by chance. We need a plan.

In recent months, the city has demonstrated a willingness to work on this issue. The Seattle City Council passed a bill to reduce illegal tree removal. The Department of Construction and Inspections released a draft update to the tree code. And the Office of Sustainability and Environment recognizes the important role our urban forest plays in climate change resilience.

We're also having important conversations with housing affordability groups like Share the Cities and Community Roots Housing. We're learning how flexibility in building design standards might help preserve more trees during development, and we're hearing creative ideas to enhance canopy cover.

There's a lot of work ahead to meld city policies and community ideas into a holistic plan to grow our urban

forest and affordably house more people. We see an opportunity through the 2024 Seattle Comprehensive Plan update. It's a chance to be in conversation with developers, urban planners, and other stakeholders to find creative solutions to the multiple challenges we face.

The hardwood floors in my new apartment are actually plastic, but there's an old maple tree outside my window. Finches sing from inside its canopy. Living trees and the birds they attract provide a more immediate connection to home and place than old floors can, anyway. Fostering those connections is core to Seattle Audubon's mission. We're committed to building a future with more homes, more trees, and stronger connections between Seattleites and the land upon which we live.



By Joshua Morris
Urban Conservation Manager



HOUSE FINCH | WEAVER/CANVA

DID YOU KNOW?

The Great Blue Heron is the official bird of the City of Seattle. The abundance of waterways in the Puget Sound region, make for perfect fishing and nesting habitat year-round. Two heronries (large concentrations of heron nests) can be found locally at the Ballard Locks and at Lake Sammamish State Park.

There are countless places to enjoy birds. Seattle Audubon members offer their suggestions for some lesser-known locations in the area that you might consider for your next local birding adventure.

1. Pier 62 Waterfront Park is a 20-acre downtown park with views of Elliott Bay and the urban skyline

I have so many birds right downtown, where I live, whose behaviors I enjoy getting to know. Flickers, Bushtits, House Sparrows, Cooper's Hawks, hummingbirds, starlings, gulls, and Bald Eagles soar high above. Murders of crows fly overhead every evening, heading northwest. We live in a great place to be in the moment with our feathered neighbors just outside the door. —*Clair Ervin*



2. Constellation Park in West Seattle is made for tide pool enthusiasts

At low tide, shorebirds like Black Turnstones and Sanderlings can be seen foraging on the intertidal vegetation. Sea ducks such as Common Goldeneye, Harlequin Ducks, Bufflehead, and Surf Scoters forage on small fish and vegetation. In winter, a variety of mergansers, grebes, and loons dive for fish. As an added bonus you may see a California sea lion, Harbor seal or even a pod of Orcas. —*Deb Heiden*



3. Herring's House Park & h̄apʌpʌ Village Park are important archaeological, cultural, and ecological sites along the Duwamish River

The parks were built in 1999 as a part of the Super Fund cleanup effort, designed as habitat for juvenile Chinook salmon with an intertidal estuary. This unique habitat attracts many migratory species as they move up the coast including tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, and thrushes. On any given day one might find wrens, kinglets, sparrows, and jays, alongside ducks, gulls, and raptors. —*Deb Heiden*



4. The Cedar River Trail in Renton follows the river between Maple Valley and Lake Washington

For a long time, the Cedar River Trail and Park continue to be favorite locations of mine for a variety of gulls, waterfowl, passerines, the occasional Green Heron, terns, shorebirds, owls, hawks, Bald Eagles, and the Boeing Plant's resident Peregrine Falcons. —*Etta Cosy*



The morning sun just peeked out of the clouds as a group gathered together at Union Bay Natural Area. On April 2, I helped co-lead an "Intro to Birding" event for Outdoor Asian, a local organization whose goal is to include people who identify as Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) in outdoor experiences. With binoculars and field guides on loan from Seattle Audubon, the bird curious attendees learned how to identify birds by sight and sound. We even learned some tips on nature photography from Glenn Nelson, Community Director at Seattle Audubon.



Traveling through the various looped trails at Union Bay Natural Area that day, each person learned how to identify the birds they observed and shared their discoveries with each other. We had teenagers up to seniors in our group, representing a diversity of places, heritages, and lived experiences. Although the group would normally not interact with each other in our daily lives, it was very special knowing that birding brought us all together for this one day. The following weekend, I was proud to see some of these same people out birding with new friends.

We in environmental education often prescribe more funding or more professional training for conservation and advocacy initiatives. But what about the masses of people who don't attend our events or hear our calls for action? It starts with "calling people in." We all have the power to create spaces and opportunities for others to feel comfortable enough to take chances and act on those micro-moments of bravery.

We all know the feeling of being too scared to raise our hand in class, or the sinking feeling when something embarrassing happens to us in front of others. "Shrink-wrapping" our future selves from risk-taking has an outsized effect on our love of birding and, really, all of our life choices. I was surprised to hear comments from attendees about their feeling safe during the outing. Then I realized that we were a group of AAPI-appearing individuals at a time in U.S. history where violence against our community is at an all-time high. This had a profound impact on their willingness to try a new activity in an unknown space.

The Great Wall wasn't built in a day and neither are environmental advocates. Data shows that those most affected by a changing climate are those most systematically marginalized within our society. When we offer our resources—time, knowledge, care—to others, we are doing our part to inspire the next generation of advocates and community leaders. When we are all involved in future solutions for a changing climate, we will all benefit.

So the next time you are out birding and observe some curious passersby, remind yourself that a bit of your knowledge and time might spark a lifelong birder in them.



By *Tammy VuPham*
Seattle Audubon NextGen Council and Equity & Justice Committee Member

"I was most struck by how vast the range of species was in such an urban space. Getting so close to the Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagles, cormorants, turtles, river otters, hummingbirds, and Red-winged Blackbirds was so magical. It was also so special to learn from folks in my community and the space felt so safe to ask any questions I had. I actually went to Kubota Gardens when I got home Saturday evening and used my Merlin app to identify some hummingbirds and Black-capped Chickadees."

—*Arunika Bhatia*



"Going out and birding with Outdoor Asian was such a wonderful experience. It felt really nice to be out there with other AAPI birders. I learned so many new things on the short hike and was really excited that we were able to spot a pair of rare White-fronted Geese hanging out by the water."

—*Chris Liu*



UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES GLAZING THE WAY

When we think about cities, one of the first things that comes to mind is buildings. We know many urban hazards exist for birds; one of the leading causes of bird mortality is building collisions. Seattle Audubon is working alongside our partners in the Seattle Bird Conservation Partnership to pass city-wide requirements and incentives to ensure that new construction and renovations will meet a clear set of bird-friendly building standards.

Two local university campuses have already made their own commitments toward bird-friendly building policies. Both the University of British Columbia (UBC) and the University of Washington (UW) have created plans and policies that give bird advocates a seat at the table when it comes to future campus development projects.



Judy Bowes, a local bird-building collision expert and UW PhD student in the College of Built Environments and leader of the UW Bird-Friendly Campus Group, answered a few of our questions about how the UW is taking birds into consideration with their policy development.

What is UW developing in terms of a policy?

Sparked by a community member who was concerned about collisions, in September 2021, the UW put together the UW Bird-Friendly Campus Group comprised of faculty, grounds staff, building coordinators, architects, and Seattle Audubon staff, to start the development of their own tri-campus policy. The policy will focus on preventing bird-building collisions, but also on light pollution reduction, habitat creation, and the change to organic pesticides. The UW Bothell campus already made the switch to organic herbicides and has seen an increase in wildlife diversity.

What buildings on the UW campuses are problematic?

Specific building features are more deadly than others so we are prioritizing treatment areas. Transparent walkways, of which there are three at UW Seattle that all show imprints of a bird strike on the glass, are the deadliest. Transparent

corners, where two walls of glass come together, are also a top concern. UW is joining Seattle University as the second university campus to have some of its buildings monitored by volunteers through the Seattle Audubon's collision monitoring program in order to gain valuable insight.

What are some of the challenges you have already faced as UW considers a campus-wide plan?

Reducing light pollution is important to prevent drawing migrating birds off course and in close proximity of lit glass surfaces, however, university campuses require a certain level of night lighting to maintain safety for their student bodies.

Because many window treatment options, like Feather Friendly vinyl dot patterns are new on the market, we have limited information on how long these treatments will last.

The combination of long-term sun and rain exposure that we have in Seattle could mean they last their expected 15-20 years, or not.

We also currently lack data on window collisions at a local level. When we develop a policy, it needs to protect the greatest number of birds possible. To do so, we need science-based solutions that reduce collisions for local and migrating bird species.

Why are university campuses some of the first to develop bird-friendly policies?

Universities value research. UBC was conducting their own on-campus research and an estimated 10,000 birds were dying annually, in part due to building design and the proximity to habitat on campus. This sparked their interest in a campus-wide bird-friendly buildings policy.

Private corporate campuses use a lot of glass in their building designs. Glass lets in natural light and beautiful views, which contribute to employee well-being. What is missing is the education piece for architects and designers of these corporate campuses learn how to effectively use glass treatments that allow for natural light, but are also bird-friendly.



\$42,250 FOR THE BIRDS!

Our gratitude to everyone who gave during the annual GiveBIG community event in May. Your generosity fuels our conservations programs, making our region healthier for birds and people!



GO BIRDING WITH SEATTLE AUDUBON

Birds and nature bring us together, so get outside and enjoy both!

NEIGHBORHOOD BIRD OUTINGS

These outings are free and open to all with no pre-registration required. Upcoming trips include Magnuson Park and Union Bay Natural Area. Group size may vary.

FIELD TRIPS

Current members receive priority registration for our monthly field trip lottery, which opens on the first of each month. These trips are free and group size is usually under 12 people.

Visit the Go Birding! portion of our website to learn more about dates, meeting locations, and accessibility of specific outings and trips.

Happy birding!





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MEMBER NEWS

MEMBER SURVEY

Help Seattle Audubon better understand how we can grow and foster a diverse community of bird advocates.



Please provide your feedback to our 2022 Member Survey by June 21.

ANNUAL MEMBER MEETING

Mark your calendar for the opportunity to gather again in person, meet members of our staff and board, and learn more about Seattle Audubon programs in action!

Thursday, June 16, 5:30pm – 7pm
Seattle Audubon Nature Shop

Learn more: seattleaudubon.org/get-involved/calendar



BARN SWALLOW | MICK THOMPSON