

RONIQ BARTANEN



What got you into birding?

Years ago, I shared an interest in learning about birds with a friend Woody Wheeler, who is also a local bird guide. He took a few of us to Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge on a beautiful sunny day in May of 2012. There were birds flying and singing everywhere, within minutes I was hooked! I decided then and there that I wanted to learn as much as I could about birds!

What can people expect from a bird outing with you?

That the environment will be inclusive, welcoming and safe. That we will go slow and look at everything. That we will hopefully have fun and be open to curiosity and learning. That all questions and all birds are great! That we will be adhering to the ABA's Code of Birding Ethics and that if we are negatively impacting birds in any way, we move on. Lastly, while I often track species via eBird, my goal isn't to check birds off and move on but it's more about creating a calm, connected, community and nature supported birding experience for everyone.

What values do you lead with?

My bird outings are inclusive of all ages, gender pronouns, sexual orientations, races, cultures, abilities, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. My hope is that participants feel safe, supported and welcomed always and if not, that they let me know so I can create a more positive experience for them.

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How did you acquire your knowledge? Are you self-taught, trained in a school, had a mentor?

I have a passion for learning! One of my favorite courses was a multi week course taught by The Mountaineers called “Introduction to the Natural World” which focuses on learning all about PNW flora and fauna with class time and instructor led field trips that help you identify what you have learned. In 2017 I took a 3-day course to become a Certified Interpretive Guide. I learned so much from this course about what it means to be inclusive and engaging as a guide while meeting people where they’re at. Over the years, I’ve also taken many online classes from different organizations as well as classes through BCS, particularly from my friend and mentor Connie Sidles. Not only does Connie hold a vast wealth of bird knowledge, but she also shares her unique and loving way of looking at nature, teaching the importance of valuing and respecting nature and people while birding.

What is your personal approach/mindset toward birding?

How can I be present with nature and the environment, how can I be most supportive, how can I avoid any negative impact and what can I learn.

Where do you personally see the intersectionality of birding and creating safe spaces for folks who have often been left out of the conversation before?

I consider myself an ally-in progress, which means I’m continually learning to be an ally. I strive to create a safe, welcoming and inclusive space for all. As a white, hetero, female, my experience in the world is from that frame and I have MUCH to learn from those who have been excluded in nature and the outdoor community. I’m hopeful for opportunities and continuing conversations that will foster knowledge about what we can do to support those historically excluded communities.



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Do you have an area of expertise or focus that you prefer?

I prefer to focus on a more mindful approach that creates a feeling of a deeper connection to birds and nature. Understanding that we are visitors to the homes of birds and other wildlife, learning to observe bird behavior and watch for clues, viewing how a bird uses its habitat and how our influence can help or hinder the natural course of things, happens more readily during quiet time in observation. Discussing healthy, simple and easily attainable actions such as incorporating native plants and reducing bird threats to support birds, is a big focus for me.

What was the best advice you got when starting out as a birder?

From Connie, "Look at every bird". I hear her words every time I'm birding.

What is your favorite ecosystem to bird in?

I love Riparian habitats! I find any landscapes that occur along the edges of rivers, streams, lakes, and other bodies of water fascinating. So much blending of life where the two meet!

Dare I ask, what your favorite bird is?!

Hard to pick a favorite. Spotted Towhees hold a special place in my heart as the bird that most captivated me in my beginning birding days, but if I could be any bird I would be a species of Dipper. To be able to beautifully vocalize, swim and fly, now that's the best of everything!

