

# EARTHCARE

SUMMER 2020

## NORTHWEST



WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW © MICK THOMPSON/EASTSIDE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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AUDUBON



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## LETTER FROM OUR URBAN CONSERVATION MANAGER

Dear Members,

It feels uncanny, sometimes, to step out of my apartment into a glorious spring day. It just doesn't match the unsunny portrait of the world that the headlines paint. Times are tough. The future is uncertain. And the incongruous soundtrack in my pandemic-stilled neighborhood is...a chorus of amorous birds. The junco's trill has never sounded stranger. Nor sweeter.

We open this issue of *Earthcare Northwest* by acknowledging that these are unprecedented times. A lot has changed for all of us in the past few months. Seattle Audubon staff are working from home. Our in-person field trips and events are on hiatus. The Nature Shop is closed. Nevertheless, we continue to serve our community, birds, and nature. We're offering online classes and lectures. You can still purchase bird guides and more from the Nature Shop's online store, and by the time you read this, we will have started curbside pick-up again. Committees are using Zoom to meet and make plans. It hasn't been easy, but we're proud of what we're doing and we're looking forward to the day we can resume more "normal" activities—but not until the science indicates that we can safely do so.

Scientific guidance has been a critical component of Seattle Audubon's COVID-19 response. It is also key to achieving our mission to protect birds and their habitats.



Without science to guide our conservation work, we'd be flying blind. Science has become an important social activity at Seattle Audubon, too, bringing together hundreds of people every year to support community-driven research.

This issue of *Earthcare Northwest* highlights the ways in which science builds community as well as advances our understanding of our local birds and the threats they face.

Seattle Audubon's community science projects wouldn't be possible without countless hours from our dedicated volunteers and ongoing support from members like you. We are so grateful for all you do to make Seattle Audubon a vibrant, fun, and effective organization. We hope you and your loved ones are well and we can't wait to see you again. Until that time, take advantage of the quiet streets to listen to the birds. As our community scientists know, they have a lot to tell us.

*Tweet tweet chirp,*

Joshua Morris  
Urban Conservation Manager

## A COMMUNITY OF SCIENTISTS



WILSON'S WARBLER BY GEORGE SCOTT  
AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS



BIRD SURVEY IN GOLDEN GARDENS

With its kick off in 1994, Seattle Audubon's Neighborhood Bird Project (NBP) began to establish itself in parks and communities across the city with the intent to facilitate neighborhood investment in wildlife and land-use issues. Curious and passionate community members come together once a month to conduct point-count bird surveys and gather data on the presence and number of bird species. First begun at Carkeek Park, volunteer-led surveys now take place in Golden Gardens, Discovery, Seward Park, Genesee Park, the Arboretum, Magnuson Park, Lake Forest Park, and Lincoln Park.

Some neighborhood teams, like the one in Golden Gardens, have taken the term "community science" to heart, fostering connections by going out for coffee and social time together after their surveys. Koji Yugawa, Cinny Burrell, and Jane Glass are all graduates of Seattle Audubon's Master Birder program, and all joined the Golden Gardens NBP team. They were each attracted to the idea of contributing to science and appreciating birds in a different way. The previous leaders at Golden Gardens took them under their wings and encouraged and supported them as they began to tune into the cycles and changes of the bird communities in the park.

"Koji initiated the coffee tradition. Caffe Fiori had just re-opened after closing due to a fire and he suggested it on the premise of inputting our data, then it became a tradition and a way to bond," says Cinny.

Jane attends nearly all the post-survey coffees. "It's been great getting to know everyone," she says. "A lot of people have some science in their backgrounds but there's still a big variety of people. I really recommend the tradition."

One of the initial challenges of the Neighborhood Bird Project was volunteer retention. Koji says that the coffee tradition has helped to retain a core group and welcome in all kinds of people with a wide range of skill sets. "Birds are fun, but the people really matter to me," says Koji. "People see things differently, it's nice to get those diverse perceptions. They make observations you might have missed when you have the expectations of a master birder."

All three teammates feel that participation in the Neighborhood Bird Project has brought them a deeper sense of place and a greater awareness of the cyclical changes that take place over the course of the year. It has also brought them closer to the broader community around

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the park. “When I go down there (to the park) on my own I can have a conversation about birds with community members and answer questions like: when will we see the first wigeon, the first Hutton’s Vireo?” says Cinny.

La Manda Davis, new to the NBP this year, already finds she reaps the rewards gained from noticing and understanding birds and their habitat in our parks. NBP “requires me to slow my pace of living and to acknowledge how much I can receive and give if I just listen and let nature lead me into my day.”

The data Seattle Audubon volunteers collect help us appreciate and detect changes in bird diversity at our parks. They may also be useful for understanding the impact of habitat restoration on our local birds. For instance, in 2014 Seattle Audubon compared NBP data at sites before and after restoration was initiated. The analysis showed a decline

in species like House Sparrows and European Starlings, which can displace native birds—a “cautious success for restoration.” Future surveys will strengthen the insights we can glean from the data and the bonds of community will strengthen the project as a whole. Community adds the momentum and tradition that this project needs to persist and helps us advocate for healthy green spaces that all humans and wildlife can enjoy.

Read the NBP report: [bit.ly/NBP\\_report](https://bit.ly/NBP_report)

By Elizabeth Muntean  
AmeriCorps Urban Environmental Educator

*Neighborhood Bird Project surveys are on hiatus until Washington’s Stay Home order is lifted. To volunteer in the future, email [science@seattleaudubon.org](mailto:science@seattleaudubon.org).*



RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH © GLORIA Z. NAGLER

## CLIMATE WATCH: BIRDS IN A WARMING WORLD



CLIMATE WATCH SURVEYING

We wandered through a sunlit Boeing Creek Park early one morning in February. The weather was glorious as members of Seattle Audubon’s teen Young Birders Program and I set out to survey the bird population at five sites in the park for Climate Watch, the National Audubon community science program focused on collecting data to investigate the effects of climate change on birds.

Our task was to spend five minutes at each site to record all of the birds we could see and hear, with a focus on two specific birds: the Red-breasted Nuthatch and the Spotted Towhee. Audubon climate models predict that these two well-loved birds will undergo range shifts due to climate change. Across the nation, hundreds of volunteers, like us, would conduct similar surveys tracking bluebirds, goldfinches, and Painted Bunting as well as other species of nuthatches and towhees. These surveys occur in winter from mid-January to mid-February to capture changes in wintering activities and again in late spring from mid-May to mid-June to capture changes in breeding activities.

Standing on a dappled path at the first site in Boeing Creek, we started our timer. As the minutes ticked by, we recorded an Anna’s Hummingbird zipping by and counted kinglets from their high tinkling calls echoing from the alder treetops. Then suddenly there it was: a sound we

had come for, the *yank-yank-yank* call of the Red-breasted Nuthatch. We were delighted. With map in hand, we felt like explorers and trekked across the park to find the rest of the sites.

A few miles away, two more Young Birder teens were conducting surveys at Hamlin park, while Seattle Audubon staff and volunteers helped survey sites at Carkeek and Ravenna parks, and the Washington Park Arboretum. Seattle Audubon has participated in Climate Watch since 2018 by harnessing the power of our community, and our data have already helped provide valuable insights.

Three years of Climate Watch data show what ecologists have suspected—climate change is already affecting where birds reproduce and spend winter months. Confirming Audubon’s predictions, we can see that the birds in the study are leaving areas that are becoming unfavorable habitat and expanding into areas that are forecast to become more favorable habitat because of climate change.

With an understanding of where birds currently are and

“  
**Now is the time  
to support these  
native bird species.**

JENNY HANSEN  
SEATTLE AUDUBON YOUNG BIRDER

where they will move, National Audubon is better positioned to focus their conservation work. But they need more data in order to understand the complexity of climate change and of birds’ responses to it. Seattle Audubon is excited to continue the Climate Watch program in our area and is eager to engage more community volunteers to aid in its success.

With two easily-identifiable species of birds that can be found in accessible public parks, Climate Watch presents the ideal opportunity to volunteer with an inclusive group of people committed to bird conservation.

By Anna Murphy  
AmeriCorps Urban Environmental Educator

**THANK YOU!**

We are grateful to our 2020 GiveBIG donors who gave over \$40,000 to support important projects at Seattle Audubon.

# KEEPING AN EYE ON RODENTICIDES



## 5 EASY WAYS TO HELP PROTECT RAPTORS

1. Keep rodents under control with no-poison methods
2. Keep trash and other rodent food sources tightly contained
3. Seal homes and buildings to prevent rodent access
4. Clear ivy beds and other vegetation 3–6 feet away from buildings
5. Report any sick or dead raptors at [UrbanRaptorConservancy.org](http://UrbanRaptorConservancy.org)

Urban Raptor Conservancy (URC) is a Seattle-based non-profit focused on birds of prey. The group has pulled together years of observations and research on the urban raptors, especially Peregrine Falcons and Cooper's Hawks, that nest in our region's cities. URC's long-term monitoring of Cooper's Hawks led to a disturbing finding: dead birds with no obvious signs of trauma. One suspected factor is anticoagulant pesticides—rat poisons that cause death by internal bleeding.

People have used rodenticides for decades to control unwanted rat populations in and around homes and businesses. Unfortunately, these poisons do not stop at rats. They can also harm "non-target species"—that is, if an owl or a hawk (or a cat) eats a poisoned rat, some of that poison can transfer to the predator. The effects can be deadly. One of a pair of Barn Owls often seen at Key Arena died from rat poison in 2018, and even a nestling Cooper's Hawk which had never hunted on its own had traces of poison, presumably from being fed contaminated prey while still in the nest. But even non-lethal amounts can make a raptor less able to hunt, more prone to accidents, or less capable of feeding their young.

The presence of rat poisons in raptors can only be confirmed by a lab test on liver tissue from dead birds. Many other cities have conducted studies that show raptors (and other animals like foxes, cougars, and pet dogs and cats), are frequently contaminated with rodenticides, but there had not been any research in Seattle. Seattle Audubon relies on science to guide conservation action, so when URC started the Rodenticides in Raptors Project in collaboration with PAWS Wildlife Center in Lynnwood, we saw an opportunity to support the partnership.

This spring, we provided funds to URC to pay for more lab tests on dead raptors. Reducing harm to urban birds is a critical part of Seattle Audubon's conservation work through the Urban Bird Treaty City agreement. The results of this study will help set the stage for future actions that could be taken to reduce threats to our urban birds of prey.

*By Wendy Walker  
Community Engagement Manager*



COOPER'S HAWK BY JEREMIAH HOLT



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## BINOCULAR BINGO CONTEST

Your actions at home and in your community can make a real difference for birds and healthy habitats. See how many ways you can (and already do!) help birds. Complete at least two rows in any direction and enter to win a new pair of ZEISS Terra® ED 8x42 binoculars!

**Share on social media how you make a difference! Be sure to tag @SeattleAudubon #BinocularBingo**

I never let my cat roam outside unattended	I garden with native plants	I provide fresh water for birds	I contribute to science with eBird	I share my love of birds with others
I keep my bird feeders clean	My windows are bird-safe to prevent collisions	I keep my distance when taking photos	I drink shade-grown, bird-friendly coffee	I keep my dog on leash in parks
I vote for bird-friendly policies	I'm a Nature Shop customer	I'm a member of Seattle Audubon	I'm a Seattle Audubon volunteer	I don't use pesticides in my garden
I leave standing dead trees/snags in my yard as habitat	I leave leaf litter piles in my garden	I prune bushes during non-nesting seasons	I leave old spider webs for nesting birds	I don't use rat poison
I contact elected officials in support of bird-friendly actions	I leave bird nests alone	I don't kidnap baby birds (leave fledglings alone unless injured)	I stay on trails in parks	I'm teaching the kids in my life about birds

*To enter: email a photo of your completed board to Anna Dukes [AnnaD@seattleaudubon.org](mailto:AnnaD@seattleaudubon.org) or cut out and snail mail the board to our address above. All submissions must be received by June 30, 2020 to be eligible for the drawing.*