

EARTHCARE

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SUMMER 2021



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LETTER FROM OUR PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Welcome Silent Generation, Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennial, and Gen Z readers,

The subtle shifts in attitudes and behaviors that happen over time and shape the narrative of each generation are fascinating. While each of us likely has memories of formative experiences that propelled us toward certain hobbies, friends, and careers, Gen Z (those born in the mid-1990's through early 2010's) is the only generation whose lives have been intertwined with digital technology and internet culture from the start. Has a lifetime of screen time turned Gen Z away from green careers, care for and connection with nature, and environmental advocacy? Evidence indicates absolutely not.

These "digital natives" are using technology—social media and storytelling platforms, in particular—to organize themselves as advocates and activists around issues of environmental justice and environmental protection. Technology has enabled teens who participate in Seattle Audubon's Young Birders program to remain active during the pandemic, and significantly broadened the geographic scope of the group. Similarly, the NextGen Advisory Council continues its work to increase the reach of Seattle Audubon's programming to younger and more diverse audiences by examining barriers to entry, as well as probing the lack of diverse representation at all levels of the organization. Individuals in both groups share a genuine love for birds and nature, and technology has

certainly not dimmed this shared passion for the natural world.

The ways that Gen Zers define their connections with nature and the way that individuals and groups are redefining "outdoorsy" may look different than those of other generations, and that is a glorious piece of societal evolution worthy of celebration. We know that birds face significant environmental threats, from climate change to common urban hazards such as window collisions and outdoor cats. Making headway on these issues requires intersectional collaboration, inclusive leadership, and a tenacious dedication to make the changes needed to achieve environmental justice and protection for all.

I am committed to listen to, support, uplift, and learn from the diverse voices of Gen Z, as well as marvel at their ability to organize for joyful and profound changes that will benefit people and birds. I hope you will join me in this commitment.

Christine Scheele
Program Director



YOUNG BIRDERS

THE NEXT GENERATION OF BIRDERS

From the Olympic Coast to a grand tour of Eastern Washington, teens in Seattle Audubon's Young Birders program have birded a lot of ground in the past few years. This program is an after-school club for teens aged 13-18 who are interested in birding and conservation, and field trips are an important element. Two years ago, I had the privilege of taking on leadership of the Young Birders. Before the pandemic, we would come together for monthly meetings, outdoor group activities, and scientific monitoring throughout the school year. When the pandemic hit last March, the state of Young Birders seemed uncertain with the switch to all-virtual group gatherings.

The saying "birds bring us all together" couldn't ring more true, as this group of teens hasn't let distance get in the way of coming together for the love of birds. From Seattle to as far as Olympia and Portland, Young Birders flocked to the challenge and created a virtual community space to connect with each other. Between monthly Zoom meetings, the teens used Slack, an online communication platform, to share their individual birding adventures and artistic creations, and to debate the identities of mystery birds.

I see a new generation of energetic bird lovers. These teens express their appreciation of birds in many ways: through art and photography, by launching and leading their own birding club at school, and by volunteering at a bird sanctuary. I am struck by their capacity to hold their appreciation of birds alongside an awareness of the threats birds face. Young Birders are acutely attuned to issues like habitat loss and climate change and understand that birds play an important role in ecosystems around the world.

Teen birder Marie felt the loss of habitat close to home. Marie joined Young Birders six years ago, looking for a way to connect her life-long love of birds with others her age. As she went birdwatching in her Seattle neighborhood, she observed trees being cut down. Marie saw the loss of habitat as a significant threat to birds. In response, Marie helped convert her front yard into a native plant garden. Over the years, Marie and her family have excitedly

counted an ever-growing number of visiting bird species, with the latest yard count at 60. When Marie reflects on the future of these birds, she hopes to see Seattle as a city that serves both birds and people, providing native vegetation and space for birds to feed and nest.

It can feel overwhelming to think about the many hazards birds face in our urban environment. But the next generation of birders, like Marie and others, are mobilized by their awareness of these threats, and use their knowledge and creativity to actively support bird conservation. The resilience of these teens coming together in a pandemic is reflected in the birds flocking together in Marie's yard in a changing world. I feel hope seeing the Young Birders unite in a shared purpose.



By Anna Murphy
AmeriCorps Urban Environmental Educator
and Young Birders Leader



AMERICAN GOLDFINCH
PATRICIA MCGUIRE | AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS

Marie's native plant garden provides a space where birds can feed and nest, including her favorite, the American Goldfinch.

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YOUNG BIRDERS

STORYTELLING FOR COMMUNITY AND ACTION

If you had met me as a 4-year-old, you would have found me running around barefoot in the snow or asking questions about slugs. I've always had an affinity for outdoor creatures, and while slugs are still a source of curiosity to me, I've since discovered the feathered wonders that are birds. Spending my high school years with Seattle Audubon's Young Birders program nurtured that wonder through trips, mentorship, and community.

My first Young Birders overnight was a weeklong trip to the Malheur area in eastern Oregon. I remember staying at the chilly field station, waking up early to spend sunrise with the grouse, strumming teasel like a guitar, and trying to catch lizards in the craters. Every excursion with Young Birders was much more than a birding trip because it also encouraged my interest in habitats, plants, and conservation. Interacting with the program's volunteers and coordinators also allowed me to build relationships with college alumni and AmeriCorps members, who inspired me to follow a similar path. After high school, I completed two years of service with the Washington Conservation Corps before enrolling at The Evergreen State College.

The beauty of attending a college that prides itself on interdisciplinary study is that even while attempting a Bachelor of Science, there's still room for exploring arts and humanities. While my studies at Evergreen heavily emphasized field ecology, they also included wood carving, media studies, Indigenous histories, and community studies. Each subject was enlightening in its own way, yet it's the community studies that remains closest to my heart.

For my senior year of college, I wanted to take a break from the sciences and try an independent study. I wasn't quite sure what that would look like until I found a call for collaborators on something called The Brave Space Project. I sent the project team a letter of interest and within a few weeks we were navigating the red tape of creating a credit-bearing internship sponsored by Evergreen.

Ten months in, the project has become a multi-racial, women-led, radically collaborative creative team seeking to decolonize outdoor culture both in front of and behind the film lens. Our first short documentary film, *Expedition Reclamation*, seeks to redefine "outdoorsy" and reclaim belonging in the outdoors for Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color by highlighting their joyful, resilient, and transformative relationships to outdoor recreation. This film will help restore every Person of Color's right to dream themselves into spaces of adventure and relationship with our natural world. It was this vision of a film that initially drew me in, and it was the people that made me stay. Working with the Brave Space team has been healing in ways I didn't realize were possible. I've worked on many aspects of the project, from film production to crowdfunding tasks, and this process of creation has been life changing and life giving. In this project, we laugh ourselves to stitches in business meetings, we cry listening to stories on film production, we dream as work, and we work as rest. I cannot imagine any other culmination to my undergraduate career.

One of Evergreen's staple books is *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. In her book, she writes of the earth loving us, and how if we knew this as true, our relationship

to the land would be reciprocal, protective, celebratory. This type of bond is one of the values I see reflected in The Brave Space Project, and it adds a dimension to my studies in field ecology that I often felt was lacking. The concept of relationship is often sucked out of the sciences, and I believe that diminishes the potential of our work as conservationists and ecologists.

What, for example, would happen if we worked beyond the preservation of wilderness? What would happen if we sought to build deeply reciprocal connections between humans and all beings on the earth? What would happen if we saw ourselves as belonging here with the rest of nature in mutual respect, care, and joy? I think we would feel the earth loving us as much as we love the earth.



By Rebekah Graham
Former Seattle Audubon Young Birder

BIRD-ATTRACTING NATIVE PLANTS FOR YOUR YARD

- 1 Orange Honeysuckle**
Attracts grouse, pheasants, flickers, robins, thrushes, bluebirds, waxwings, grosbeaks, juncos, and hummingbirds
- 2 Western Columbine**
Attracts sparrows, juncos, finches, and hummingbirds
- 3 Oregon Grape**
Attracts robins, waxwings, juncos, towhees, and sparrows

THANK YOU!

A special thanks to our 2021 GiveBIG donors who are helping us soar! Together you raised over \$41,429 to fuel Seattle Audubon's mission to advocate and organize for cities where people and birds thrive.

OUR FAVORITE PICKS FOR SUMMER READING

Sparrow Envy

Field Guide to Birds and Lesser Beasts
By J. Drew Lanham

Renowned ornithologist and author of *The Home Place* investigates his obsession with birds with honesty and candor through poetry and prose.

Rooted

Life at the Crossroads of Science, Nature, and Spirit
By Lyanda Lynn Haupt

An ecophilosopher, naturalist, and award-winning local author, Haupt examines the human condition at this intersection and where it might lead us in our relationships with nature and ourselves.

Homewaters

A Human and Natural History of Puget Sound
By David B. Williams

Lifelong Washington resident and author unflinchingly delves into the multifaceted human relationship with the more-than-human world of Puget Sound.



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Rebekah Graham on Quinalt and Queets land at Kalaloch Beach 4

FOSTERING TOMORROW'S BIRD ADVOCATES & DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS

NEXTGEN COUNCIL

I joined the NextGen Advisory Council to volunteer with fellow bird enthusiasts to collectively work towards the more equitable and inclusive birding world that we envision. I believe NextGen's greatest impact will be in empowering a younger and more diverse audience within Seattle Audubon to engage with birding and the protection of birds. Together, we have the power to co-create a more beautiful world where people and animals coexist.

I am enthusiastic about NextGen's potential to increase accessibility in birding. This can be addressed through access to equipment such as binoculars and spotting scopes, training on how to use equipment, and information on how and where to bird. Inclusivity can be achieved by incorporating diverse viewpoints and broadening representation in leadership, members, and activities. Mentorship is also an effective way to engage younger adults and fledgling birders. Established birders who share a similar identity, such as age or background, can serve as role models or guides. These individuals can be called upon to welcome new birders to step into the wonderful world

of birds and nature. Guides can share the best birding locations, where to find birds in the landscape, and how to tune into the bird soundscape. They can make birding accessible by explaining bird terminologies and cultivate a sense of connection with the birding community by providing a positive experience.

We can create engagement with the wellbeing of birds by centering the importance of birds both for conservation and people. Birds serve a myriad of essential ecological roles. They also bring joy and peace to the mind, with gorgeous feathers and the power of flight that sparks wonder and inspiration. By engaging in birding, we build empathy, forming a deep love and bond for birds. We protect what we care about, and as we learn and understand how climate change affects birds, it will motivate us to stay engaged through action.

The numerous threats that face our natural world are highly interconnected. Climate change, pollution, and elements of our human-made environment all have detrimental

effects on the welfare of birds and ourselves. Birds serve as a bellwether for what humans will face if we collectively refrain from taking meaningful action. Climate change can seem amorphous. It is an ominous, looming threat in our minds that can result in eco-anxiety and paralysis. Where does one even start? The NextGen Council is focused on promoting engagement through the principles of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion to ensure we can all share in the appreciation and protection of birds.

Fifty years from now, I envision cities designed with the needs of both people and wildlife in mind. Buildings created from bird-friendly, sustainable designs, where birds can fly free from window collisions. By incorporating nature into the design of cities, people will enjoy easy access and rich benefits of nature. I dream of transformation to a regenerative economy, green modes of transport, and city planning that encourages walking and biking to ensure clean air and water.

We live in a society that often demands a fast-paced life, which means we frequently lose sight of the wonders that flutter right in front of our eyes. To fully engage in birding often requires patience—time that many feel they cannot afford. I have found birding to be an act of self-care. In experiencing moments of stillness, I practice mindfulness and sharpen my powers of observation. I find joy in watching the delightful antics of my feathered friends and ground myself in the ensuing sense of connection and belonging in nature.

My favorite place to bird is the Union Bay Natural Area at sunset. It is a breathtaking experience to watch the numerous flocks of birds take flight and swirl across the sky, while listening to the beautiful symphony of their calls, all against the backdrop of a painterly swath of colors perfectly reflected in the water on a calm evening.



By Suzannah Yu
NextGen Advisory Council Member



PHOTO BY UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Suzannah Yu counting Common Ravens for a long-term population study in Yellowstone National Park

Growing up, Suzannah was delighted to see Anna's Hummingbirds for their iridescent colors and lively behavior. Her mother nurtured Suzannah's love of birds by gifting her a pocket guidebook that she treasures to this day.



Great Blue Heron perched along the picturesque trail at the Union Bay Natural Area.



PHOTO BY SUZANNAH YU

Seattle Audubon established the NextGen Advisory Council in the fall of 2018, to elevate the perspectives and expertise of young professionals and student activists. Seattle Audubon has a rich history of conservation achievements, but our programs have not been sufficiently informed by, or in service of diverse audiences. Over the coming years and beyond, the NextGen Advisory Council will foster intentional collaboration with communities that have been excluded or sidelined by the mainstream environmental movements of the past.



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