

WHITNEY NEUFELD-KAISER

she/her/hers



What got you into birding?

My mother gave us a housewarming gift that was a large gourd – hollowed, dried, painted and sealed – that she had gotten at a craft fair. We drilled a few small holes in the bottom and turned it into a bird feeder that we hung on our front porch. Birds started coming. We began noticing the differences between them and wondered what species they were. We bought a National Geographic Guide to Birds, and the rest (as they say) is history.

What can people expect from a bird outing with you?

To have fun and to learn about birds. And maybe to see some birds! Bird outings with me begin with an opening circle where folks are invited to share their names, their pronouns as they are comfortable, and something about themselves like what their favorite soup is, or where they were born. We talk briefly about whose ancestral lands the outing takes place on, and I invite everyone to share during the trip whatever knowledge they have – some folks are so knowledgeable about flowers, trees, plants, mushrooms, rocks, geology, history – and it enhances the trip when we can learn from each other.

What values do you lead with?

Curiosity, gratitude that people choose to spend their precious time with the birds and with me.

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

My husband and I did a lot of self-teaching at the beginning. Equipped with a National Geographic Guide to Birds and a copy of Birder's Guide to Washington, we began visiting new places in Puget Sound and then Washington State to find different types of birds while soaking up the beauty of our state. I was fortunate to be accepted into the 2016-2017 class of what was then called the Master Birder program. My husband and I both learned a lot from that experience. After the program was over, I continued to read and learn on my own about bird vocalizations, which remains one of my favorite aspects of birding.

What is your personal approach/mindset toward birding?

Birding is not a separate activity for me. Being aware of the birds around me has a profound impact on my daily life. It brings me great joy and serenity. I recently had to answer the question, "How many days in the last year have you spent at least 10 minutes birding." It would be close to 365, because any time I'm outside or near a window, I'm looking for birds out of the corner of my eye and listening.

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?

Birding is for everyone, and yet not everyone feels welcome and safe in going all places where birds are found. I hope to be a collaborative ally with folks who have often been excluded from birding and provide a welcoming, inclusive field trip experience as a safe space.



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

I love identifying birds by their sounds, listening for patterns in their songs, thrilling to the variation within and between birds of the same species, hearing new types of vocalizations from a familiar species. For example, I just learned that some subspecies of Fox Sparrows are known to mimic Olive-sided Flycatchers! Wut.

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

Because my husband and I were largely self-taught, we didn't seek or get advice when we first became curious about the birds coming to our feeders. Birds are so interesting, there's so much to learn, and so much we don't know (and never will). Start small – start with the birds you see frequently in your daily life. It makes the project of birding manageable, gives a foundation to build on. Get to know what those close-in birds look like, what they sound like, what their habits are – are they here year-round, or do they disappear for a while?

What is your favorite ecosystem to bird in?

Birds are everywhere, and I enjoy engaging with them, watching them, listening to them, learning from them wherever I am.

Dare I ask, what your favorite bird is?!

Any of the wrens. They are small, yet so earnest with such loud, beautiful, and varied voices!

