

Crossing Paths



WITH WILDLIFE IN WASHINGTON TOWNS AND CITIES

Fall 2006

We're monitoring for avian flu

By Dr. Jeff Koenigs, WDFW Director

Since avian influenza made headlines more than a year ago, the disease has raised questions among many of those who have an interest in wildlife, including wild bird enthusiasts.

Some species of wild birds, especially waterfowl, naturally carry various strains of avian flu without ill effect. However, the virulent form of bird flu, which is caused by a strain of virus known as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 (HPAI H5N1), has sickened and killed some birds in Asia, Africa and Europe. After close contact with infected domestic birds, more than 200 people also have died from the HPAI H5N1 virus.

So far, the HPAI H5N1 strain of the virus has not been found among wild birds in North America.

As part of a nationwide surveillance effort, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) this summer began testing some species of wild migratory waterfowl and shorebirds for avian influenza. The joint effort by state and federal agencies is intended to detect whether the virulent form of avian influenza has occurred in migratory birds passing through the United States.

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Don't feed the coyotes



Photo by Brad Manchias

Both urban and rural Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary managers across Washington have experienced that shadow of grayish-brown fur, those furtive backward glances, or the yipping, yelping song of coyotes.

Canis latrans is everywhere because the species is adaptable to almost every conceivable habitat type, from forested mountains to downtown waterfront. It's also intelligent, and usually shy enough, to co-exist relatively easily with humans.

Most wildlife enthusiasts appreciate or admire the wily tenacity and beauty of the coyote. But this year in Washington coyotes officially joined the ranks of potentially dangerous wildlife.

This spring, two toddlers, an adult, and a dog were bitten by coyotes in the Bellevue and Issaquah areas. A 1 ½-year-old boy was bitten on the ear while playing under the supervision of his parents at an elementary school playground. A 4-

year-old boy was bitten on the buttocks in the yard of his home. A woman was bitten on the leg in the afternoon as she was walking on a sidewalk to pick her child up from school. And a pet toy poodle was attacked while being walked on a leash in town. The children and

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Crossing Paths is a quarterly newsletter for Washington residents enrolled in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program and others interested in urban/suburban wildlife.



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Expand wildlife habitat from backyard to community

Washington residents love their wildlife and backyard habitat gardening so much that our state is home to one of the country's greatest concentrations of certified "Community Wildlife Habitats" – a national program that recognizes shared devotion to wildlife habitat enhancement and preservation.

The National Wildlife Federation sponsors this program and featured the Washington communities in an

article titled "Coloring Communities Evergreen" in a summer edition of its National Wildlife magazine.

Communities qualify for the distinction through a point system awarded by habitat enhancement and community beautification projects and meeting criteria like reduced or no use of pesticides and fertilizers, minimized watering, and measured clean air and water.

The basic idea of the program is that by becoming healthier for wildlife, communities become healthier for people. And the Community Wildlife Habitat distinction promotes pride in neighborhoods.

The Washington communities currently registered in the program are Alki, Bellingham, Camano Island, Fidalgo Island/Anacortes, Lake Forest Park, and Tukwila.

Backyard habitat designed by WDFW biologist and author Russell Link



WDFW wildlife biologist Michelle Tirhi reports working with National Wildlife Federation representative Gretchen Muller and the Pierce County Biodiversity Alliance to register more communities in the program.

"For example," Michelle said, "the Crescent Valley Alliance, a local community group living within the Crescent Valley that formed as a result of the BioBlitz in 2005 and subsequent Biodiversity Stewardship Planning venue, are working towards certification. We hope to bring the same effort to the Lower White River, whose planning venue is just beginning."

For more information about the program and community eligibility, see <http://www.nwf.org/community/>

Spreading the word

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary manager Christine Southwick of Shoreline hopes her enthusiasm for the program will spread to her neighbors. She recently wrote a "how to" article for her neighborhood newsletter, including this testimonial:

"My wildlife count for my yard is 60 different species of birds, including year-round Anna's Hummingbirds and migrating Rufus Hummingbirds, 6-7 different butterflies, 3 different types of

dragonflies, salamanders, and lots of beneficial bugs. (An occasional raccoon, opossum or coyote may pass through my yard, but they did that before I improved the yard.)

I keep the garden organic— meaning I don't use poisons — which is healthier for me, the dog, the birds, and stream that gets my yard run-off. I let the birds eat most of the "bad" bugs, and sometimes I help with insecticidal soap. And I let the flower heads go to seed for the birds.

I love my yard now and so do my neighbors. And I go to sleep knowing that I am making a little better and healthier place in my corner of the world. Won't you add your yard, too?"



Photo by Kelli McAllister

Birdhouse transformed to yellow jacket hive

A wooden birdhouse on Ione Prowse's backyard fence in Bremerton became a rounded beehive over a period of about a month last summer. These photos show the transformation. Finally, a raccoon made a nighttime visit, tearing off the exterior layers of the hive.



Photos by Judy (Prowse) Buskirk of Fox Island, WA

Don't feed the coyotes, (cont. from page 1)

woman were medically treated and underwent rabies vaccinations just in case the coyote was rabid; the dog also recovered after treatment.

Due to the proximity of the incidents in both time and place, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) investigating officers believed the same coyote could have been involved in the attacks on people. Weeks after the incidents, a WDFW officer shot and killed a coyote believed to be the offending animal. Because it was shot in the head, it could not be tested for rabies. (To date there is no documentation of rabies in coyotes in Washington, but rabid coyotes have been found in other parts of North America.)

The coyote attacks on humans were the first ever recorded in Washington.

California has been dealing with such incidents for several years in some communities where some coyotes have become habituated to humans, usually through an association with food.

WDFW wildlife biologists believe the coyote or coyotes involved in the attacks here this year may have become aggressive because they were accustomed to getting food—either intentionally or inadvertently—from humans. Once individual coyotes learn about easy meals, they become overly familiar with people, start traveling during the day, and develop unusually bold and aggressive behavior.

Coyotes are opportunistic scavengers and hunters who are known to eat a wide variety of food: grass, berries, other fruit, grasshoppers and other insects, small mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians, garden vegetables,



Photo by Brad Manchias

poultry and other livestock, domestic cats and small dogs, pet food, wild bird seed, and garbage.

If a food source remains available, and if people fail to establish their own territorial boundaries by harassing a bold coyote out of their

area, another potentially dangerous incident could occur.

The most important way to minimize the likelihood of a coyote interaction is to not feed them, certainly not intentionally, but also not inadvertently.

Here are some specific steps to take to avoid problems with coyotes:

- Keep garbage and compost piles securely covered.
- Keep pet food and water inside.
- Keep pets indoors or confined in a kennel or covered exercise yard.
- Do not feed any wildlife on the ground; keep wild bird seed in elevated feeders designed for birds, and clean up spilled seed from the ground.
- Do not feed feral cats; coyotes prey on the cats and feed on cat food left out for them.
- Minimize ground cover vegetation near children's play areas, to avoid attracting rodents and small mammals that in turn attract coyotes.
- Use noise-making devices when coyotes are seen; check with local authorities regarding noise and firearm ordinances.
- Be assertive toward coyotes that do not show fear of humans; clap hands, shout and throw rocks at individuals that venture too close to people, pets and homes.

Coyotes are clever enough to be around as long as we are, so we need to learn to co-exist with them and enjoy them from afar.

More information on coyotes is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/coyotes.htm>

The backyard pics are rolling in

Thank you to all who responded to our request in the summer edition of this newsletter for pictures from your Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary.

Among them were Betsy Shultz's shot of violet-green swallow chicks begging for a meal from their nestbox on her property and Christine Southwick's shot of a hairy woodpecker at her water dripper (both shown here).

Those and others will be posted on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife website's "Image Gallery" page (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/gallery2/main.php>) that includes an "album" on Backyard Wildlife Sanctuaries (http://wdfw.wa.gov/gallery2/main.php?g2_itemId=8782).

We can always use more, so take a look at what's there now and think about what you might be able to add in any of the categories: Gardens and Landscapes; Garden Wildlife; Feeders, Ponds and Birdbaths; Nestboxes and Bathouses; Wildlife Plants; and Before and After shots of your Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary (before development as a sanctuary and after.)

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Send digital photos for posting consideration to luersmel@dfw.wa.gov.



Hairy woodpecker at her water dripper taken by Christine Southwick



Violet-green swallow chicks taken by Betsy Shultz

We're monitoring for avian flu, (cont. from page 1)

An estimated one million geese, 12 million ducks, 150,000 swans, and hundreds of thousands of shorebirds returning from the Arctic pass through the Pacific Flyway annually. Our sampling, mostly in Puget Sound, coastal estuaries and the Columbia Basin, focuses on birds that could have interacted with Asian migratory birds in the Arctic last summer.

Part of our monitoring effort also involves testing some birds found dead, either by our field staff or reported by citizens. To report a dead wild bird, you can call WDFW's toll-free line at 1-800-606-8768. As a standard safety precaution for protection from various wildlife diseases, do not

handle dead wild birds with bare hands or transport them.

Birds that likely died from predators or traumas, such as collisions with windows, power lines or motor vehicles, are not collected for testing. If you have questions about reporting a dead bird call 509-892-1001 Ext. 316.

While highly pathogenic avian influenza has not been detected here, it's always advisable to take common-sense precautions when handling wildlife to avoid contracting any wildlife disease. Here are some tips for handling wild birds and bird feeders:

- Do not handle wild birds that are obviously sick or found dead; use

rubber gloves, plastic bags, and/or shovels to remove dead birds.

- Wear rubber gloves while cleaning bird feeders.
- Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes immediately after handling dead birds or cleaning bird feeders.

I encourage you to visit our Avian Influenza webpage at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/avian_flu/index.htm, where you will find details about our monitoring effort. For additional human health information, check with the state Department of Health (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/panflu/>) or your local health department.

Study targets bird use of Puget Sound urban areas



Spotted-towhee



Bewick's wren



Black-capped chickadee

Photos by Kelli McAllister

An investigation of how resident birds use the urban environment is getting underway this fall in western Washington, possibly involving some Backyard Wildlife Sanctuaries.

Researchers will be capturing and color-leg-banding five species that exhibit either flocking or territorial behavior in the fall and winter — black-capped and chestnut-backed chickadees, spotted towhees, song sparrows, Oregon juncos, and Bewick's wrens. Volunteers will be helping record observations of these banded birds through the winter by watching backyard feeders and walking weekly transects in the

vicinity of banding locations. Basic vegetation and habitat features at both the banding and re-sighting locations will be recorded.

The re-sighting of color-banded birds over time will help researchers assess the birds' fidelity to specific sites and their dispersal in the urban environment. Little is currently known about how native birds that persist in completely urban environments (small-parcel landscape lots) make use of the changed landscape, and what role that landscape plays for the resident populations during the non-breeding season.

Preliminary banding evidence from Seattle indicates a variety of strategies among wintering birds. While song sparrows display winter site fidelity in urban backyards, spotted towhees seem to show fidelity only in larger habitat reserves, and Oregon juncos are regularly recaptured at urban locations far distant from where they were originally banded.

Researchers hope to understand the role urban environments play in birds' lives throughout the year by documenting movements of birds within and between seasons, their persistence in a variety of urban

settings from small and medium sized urban parks, open spaces, or backyard wildlife sanctuaries, and variability in responses based on bird age or habitat features.

In addition, the vegetation cover data should lend new information. Supporters of native plant landscaping frequently invoke the benefits for birds, yet few if any studies have documented how the patchwork and variety of backyard conditions in urban landscapes affect birds.

Large tracts of forest habitats at the Islandwood Nature Center on Bainbridge Island will serve as a control site for the study.

The research is being conducted by Donald Norman and Sherry Hudson of Norman Wildlife Consulting, along with Dan Froehlich of the University of Washington Burke Museum, Stephanie Forbes, Mark Myers and Gretchen Albrecht of Woodland Park Zoo, and Karen Salsbury of Islandwood.

Besides WDFW and National Wildlife Federation backyard program participants, project cooperators include Seattle Parks Department and City of Lake Forest Park Parks Department.



Song sparrow

Photo by Brad Manchias

Raptors encouraged to protect young trees



Birds of prey were encouraged to help protect newly planted trees at the Crystal Lake Tree Farm in Woodinville by the placement of perch poles this past summer by volunteers.

The idea, explains Andrew Perleberg of Wenatchee, a Washington State University Extension Educator in the Forest

Stewardship program, is for raptors like red-tailed hawks to use the perch poles to spot and hunt voles, rabbits and other small mammals that nibble on the young seedlings.

Perleberg provided these photos of a community work party placing perch poles in a recent harvest unit replanted with Douglas-fir and western red cedar.

“One-stop-shopping” for state and national certification

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS) certification is available from both the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the National Wildlife Federation through a special “one-stop-shopping” partnership.

You get the benefits of two habitat programs while doing the paperwork for one!

The National Wildlife Federation is a four million member non-profit organization with a mission to “inspire Americans to protect wildlife for our children’s future.”

The Federation offers certification of yards and gardens across the country as “Backyard Wildlife Habitat” sites, much the same as WDFW does with the BWS program.



Here’s the way the partnership program works: Application for certification through the Federation costs \$15, which includes a certificate, yard sign, subscription to

a quarterly newsletter, and automatic Federation membership and a year’s subscription to “National Wildlife” magazine. For an additional \$5, enrollees from Washington state are also enrolled in our BWS program, and receive the new yard sign pictured here and e-mail subscription to this “Crossing Paths” quarterly newsletter.

The partnership is a pilot that may be extended permanently and include other states, depending on the number of enrollments.

If you’re not already enrolled in Washington’s BWS program or the Federation’s program, see <https://secure.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/certify/page1.cfm>

and click the partners link.

“Missing” birds just taking care of themselves

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Managers Jon and June Hahn of Woodinville returned from a two-week vacation this past summer to discover their bird feeders and baths still partially full – obviously, and oddly, unused for some time – and no birds.

They refilled all the feeders and baths, but over the next couple of weeks they still observed no birds – not even squirrels.

Normally the Hahns feed through the summer and enjoy more than a dozen species of birds, including hummingbirds, chickadees, wrens, warblers, siskins, creepers, Stellar’s jays, grosbeaks, goldfinches, and towhees. They have one-plus acres of wooded and landscaped grounds just outside town, with groundcovers, flower gardens, native plants, shrubs, 15 fruit trees, mature firs, and more.

Puzzled by the “missing birds,” the Hahns e-mailed WDFW wildlife

biologist Russell Link for an explanation.

“We can discover no major development projects nearby, nor any word or evidence of (pesticide) spraying,” they wrote. “(In the past) we have had occasional visits by peregrine falcons, but we cannot imagine they would have decimated all the other birds.

In fact, we’ve not seen the peregrines, nor have we seen our local redtail hawks or the occasional bald eagle, (although we think we heard their hunting calls over the Samammish Valley about 1/4 mile distant.) All feeders and baths are filled, and there’s no change in local environment. Can you offer any suggestions as to what has happened here?”

Russell responded that the Hahns’ “missing birds” might just have been taking care of themselves in other places for dietary reasons.

“Many birds, especially those in the finch family, search a variety of areas for natural foods as they become available,” he wrote. “It could be they are simply feeding elsewhere. Birds that feed on seeds for much of the year will move to invertebrates when feeding their young of the year.”

Russell also noted that bird populations fluctuate as a result of overall food availability and disease. The pine siskin population in western Washington, for example, seems to be comparatively low this year.

Although the Hahns did not witness bird predators in their area, Russell says it’s possible that a Cooper’s hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, merlin, peregrine falcon, or even a stealthy cat could have been hunting in the area and birds just started avoiding their yard for awhile.

Photo by Kelli McAllister



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