

Crossing Paths



WITH WILDLIFE IN WASHINGTON TOWNS AND CITIES

Fall 2007

Keep those nature connections

By Dr. Jeff Koenings, WDFW Director

Nature slows down at the end of the growing season, but too often we don't.

We shift from summertime outdoor relaxation to busy indoor fall and winter schedules.

To stay physically, mentally and spiritually healthy, we need to keep our connections with nature.

That was one of the "take home" messages last month at our fifth annual conference on wildlife-related recreation and tourism. The gathering's "Pathways to Nature" theme was inspired by Governor Chris Gregoire's Healthiest State in the Nation Campaign, which promotes the idea that being outdoors and enjoying nature is "good for us."

From Pend Oreille County to Long Beach, the 100 business owners, community leaders, and others who attended the two-day event near Mt. Rainier learned that wildlife festivals and other nature-based events are "pathways" for reconnecting to Washington's great outdoors.

I remember our first such wildlife-tourism conference in 2003 co-sponsored with the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED). At that time we were

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Photo by Betsy Schultz

Feed birds with care and cleanliness

Fall's shorter days and colder nights bring migrating birds through Washington's neighborhoods and bird feeders back in operation for many Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary managers.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) veterinarian Kristin Mansfield has received calls from bird feeding enthusiasts wondering if it's "safe" to start feeding again since a disease outbreak earlier this year prompted a WDFW recommendation to temporarily discontinue feeding.

"It's been several weeks since we've received any reports consistent with salmonellosis, so from a disease-prevention standpoint it's probably safe to start feeding birds again," Mansfield said, "as long as you clean and disinfect feeders on a regular basis."

On the other hand, bird feeding enthusiasts who live in black bear habitat should hold off on feeding

until November, when most bears den up for the winter. Black bears raid bird feeders in some areas, and chronic problem situations too often result in bears being euthanized. (See story on page 2.)

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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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Avoid drawing bears with bird feeders

Black bears have become notorious raiders of backyard bird feeding stations in Washington, especially where both people and bears are most dense.

The suburban areas of the north Puget Sound and Olympic Peninsula regions of the state have the most chronic black bear problems of this nature. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) offices there advise holding off on feeding birds until November, when most bears den up for much of the winter.

“It’s become quite a problem for us,” said WDFW wildlife biologist Patricia Thompson of the Mill Creek office. “Bears are hungry at this time of year and are looking for easy meals to fatten up before winter. When a bear becomes conditioned to food like that near humans, it can be dangerous. Our enforcement officers attempt to capture and relocate bears, but too often there’s nowhere to safely release a conditioned, problem animal. Unfortunately we sometimes end up euthanizing bears in those situations.”

Thompson said bird feeding enthusiasts can help by simply waiting until November to fill feeders, keeping spilled feed cleaned up, and cutting off the feed supply by March when more bears are out and about again.

Black bears are prolific in forested habitat across the state, including the northcentral Cascade Mountains, the northeast Selkirk Mountains, and the southeast Blue Mountains. They have always caused some problems for livestock and people in rural areas, from Chelan County to Asotin County.

But this year’s extremely warm and dry conditions have left bears wanting for natural food sources – berries, wild fruit, nuts, grasses, insects and small animals. Being omnivores (they’ll eat just about anything), and having extremely keen noses, they have been scavenging for food in garbage cans, livestock or pet food dispensers, chicken coops, gardens, campgrounds, and other places with easy meals.



Photo by Alan Bauer

“This year in particular everyone needs to be careful about drawing black bears with any kind of food source,” Thompson said.

For more information about black bears, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/blkbear/blkbear.htm>.

Pierce and King counties adopt biodiversity resolution

Conservation of White River biodiversity is the goal of a recent joint resolution between Pierce and King counties.

Since both counties share a common boundary on the river and both support conservation of shorelines, wetlands, open space, forest, and native fisheries and wildlife habitat, the resolution to coordinate planning, zoning, communication, voluntary landowner incentive programs and other practices made sense.

WDFW wildlife biologist Michelle Tirhi said the data-collecting “Bio-

Blitz” on the White River earlier this year, which paired professional biologists with local landowners and volunteers for a day in the field, provided the foundation for the joint resolution.

“We confirmed the presence of almost 90 percent of the native plant and animal species that we predicted to occur along the Lower White River,” she explained, “which shows just how biologically diverse that area is.”

The resolution means that both counties’ planning actions, technical consultations, voluntary

conservation and tax incentives, and strategic land purchases will be coordinated to maintain that diversity.

The Pierce County Biodiversity Alliance, comprised of agency and non-profit entities committed to preserving the biodiversity of Pierce County, sponsored the joint resolution. The Alliance recently testified before the county’s Planning Commission and asked for the intent of the resolution to be integrated into several county programs.

Feed birds with care and cleanliness, (cont. from page 1)

The fact that so many people were diligent about following the recommendation to stop feeding this summer to protect birds from disease was “truly heartening,” Mansfield said.

By June about four dozen reports of dead birds had been received involving pine siskins, goldfinches and purple finches in both eastern and western Washington. Carcasses of purple finches and pine siskins were sent to a Washington State University laboratory for testing that confirmed salmonellosis, a common and usually fatal bird disease caused by the salmonella bacteria.

Salmonellosis is probably the most common avian disease at feeders in Washington. The disease afflicts species such as finches, grosbeaks and pine siskins that flock together in large numbers at feeders and transmit the disease through droppings.

The first indication of the disease is often a seemingly tame bird on or near a feeder. The birds become very lethargic, fluff out their feathers, and are easy to approach, but there is very little people can do to treat them.

It's possible, although uncommon, for people to become sick from the salmonella bacteria through direct contact with infected birds, bird droppings, or through pet cats that catch sick birds. People who handle birds, bird feeders or bird baths should wear gloves and wash their hands thoroughly afterwards.

Other bird diseases that may be observed at backyard feeding stations include:

- **Avian Pox** -- a viral disease that causes wartlike growths on birds' faces, legs, wings and feet. The virus is spread by direct contact with infected birds, ingestion of food and water contaminated by sick birds, or contact with contaminated surfaces

such as at feeders, birdbaths, and perches. Insects, especially mosquitoes, also carry the disease from one bird to another.

- **Aspergillosis** -- a disease caused by a fungal mold that grows on damp feed or soil in or around the feeder. Birds inhale the fungal spores and the disease spreads throughout their lungs and air sacs, causing bronchitis and pneumonia.

- **Trichomoniasis** -- a disease caused by small parasites that can affect a wide variety of animals, including humans. The mourning dove and band-tailed pigeon seem to be particularly susceptible. The disease causes sores in their mouths and throats, and results in death from starvation or dehydration.

If evidence of any of these diseases is seen, immediately remove feeders and/or clean them with a bactericide, like a ten percent chlorine or bleach solution (one part bleach to ten parts warm water). Soak feeders and all parts for at least 10 minutes. Scrub, thoroughly rinse, and dry completely before re-using. Repeat every couple of weeks or more often if you notice sick birds. Avoid using wood feeders because they're difficult to keep clean. Make sure feeders allow rainwater to drain easily.

One of the better ways to address the potential disease problem during the wet months of the year is to switch to using only tube feeders rather than platform feeders. Feeders that have more flat surfaces collect more droppings, fungus, and other dirt that may spread disease.

Other ways to minimize chances of a disease outbreak at feeders include:

- **Give birds space** - Spread more feeders over a greater space. Crowding is a key factor in spreading disease because birds

have more direct contact, jostle each other, and are stressed and thus more vulnerable. Use smaller feeders that allow only a couple of birds to feed at a time.

- **Clean up wastes** - Regularly rake the area underneath feeders to remove droppings and old, moldy seed. Mount feeders over a surface that can be swept easily. Move feeders around periodically to keep droppings from collecting.

- **Use good feed** - If any feed smells or looks musty or moldy, don't use it. Disinfect storage containers and scoops used with spoiled feed before replacing with fresh, clean, dry feed.

- **Avoid seed mixes** - Most birds will scatter mixes, especially those with mostly milo or millet, for more preferred seed and the waste on the ground can become wet and moldy.

“Remember that wild birds are not dependent on backyard feeding stations,” Mansfield said. “Birds use natural food sources year-round in addition to feeders, so you don't have to worry about always keeping feeders filled. For the most part, supplemental feeding isn't critical to bird survival. It's mostly recreational, allowing us close-up views and greater appreciation of birds.”

Dead bird in your backyard?

Reports of dead birds in Washington can be made to the Dead Bird Reports line, 1-800-606-8768.

Wheatfield returned to forest draws wildlife

Elk, deer, raccoons, skunks, turkeys, songbirds, and other wildlife are making themselves at home on Gerry and Ron Kruegers' property in Spokane County where what was once a wheatfield is now a forest.

"Of all the things I've done in my life," says Gerry, "this is the best."

That's quite a testimonial for a charter member of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary program who created the "Open Yard/Bird Fair" event to promote the program, hosted it for nine consecutive years, and reached nearly 12,000 persons with her sustainable wildlife gardening message.

While running a small home nursery of old-fashioned (non-hybrid) roses and drought-tolerant and native plants for birds in her retirement, Gerry turned the couple of acres directly around their home into a colorful wildlife haven. The Kruegers were among the first to enroll their property in the Backyard program in 1988 when WDFW expanded it to the Spokane area after its 1986 start in Seattle.

Knowing that "seeing is believing," in 1991 Gerry and Ron offered to open their place for a weekend of public tours to show others how to provide habitat for wildlife at home with minimal watering and maintenance. In the first year, nearly 1,000 attended, and for each of the next eight years about 1,300 flocked to the Pleasant Prairie property to learn from the Kruegers' experience. With many native plants not available then in conventional nurseries, Gerry's "Blossoms and Bloomers" operation provided the start for thousands more wildlife gardens throughout northeast Washington.



Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Manager Gerry Krueger enjoys her 12-year-old forest

The 18-acre balance of the Kruegers' property was in wheat, like much of the surrounding area. Gerry knew she couldn't afford to restore those 18 acres to native vegetation on her own, so the former teacher/librarian started cracking the books and knocking on doors.

She found a "carbon offset" program (now Carbonfund.org) that funds reforestation projects to help reduce carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel burning that contributes to global warming. Besides restoring watersheds and wildlife habitat, forests capture carbon dioxide and store it in the trees' mass and in the soil.

Gerry also found Steve Sprecher, a Spokane-based soil conservationist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), who was willing to help her waste through the carbon offset funding application paperwork to secure a grant.

By spring of 1995, more than 5,000 six-inch tree seedlings, 2,000 shrub starts, and hundreds of pounds of native grass seed were available for planting on the old wheatfield. Gerry and Steve rounded up student volunteers from local schools to get the stems in the ground and spread the seed.

Most of the trees planted were Ponderosa pine, native to the area and notoriously tough. Also planted were Douglas fir, tamarack, bird cherry trees, elderberry, snowberry, wild rose, Siberian pea shrub, and bunchgrasses.

The first three springs were fortunately wet, Gerry recalls, and the forest took off. The area has never received any supplemental watering and the only fertilizer was in the original mesh rodent-guards placed around each planted stem.

Earlier this summer, a dozen years after the planting, Steve visited the Kruegers' forest and estimated that amazingly almost 85 percent of the

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Wheatfield returned to forest draws wildlife, (cont. from page 4)

plantings had not only survived, but thrived. Many of the pines are 20 feet or taller and other trees are 15-footers.

“Steve had said when we planted that we could expect 12 to 18 inches of growth a year,” Gerry recalls, “and we got that and more.”

The only species that didn’t do well were bird cherry trees, which Gerry notes are prolific in the garden around the house.

“Maybe they just don’t like the P-pines,” she said.

Gerry and Ron maintain a mile-long trail through their new forest and Gerry walks it every day to enjoy the trees and the wildlife they draw. Although the landscape around their house has long hosted a variety of birds and other wildlife, she says the forest has drawn some newcomers.

“We have both black-capped and mountain chickadees and wild turkeys now,” she said. “A small herd of elk, 12 to 18, are here in the winter. And we never saw raccoons or skunks before the forest.”

In another dozen years or so the 18-acre stand will likely need some

thinning. But beyond that, the Kruegers plan to protect the forest as long as they can. In 1995 when the project started, they secured an 80-year covenant to do just that, and were honored by WDFW for lifetime stewardship of wildlife habitat.



Students plant trees in Kruegers’ wheatfield in April 1995

Keep those nature connections, (cont. from page 1)

talking about the \$980 million generated in Washington annually from wildlife viewing alone.

At this year’s event, co-sponsored by CTED, the state Department of Transportation and Audubon Washington, participants learned that economic impact has increased by more than 50 percent. Now, spending by wildlife viewers generates nearly \$1.5 billion annually in Washington, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s 2006 survey.

But an even more important concept was discussed at the conference—that youngsters are disconnected from outdoor play and interest in nature. Concern over our children’s connection with nature has grown since author Richard Louv’s book, “Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder,” became a best seller last year. As our

lives become busier, and cities and suburbs grow, most youngsters no longer grow up with fields, woods and ponds close at hand, and the unstructured time to explore them.

Conference keynote speaker Martin LeBlanc, National Youth Education director for the Sierra Club in Seattle, discussed ways to remedy that “nature-deficit disorder” among youngsters.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife is also playing a part. We are working with public and private partners through the Pacific Education Institute (PEI) to help teachers present “on-the-ground” science and math lessons to students from kindergarten through high school.

Youngsters in these programs observe animals—from black bears to burrowing owls—in the field.

In the past year, PEI started

its first, full-time, high school environmental explorations course at the New Market Skills Center in Olympia, and plans to expand the course to all 10 skills centers statewide. Student “citizen science” is fostered by PEI through the NatureMapping Program and its network of 10 outdoor-learning centers involving 30,000 K-12 students in 90 school districts. Empirical research in the Tahoma School District is demonstrating that outdoor education improves student performance on state standards for math, writing and science and reduces high school drop-out rates.

On the home front, we can also help youngsters connect to the outdoors. During this season when nature is slowing down, I encourage you to take some time outside, and invite your young friends and relatives to join you.

Some wildlife is more colorful than others

University of Washington landscape architecture student Becky Chaney took this photo of a black-tailed deer in her front yard in Carnation and sent a copy with the following note to WDFW wildlife biologist Russell Link:

“I thought you might be interested in this photo I took of a young deer that we see in our neighborhood. Its coloring is quite unusual and we are assuming that it is some type of genetic mutation. The deer has been sighted just outside of Tolt McDonald Park (King County) for about a year and a half. The first time I saw it, it was tottering after its mother.”

It is a type of genetic mutation or defect in pigment cell differentiation, Russell says, that results in a “piebald,” or animal with spotted coloration.

“People often mistake these for albinos,” he said, “but that’s a complete lack of pigmentation.”

Piebalds occur from leucism, a mutation of genes characterized by reduced or incomplete pigmentation. Unlike albinism,



leucism causes a reduction in all types of skin pigment, not just melanin or dark pigments. Albinos also lack eye coloration while most leucistic animals have normally-colored eyes.

Piebald horses are commonly known as pintos or by breed, paints. Cows, dogs, cats, birds, snakes

and many other animals can have piebald coloration.

“While this colorful trait is bred for in some domestic animals,” Russell said, “piebalds in the wild are relatively rare because they can be easier marks for predators and the gene is not passed on.”

Kids grow with trees

Know a kid with a birthday this fall?

Mark the occasion in a unique way with a wildlife tree-planting ceremony on your property.

Have the birthday boy or girl hold the young tree upright while the planting hole is filled and take a snapshot of the operation.

Each birthday in future years can be celebrated with a visit to the new tree, reminding the birthday boy or girl of how much smaller - or bigger - than the tree they were when it was planted. Annual visits can also mark wildlife use of the tree - remnants of birds’ nests, nut or seed foraging by birds or squirrels, even trunk scars from gnawing, rubbing, scraping or climbing.

Each birthday can also be marked with the planting of another tree, continuing to increase the wildlife value of your property



Transplant now

If you've been thinking about re-arranging young trees or shrubs in your wildlife habitat landscape, now is the time to transplant.

Fall planting of trees and shrubs takes advantage of increased moisture and root system dormancy through winter to minimize transplant shock, give a headstart on spring growth, and increase resiliency through summer.

Deciduous trees and shrubs are best transplanted after they have dropped the leaves in late fall or early winter. Evergreen trees or shrubs can be transplanted earlier, as long as they are not currently putting on new growth.

Before the first ground-hardening frost, carefully dig up the transplant's root system, including plenty of surrounding soil to avoid cutting too many roots. To prevent damaging the rootball, transport it to the new planting hole using a wheel barrow or pulling it to the new site on a tarp.



Photo by Jim Cummins

Dig a planting hole no deeper or wider than the root system so the top of the transplant's soil is an inch above the surrounding ground. Planting too deep can create future problems. Water regularly until the ground freezes.

At time of planting, you can lightly prune needle and broadleaf evergreens of crowded branches to strengthen the frame and help the

plant withstand snow accumulation.

Young trees or shrubs are best protected from deer or other wildlife damage by fencing with wire. If they are too big or too many for fencing, try one of the methods described in WDFW's "Living with Washington's Wildlife" series at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/deer.htm>.

Evergreen State is full of mulch

Mulching wildlife plants in the fall is a good way to protect your habitat investment, and our "Evergreen State" is full of natural mulch.

The pine needles and leaves dropped by Washington's many trees at this time of year make a great winter mulch. A four to 12-inch layer of them around the base of plants acts like building insulation or a protective blanket.

Mulch prevents alternate freezing and thawing that may heave shallow-rooted plants out of the ground, a problem especially serious with dense soils. Mulch can also protect the soil from the impact of heavy rain that can cause drainage problems.

Mulches are a labor-saving device for gardeners any time of year. A layer of needles, leaves, straw, or other mulch materials can prevent the germination of many weed seeds and reduce the need for cultivation or use of herbicides.

Mulch also improves the soil by adding organic matter as it decomposes. It also may encourage the growth of worms and other soil organisms that improve soil structure and the availability of nutrients for plants.

For more on composting autumn leaves, see <http://lighterfootstep.com/autumn-leaves-are-coming-get-ready-to-compost.html>.

Backyard Forest Stewardship Program

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has a program for people who own a home in the woods and those who own small forested parcels "from 10 trees to 10 acres."

The Backyard Forest Stewardship Program features a "how to" kit with information on tree planting, fish and wildlife habitat, thinning and pruning, wildfire safety, hazard trees, forest health, safe debris burning, and more.

Call 1-888-STEWKIT or e-mail forest_stewardship@wadnr.gov to have a kit mailed to you.

Personalize special license plates now

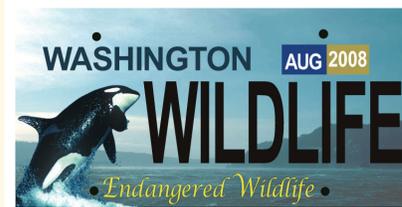
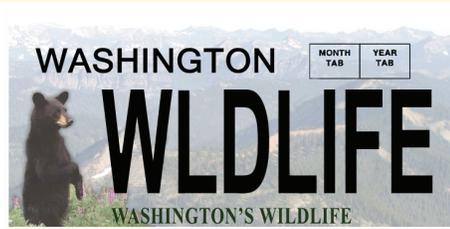
As of October 1, Washington's special wildlife picture motor vehicle license plates can be personalized, or vice versa.

If you currently have a personalized plate – one with your choice of a letter or number combination to spell a name or message of some kind – you can now have that personal combination on a special wildlife picture plate.

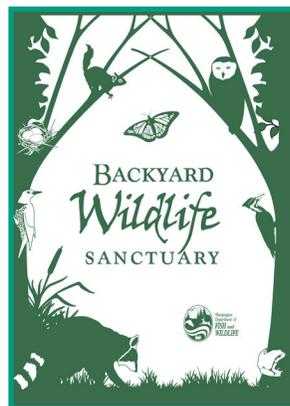
If you currently have a special wildlife picture plate (bald eagle, killer whale, elk, black bear, or mule deer), you can now request a personalized letter or number combination on that plate.

Proceeds from the extra fees for both kinds of plates, personalized and special, go toward wildlife conservation. Personalized plates specifically support non-game wildlife activities, and the bald eagle plate proceeds are dedicated to wildlife viewing projects.

For more information see http://wdfw.wa.gov/license_plates/index.htm.



www.wdfw.wa.gov/license_plates/index.htm



WDFW Backyard Sanctuary Program
<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/index>



Washington Watchable Wildlife
<http://wdfw.wa.gov/viewing/wildview.htm>

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