

Crossing Paths



WITH WILDLIFE IN WASHINGTON TOWNS AND CITIES Summer 2008

Thank you for welcoming wildlife

By Jeff Koenings, Ph.D., WDFW Director

Property owners involved in the Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary program know better than most that some conflicts with wildlife are inevitable.

Sooner or later, a raccoon raids the pet food, a deer munches the roses, a skunk turns your crawl space into a maternity ward.

People who welcome wildlife to their property know that while many of these conflicts are preventable – or at least manageable – some just come with the territory.

That “territory” is a state blessed with some of the most diverse fish and wildlife species on earth, and people who enjoy them.

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Golf courses can provide wildlife habitat

Whether playing golf this summer or not, ever wonder if all the green acreage of golf courses in your community could be providing wildlife habitat?

Although the potential has only recently been studied, it's not a new idea.

In 1930, the National Association of Audubon Societies published a “Golf Clubs as Bird Sanctuaries” booklet to assist clubs in “attracting and holding desirable wild birds.”

The Association's Arthur A. Allen of New York City wrote “The majority of golfers may not realize that their clubs are ideally situated for giving sanctuary to birds without the slightest inconvenience to the game. It is a mistaken notion that a bird sanctuary must be a large area covered with a tangle of bushes and vines – a real jungle. The places in this country which

are richest in bird life are those that combine open areas with clumps of shrubbery or single bushes. The edges of woodlands shelter far more birds than the center of the woods, and pasture lots dotted with thorn apples, dogwoods, and mulberries support still greater numbers.”

Allen contended that with a water source and dead trees or bird houses for cavity-nesters, golf clubs that included such tree and shrub arrangements could be ideal for birds. “Clubs lacking in any of these features can, with comparatively little expense, provide substitutes that will be equally attractive, and thus in fairly short time build up a bird population that rivals that of any bird sanctuary in the country,” he wrote.

That basic idea, now coupled with concerns about pesticide use, water

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conservation, and sustainability in general, has been explored for the past decade.

One of the latest studies about managing golf courses as wildlife habitat, by biology graduate student Ryan Burdge and professor Daniel Cristol of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, is featured in the Spring 2008 edition of The Wildlife Society's "Wildlife Professional" publication.

Burdge and Cristol say that despite skeptics, the potential value of golf courses increases as remaining natural habitats are lost to development.

"Whereas privately-owned natural lands may fall to the bulldozer at any time," they write, "profitable golf courses are more permanent fixtures in the developed landscape... (and) whatever shortcomings they have as wildlife habitat may be correctable."

Although most of what's known about wildlife use of golf courses comes from studies of birds, Burdge and Cristol note a diversity of other wildlife can benefit, too. Wolves readily used a wildlife corridor added to a course in Canada, leading to reduced damage by elk. Salamander dispersal was not impeded by fairways and predator-free ponds, and some courses can provide breeding habitat for other vulnerable amphibians.

Birders as far back as Allen are familiar with the abundance of neotropical migrant songbird use of golf courses and other urban parklands. But Burdge and Cristol note that nesting and reproduction may be no greater, if not less, than other habitats due to pesticide use with intensive turf management and elevated predation in fragmented woodlands. For example, insect prey bases may be reduced enough by insecticides to affect survival of nestlings.

They also note that many birds on golf courses tend to be "disturbance-adaptable" species often associated



with urban environments, rather than species of conservation concern. The Canada goose, for one, has "adapted" to golf courses a bit too well in many places (see story on urban-rural goose study on page 6.)

"While golf courses cannot yet be considered adequate replacement habitat for displaced wildlife," conclude Burdge and Cristol, "they may play a role in mitigating habitat loss."

These researchers recommend some design and management changes to improve golf courses for wildlife:

- Bigger out-of-play or rough areas, particularly forested, wetland and riparian, using native vegetation;
- Less chemical use, particularly during breeding season;
- Use of specific, research-based recommendations for local species of concern.

"In the end, golf courses are designed for golfers, not wildlife," Burdge and Cristol write.

"Conservation benefits will always be secondary to industry interests, but it may be possible to integrate sport and conservation in ways that benefit both."

They note that programs such as the U.S. Golf Association's Wildlife Links grants http://www.usga.org/turf/environmental_programs/wild_links_program/wild_links_program.html and Audubon International's Cooperative Sanctuary Program

for Golf Courses (<http://www.auduboninternational.org/programs/acss/golf.htm>) arose in the last decade from the industry's desire to change public perception by reducing environmental impacts.

Both programs advocate reduced chemical use, water conservation, water quality management, and other practices that protect and enhance natural resources.

Audubon International certifies golf courses as committed to these principles, including the following Washington courses:

- Bellevue Golf Course, Bellevue
- Classic Golf Club, Spanaway
- Everett Golf and Country Club, Everett
- Glendale Country Club, Bellevue
- McCormick Woods Golf Course, Port Orchard
- Port Ludlow Golf Course, Port Ludlow
- Royal Oaks Country Club, Vancouver
- Semiahmoo Golf and Country Club, Blaine
- TPC Snoqualmie Ridge, Snoqualmie
- Useless Bay Golf and Country Club, Langlely
- Whidbey Golf and Country Club, Oak Harbor

Audubon International also certifies golf courses under development in their Gold, Silver or Bronze "Signature Program" if they are designed with designated levels of environmental standards. One of Washington's newest golf courses, which opened last summer -- Chambers Bay at University Place along the shores of Puget Sound - - obtained the Silver Signature status. Featuring old-style "links", open and near the seashore with natural vegetation, it will host the 2010 U.S. Amateur and 2015 U.S. Open Championships.

Thank you for welcoming wildlife, cont. from page 1

Of course, there are circumstances where wildlife can become a threat to people's property or personal safety. In these cases, WDFW is prepared to intervene. Our deer/elk conflict specialists work with agricultural producers to address crop damage problems. Our enforcement officers work with other rural landowners and recreationists to resolve issues with black bears and cougars.

But for every one of those situations, there are dozens of routine "nuisance" wildlife scenarios playing out every day from Seattle to Spokane.

We hear about some of them. Our customer service specialists are busy throughout the summer explaining to callers that if they keep the pet

food inside, close up the crawl space, or cultivate rhododendrons instead of roses, future conflicts can be prevented.

Sometimes, they refer callers to private Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators or steer them to the "self-help" information available on our "Living With Wildlife" webpage (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/index.htm>.) But most Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary managers are familiar with that information, and take life with Washington's wildlife in stride.

They know that some wildlife lived in their space long before they did.

They know that wild animals are just doing what comes naturally – following their survival instincts

to meet needs for food, water and shelter.

They know that when they invite wildlife onto their property with landscaping or supplemental feeding, they can sometimes get too much of a good thing.

They take it in stride, because they know that sharing your space with wildlife is one of the reasons they live here.

So, to backyard wildlife sanctuary managers and everyone who makes room for wildlife in their lives, I say thank you. We at WDFW appreciate all that you do on your property for wildlife, and your willingness to safely deal with the inevitable conflicts that arise.

Thank you, in short, for your dedication to Washington's wildlife.

Tell the world you're pesticide free with a sign

Want a way to identify your home landscape as being free from toxic pesticides?

The Washington Toxics Coalition (WTC) Pesticide Free Zone is a project to mark unsprayed landscapes with free, sturdy, attractive signs.

The eight-inch diameter aluminum signs are permanent and have two mounting holes that allow them to be attached to a stake, fence, or wall or hung from a wire.

Getting a free sign is easy. Just sign a pledge committing to put up your sign, avoid the use of toxic pesticides, and talk to at least three people about pesticide-free gardening.

You can sign the pledge on the WTC website, www.watoxics.org, or call 206-632-1545 Ext. 112 and request that a pledge card be mailed to you. Once your signed pledge is received by WTC, you will

receive your free sign in the mail, along with three fact sheets: *What's Wrong with Pesticides?*, *Talking to your Neighbors about Pesticides*, and the *Pesticide Free Zone Sign Owner's Manual*.

Ideally, pesticide free means that no chemical pest controls at all are used. But if you use organically certified or EPA-exempt pesticides, you can still put up a sign. Examples of such pesticides are insecticidal and herbicidal soaps, vinegar-based weed killers, and iron phosphate slug bait. WTC has a list of acceptable products, as well as information on safer methods of pest control, available on their website.



WTC thanks you for showing the world that beautiful gardens can be maintained without toxic pesticides!

Cornell's "NestWatch" seeks participants

What could be cuter than baby birds all atwitter in the nest?

But amid the "oohs" and "aahs" are real data about the rhythms of bird biology and how they may be changing as the result of human activity.

Combine the "wow" factor of the former with the scientific value of the latter and you have NestWatch a new, free citizen science project developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in collaboration with

the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and funded by the National Science Foundation.

Participants visit nests during spring and summer to collect simple information about location, habitat, species, number of eggs, and number of young in the nest, and then submit observations online.

Anyone who's been keeping nest records on their own in the past is also invited to put that important information to use through the

NestWatch project. Such historical information will help scientists track changes in reproductive timing and fledging success, which may be linked to climate change.

All NestWatch materials and instructions are available online at <http://watch.birds.cornell.edu/nest/home/index>, including directions on how to find nests and how to monitor them without disturbing the birds.



Bewick's Wrens hatching

Ask the biologist

Do treefrogs really climb trees?

What are coyotes communicating with their calls?

Do I need to have native plants in my wildlife garden?

If you've got a question, send it to "Crossing Paths" editor Madonna Luers (luersmel@dfw.wa.gov) and look for an answer from the experts in this newsletter space next edition.



“Celebrate Urban Birds!” project reaches all ages



Nature has the power to soothe and enthuse.

More people are finding that out as they join the free, year round “Celebrate Urban Birds!” citizen science project from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

One girl changed her mind about city birds after taking part in the project: “At first I didn’t like urban birds,” she said. “I thought of them as pests. Then I realized that they are just like me and other kids. We are ignored, or people just see us as pests, or don’t see us at all. But if you look a little deeper you can see that on the inside we are pretty unique and cool!”

People of all ages and backgrounds participate in “Celebrate Urban Birds!” through gardening, cultural activities and

citizen science – all reaping the benefits of a closer connection to the natural world and a new appreciation for city birds.

For the citizen science part of the project, participants watch city birds for 10 minutes, check off 15 target species of birds, and send the information through the mail or the Internet to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Once enough data are gathered, scientists hope to learn more about how birds survive in cities and how they use urban green spaces such as parks, rooftop gardens, and even potted plants on balconies for food, resting sites, and shelter.

Individuals can participate on their own or through public events organized by local groups. “Celebrate Urban Birds!” has partnered with more than 2,000 organizations to hold special “birdy” events featuring the arts, science, gardening, or other ways to draw people into bird study and observation.

While supplies last, everyone who signs up will receive a “Celebrate

Urban Birds!” kit in English and Spanish with two colorful urban birds posters, educational materials about birds and urban greening, a data form, and a packet of sunflower seeds to plant in pots and gardens.

Teachers find that the 10 minute bird observation can be done within a class period, and it reinforces math, reading, scientific, artistic, and team building skills. One teacher noted, “Our group of middle school boys was impressed with being able to help with a project sponsored by a university.”

Some groups go beyond a single event by greening their neighborhood, creating habitat for birds on balconies, rooftops, front stoops, or community spaces. Others are tapping into the arts, creating dances, drawings, murals, sculptures, puppet shows, and short films based on city birds.

See the “Celebrate Urban Birds!” website <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/celebration> for more information on getting started.



Fidalgo Island/Anacortes strives to be Wildlife Habitat Community

Fidalgo Island/Anacortes area backyard wildlife enthusiasts are looking for 40 more neighbors to join an effort to make certification as a Wildlife Habitat Community this summer.

The designation is through the National Wildlife Federation’s Backyard Wildlife Habitat program, which works in partnership with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary program.

“We need just 40 more yards certified in either program by August to make the total 500 yards needed for the community certification,” explained Rich Vinyard, who has spent considerable time canvassing neighbors on behalf of wildlife habitat. “Our current 460 members could put us over the top just by talking over their fences to un-enrolled neighbors.”

Program application forms are available at a community wildlife habitat display in the downstairs 800 section of the Anacortes library, or on-line at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/> or <https://secure.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/certify/dspPartners.cfm>.

Goose marking to compare eastern WA urban, rural birds

This summer WDFW biologists and volunteers captured and marked up to 500 Canada geese in six eastern Washington locations to compare migration, reproduction and hunter-harvest of urban and rural-dwelling birds.

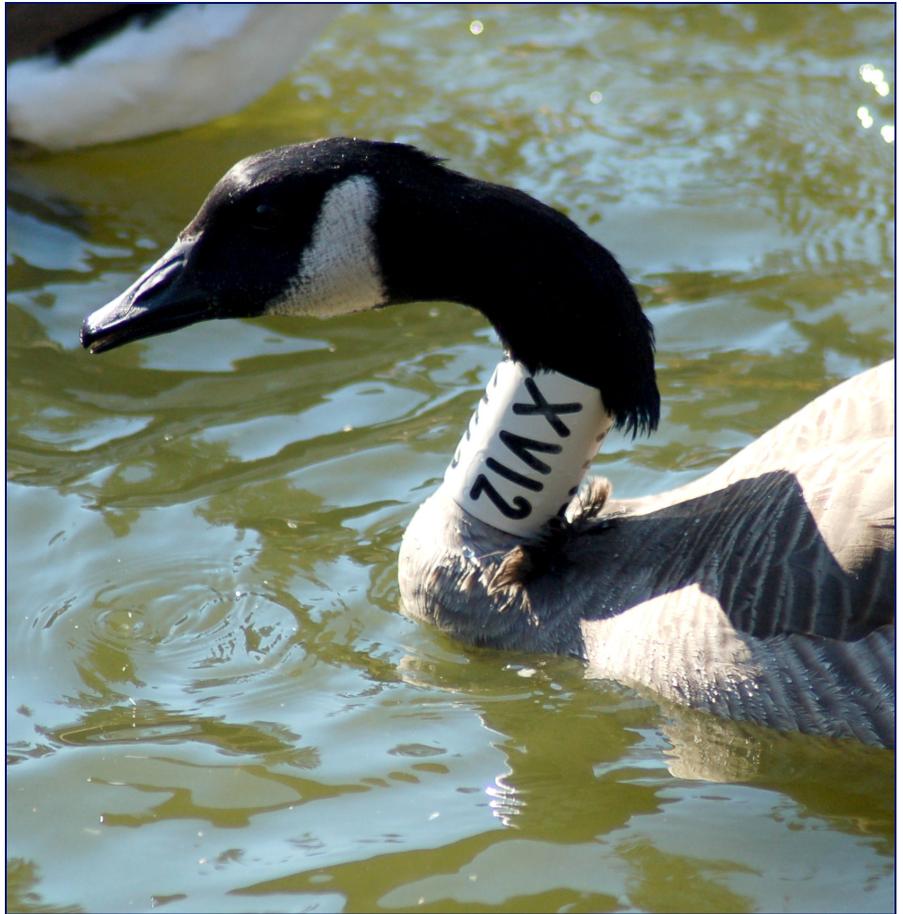
The geese were captured during the molt when they're unable to fly using drive boats and mobile trapping panels at Sprague Lake, Potholes Reservoir, Lake Roosevelt/Upper Columbia River near Kettle Falls, Tri-Cities, Yakima, and Spokane. All were marked with numbered aluminum leg bands and adult geese received coded (numbered and lettered) white neck collars.

WDFW state waterfowl specialist Mikal Moore of Ephrata explained that waterfowl hunters report the bands when geese are harvested, but the highly-visible collars can be reported by anyone. Recapturing the geese at the same locations over the next five years will provide wildlife managers with information on annual survival, a critical measure of population stability.

“Other recent research suggests that small Canada goose sub-species, Lesser and Taverner’s, may be in danger of being over-harvested in the Columbia Basin,” Moore said. “This study will allow us to compare harvest rates between local and migratory geese and help determine if small Canada geese are more vulnerable to harvest. We haven’t examined locally breeding Canada geese in eastern Washington for at least 15 years, and we’ve never looked at the urban goose population as a whole.”

Moore noted that some Canada geese readily live close to people, eliciting both delight with opportunities for close-up wildlife watching and frustration with the nuisance of abundant goose droppings in parks and other areas.

“We love them or hate them or something in between,” she said.



Last year Moore worked with federal Wildlife Services staff to mark geese in the Spokane urban area to begin to learn if the birds are year-round residents or migratory. Urban goose numbers can become unmanageable when not exposed to predators, hunting, migration stress, and other factors that limit populations. If geese are year-round residents, she explained, nuisance problems can be addressed with hazing or removal.

Part of the new five-year study is an extension of that effort, Moore said. It will also shed light on fall movement patterns, spring production, and hunter harvest – all which can guide management decisions and hunting regulations.

“Our September goose hunting season focuses on local populations based on annual spring production estimates,” Moore said. “Those estimates are based on a combination of nesting effort and breeding pair counts, and they have been dropping in rural areas while complaints about overabundant urban geese have been rising.”

Moore said that because fall movements of urban Canada geese are assumed to be more restricted than geese that breed in more remote locations, urban geese may be less subject to hunter harvest.

Reports of band or collar codes, along with locations and dates, should be made to U.S. Geological Services Bird banding Laboratory at 1-800-327-BAND or online at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/homepage/call800.htm>.

Summer reruns include West Nile virus concerns

Summertime means mosquitoes are buzzing and raising concerns again about West Nile virus, for both people and wildlife.

According to the Washington Department of Health, no people contracted the mosquito-transmitted disease last summer in Washington — but eight horses, one bird, and one dog tested positive for the virus in Yakima County.

“We’ve been fortunate that West Nile virus hasn’t hit our state hard, but the virus is here in birds and mosquitoes,” said Gregg Grunenfelder of the Department’s environmental health division. “As we’ve seen in Idaho and Oregon, this virus can make a lot of people sick — or worse — so preventing mosquito bites is the best way to avoid infection.”

The best ways to avoid mosquito bites are:

- Stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active (dusk to dawn)
- Make sure screens on doors and windows are working properly
- Cover exposed skin with light colored clothing when outside in the evening
- Use an effective repellent on exposed skin

The best ways to reduce mosquito larvae habitat are:

- Dump standing water around the home
- Change water in birdbaths, fountains, wading pools, animal troughs, and other sources once or twice a week.

West Nile infection can be very serious, and even fatal, for some people. While most people bitten by a mosquito carrying West Nile virus don’t become ill, some may have

mild to severe flu-like symptoms. A small number of people may develop a serious neurological disease. People over 50 and those with compromised immune systems are at greater risk for serious illness.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is concerned with the impact of West Nile virus on wildlife populations, both directly from the disease and from pesticides used to control mosquitoes.

At least 140 species of birds, including songbirds, hawks, owls, eagles, waterfowl, woodpeckers and hummingbirds, have tested positive for West Nile virus in the United States. At least 77 of those species are found in Washington.

Corvids (ravens, crows, jays, magpies, etc.) are the group most commonly affected. (See http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/research/west_nile/wnvaffected.html for a list of wildlife species that have tested positive for West Nile virus elsewhere in the country.)

Besides birds, some free-ranging mammal species, including caribou, squirrels, wolves, bear, and deer, have tested positive for the virus.

WDFW is working closely with the Department of Health, the lead state agency for WNV investigations, to document the identity and distribution of species impacted by West Nile virus in Washington.

Although scientists are working to develop vaccines that could potentially be administered to wild animals, it is not feasible to capture a significant portion of Washington’s wildlife for multi-dose vaccinations. Some zoo facilities, however, have vaccinated their captive birds against the virus.

The presence of dead birds in an area may be an indicator that WNV is present. Public health workers in Washington conduct dead bird surveillance from late spring to fall, when mosquitoes are most active.

If you find a dead bird, or if you notice more dead birds in an area than you consider normal, please take the following actions:

- Report the information promptly to your local health department; birds that have been dead less than 48 hours provide the best samples for testing.
- Be prepared to share information about the bird(s)’ specific location, including the distance to the nearest town, road or other landmark, and your name and phone number.
- Leave the bird in place on the ground and report its location; if you choose to collect the specimen, use a shovel or wear gloves to place it in two plastic bags (do not handle with bare hands)
- Keep the specimen in an ice chest or refrigerator that is not used for food or place plastic bags of ice or cool packs over the bird and cover it with a bucket.

Horses are also susceptible to West Nile virus, but vaccines and an annual booster can protect them. Horse owners should contact a veterinarian to learn about vaccinating horses against West Nile virus.

More information on West Nile virus is available at www.doh.wa.gov/WNV or by calling the Department of Health’s toll-free phone line, 1-866-78VIRUS.

Pend Oreille County birding map available

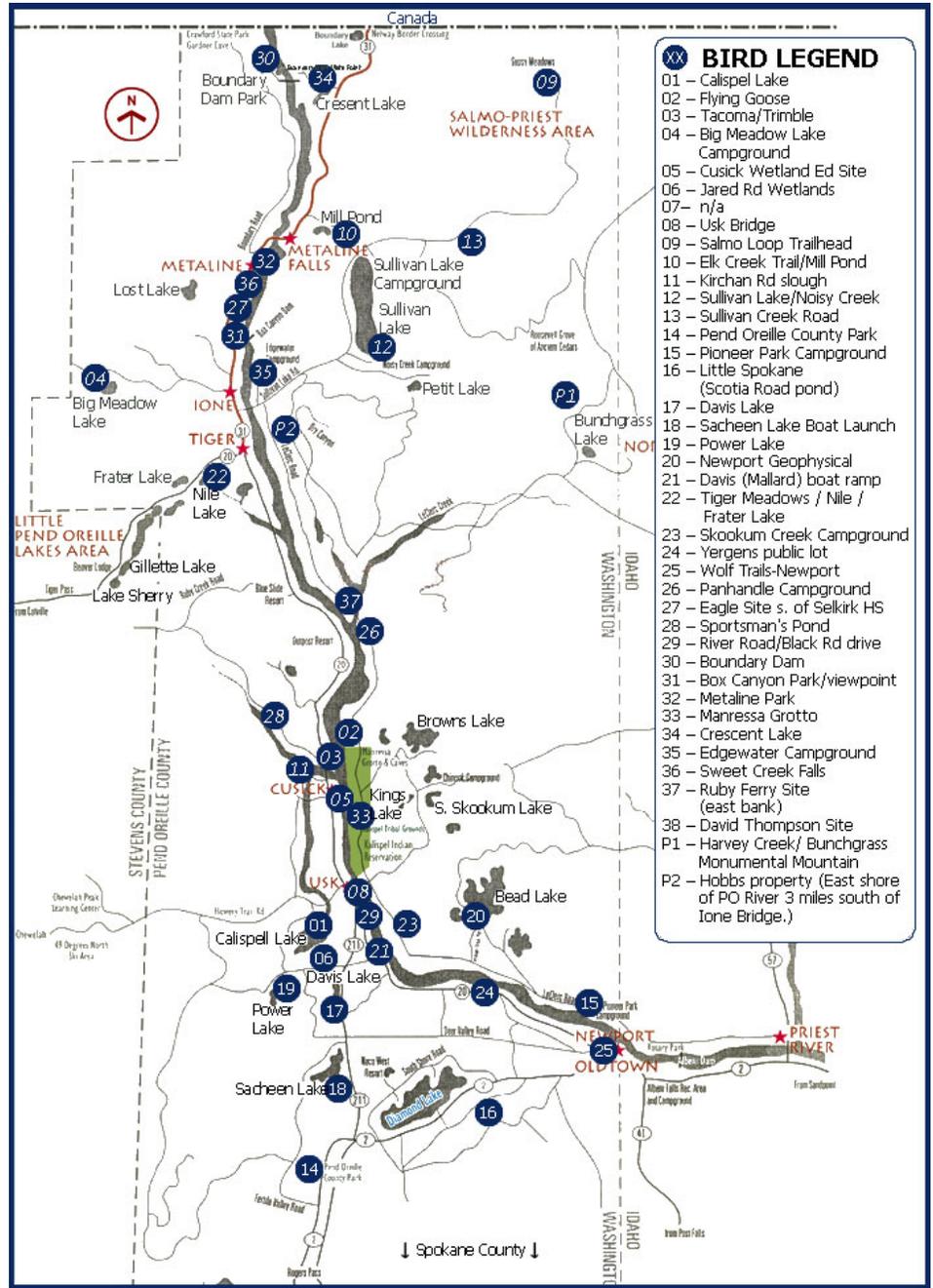
A map of 40 bird-watching spots throughout Pend Oreille County is now available through the Pend Oreille River Tourism Alliance (PORTA) website at <http://www.porta-us.com/birding.html>.



PORTA Executive Director Susan Harris says the birding trail is an extension of the Washington section of the North Pend Oreille Scenic Byway/International Selkirk Loop.

Pend Oreille County hosts a great diversity of birds and other wildlife, including an annual spring migration stopover of thousands of tundra swans in the Calispel Lake area near the Pend Oreille River. PORTA co-hosted a Tundra Swan Celebration this Spring with the Kalispel Tribe Natural Resources Department.

A free DVD of the swans and the celebration is available through Harris at susan@porta.us.com and a video sample can be accessed through the website.



This program receives Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is the policy of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to adhere to the following: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability and sex (in educational programs). If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, please contact the WDFW ADA Coordinator at 600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, Washington 98501-1091 or write to:

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