

Crossing Paths



WITH WILDLIFE IN WASHINGTON TOWNS AND CITIES

Winter 2006

Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy finalized

By Dr. Jeff Koenings, WDFW Director

Over a year ago in this column I told you about our work to develop a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) that identifies wildlife and habitats in greatest need in our state and helps keep common species common.

I asked you then for your input in that strategy development and I thank those of you who took the time to review our draft plans.

Now I'm proud to tell you that we submitted our final CWCS to the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and its National Advisory Acceptance Team. Our CWCS was accepted, which makes us eligible for new federal grants to implement projects on the ground across the state.

Development of our CWCS paralleled our assessments of nine ecoregions within Washington – Northwest Coast, Puget Trough, North Cascades, West Cascades, East Cascades, Okanogan, Canadian Rocky Mountains, Blue Mountains, and Columbia Plateau.

Those assessments, including establishment of conservation targets and biodiversity mapping, should be completed this year. They will build on our CWCS by

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Take precautions with bird feeders

With avian influenza in the news, some bird watchers have begun to wonder if their backyard feeders could present a health risk.

Animal disease experts say it's highly unlikely that finches, chickadees, juncos and other birds attracted to backyard feeders carry the strain of avian flu that is making headlines. That highly pathogenic strain, known as HPAI H5N1, has killed domestic poultry and more than 60 people in Asia.

In fact, there are no known cases anywhere in the world of humans contracting HPAI H5N1 from wild birds. Waterfowl do carry various strains of avian influenza, but no trace of the highly pathogenic strain has been found in either wild or domestic birds in North America.

Even so, wildlife professionals recommend that birders take several precautions to reduce the risk of



Photograph by Keaton Everitt

contracting any disease borne by birds and other wildlife:

- Avoid handling wild birds that are obviously sick or found dead.
- Wear rubber gloves while filling or cleaning bird feeders.
- Disinfect bird feeders periodically with a 10 percent solution of chlorine bleach and dry thoroughly.
- Wash hands with soap and water

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Enroll your property as a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary

Some of you reading this are likely not enrolled in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS) program, now that this newsletter is available over our Internet website to all browsers, and by e-mail notification to those who sign up.

“Crossing Paths with Wildlife in Washington’s Cities and Towns” began in 1992 as the newsletter of the BWS program, which began in 1985 to help urban and suburban property owners create habitat for wildlife.

The BWS program is an outreach effort with a how-to packet about landscaping for wildlife, supplemental feeding, and other information, available for \$5 through WDFW’s two urban-centered regional offices in

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Winterize your backyard pond

Backyard wildlife sanctuaries with ponds require a little “winterization” to continue attracting wildlife, allow stocked fish to survive, and protect the pond structure.

During freezing weather, keep some open water for wildlife drinking and bathing and to prevent ice expansion damage to concrete surfaces.

There are a number of ways, from high to low technology, to keep your pond from icing over completely:

- Use a thermostatically controlled submersible heater, such as a birdbath de-icer or a stock tank heater available at farm supply stores, to keep the pond water just above freezing.
- If the pond is equipped with a fountain or filter pump, keep it on through the winter to keep water moving. Raise the inlet to within a foot of the surface to avoid recycling the warmer water at the pond bottom, where fish overwinter.
- Use a small, inexpensive aquarium pump designed to oxygenate water

in a fish tank to create air bubbles. House the pump in a convenient shed, run a length of plastic piping to the pond, and fix the end about one foot below the water surface. Air bubbles will keep just enough of the surface clear of ice to let gases escape that can suffocate fish, and to provide a couple of birds a place for a bath.

- Float some small black rubber balls, pieces of dark wood, or dark-colored styrofoam on the pond water. Black objects like these will absorb more heat and help keep the water open. In-water objects may also help prevent ice-expansion damage to concrete pond walls.
- Cover part of the pond with either plywood or plastic, leaving areas open for air circulation, or leaves or straw.

If you have fish in your pond, they can survive the winter months by living at the bottom of the pond. There is nearly always room



beneath ice where fish can hibernate.

The potential although rare problem is not that fish will freeze, but that the ice may trap toxic gases so that the fish suffocate. You can cut a hole in the ice of a frozen pond to release gases and let oxygen in. In doing so, don’t bang on the ice — the sharp sound may give fish a concussion and kill them. Use an ice auger to cut a hole.

Keep snow brushed off an iced over pond to allow light to reach pond plants.

For the most part, avoid disturbing the hibernating life forms in and around your pond during the winter.

Take precautions with bird feeders (cont. from page 1)

or alcohol wipes immediately after filling or cleaning bird feeders.

“It always makes sense to follow basic sanitary procedures when handling wild birds and bird feeders,” said Dr. Kristin Mansfield, veterinarian for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

Mansfield noted that migratory waterfowl along the Pacific Flyway are being closely monitored for avian influenza viruses and the Washington Department of Fish and

Wildlife (WDFW) is working with wildlife professionals in Alaska, British Columbia and California to track the results. WDFW also is testing small populations of wild birds as opportunities arise in conjunction with other, planned wildlife management activities.

In addition, WDFW routinely investigates reports of multiple wild bird deaths, sending tissue samples to Washington State University for disease testing. Mansfield asks that people report multiple-bird deaths – including their location, date of

discovery and other details – to WDFW by calling 509-998-2023 or 509-892-1001, ext. 326.

For information see WDFW’s avian flu factsheet at http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/avian_flu.htm or check the following websites:

- USGS National Wildlife Health Center
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Washington Department of Health
- Centers For Disease Control and Prevention

What is this thing called suet?

Most Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary managers who provide supplemental feed for birds include suet on their winter menu, knowing that it's a good high-energy substitute for insect-eating birds at a time when insects are scarce.

But do you know what suet actually is, and the differences between commercially available suet products and the "raw" kind?

Suet is the hard fat surrounding beef kidneys. It is inexpensive, or sometimes even free, available from butchers and many grocery store meat counters.

If the temperature outside is below 70 degrees, you can simply place chunks of this raw suet in a plastic mesh bag, wire basket, or some other kind of feeder for use by everything from brown creepers to woodpeckers.

If outside temperatures rise above 70 degrees, raw suet may become rancid and melt. That's when you need to either do some processing of the suet, or buy manufactured suet cakes.

Suet must be "rendered" to make it less prone to spoilage and melting. Rendering is a process of cooking the suet to melt it down, and straining it to remove bits of meat. (Those bits of meat are what spoil suet or make it rancid.) Once the melted, strained suet is cooled, it can be frozen for later use. If you re-melt it and strain it again, it becomes harder and will not melt as easily.

If all of that sounds like a lot of work, you can buy lard, which is rendered animal fat (not necessarily beef), or prepared bird-feeding suet cakes. Some commercial suet cakes have bird seed and other ingredients added, either as extra enticements for the birds, or to reduce the amount of actual fat so they can be used year-round without problems. Check package information and recommendations for use and storage.

A warm-weather alternative to suet is peanut butter, although there's some debate about whether the sugar and preservatives found in

some peanut butter is healthy for birds.

Hang raw or minimally processed suet in the shade when temperatures might temporarily rise above that 70 degree cutoff to reduce chances of spoilage. Keep it out of the reach of dogs or cats, or you will be going through a lot of suet (and possibly digestion problems with your pet!)

Starlings are also very fond of suet. To discourage these non-native competitors, offer suet in a feeder that requires birds to feed hanging upside down (a covered cage accessed from the bottom only.) Woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches and other birds that cling to tree bark to feed on insects, will reach the suet easily, but starlings generally will not. Hungry, persistent starlings can be creative, however; some will flutter up and knock pieces of suet out of such feeders with their bills, then feed on the ground below.



If you like the idea of making your own suet, and adding ingredients you have on hand, try the following recipes:

Soft Suet Medley

- 4 1/2 cups ground fresh suet
 - 3/4 cup dried and fine ground bakery goods (whole-wheat or cracked-wheat bread or crackers are best)
 - 1/2 cup shelled sunflower seeds
 - 1/4 cup millet
 - 1/4 cup dried and chopped fruit (currants, raisins, or berries)
 - 3/4 cup dried and fine ground meat (optional)
1. Melt suet in a saucepan over low heat.
 2. Mix the rest of the ingredients together in a large bowl.
 3. Allow the suet to cool until slightly thickened, then stir it into the mixture in the bowl. Mix thoroughly.
 4. Pour or pack into forms or suet feeders; smear onto tree trunks or overhanging limbs and branches; or pack into pine cones.

Hard Suet Tidbit Cakes

- 1/2 lb. fresh ground suet
 - 1/3 cup sunflower seed
 - 2/3 cup wild bird seed (mix)
 - 1/8 cup chopped peanuts
 - 1/4 cup raisins
1. Melt suet in a saucepan over low heat. Allow it to cool thoroughly, then reheat it.
 2. Mix the rest of the ingredients together in a large bowl.
 3. Allow the suet to cool until slightly thickened, then stir it into the mixture in the bowl. Mix thoroughly.
 4. Pour into pie pan or form, or pack into suet feeders.
- Optional or substitute ingredients: millet (or other birdseed), cornmeal, cooked noodles, chopped berries, dried fruit.

What about those neighbors' cats?



A BWS manager wrote us last fall that the only problem with her sanctuary, which is visited daily by at least 50 birds of five species, is the neighbor's cats.

"I wish the cats could read my sanctuary sign, or at least get their masters to," she wrote. "How do you tell your neighbors, ever so politely, that their cats should not be let loose to hunt?"

We advise appealing to a cat owner's regard for their pets by relaying this information about cat health and safety from the Humane Society of the United States: Cats kept indoors have at least triple the lifespan of cats allowed outdoors. Free-roaming cats are injured or die from motor vehicle collisions, attacks by other animals, accidental poisoning or trapping, and parasites and diseases.

If you can get your neighbors' attention with that information, maybe you can talk to them about

the damage cats can do to wildlife. Studies have shown that a free-roaming cat kills at least one wild animal every month. With more than 60 million cats in this country, and Seattle neighborhoods averaging at least 30 cats per block, that's potentially a lot of wildlife kills.

Cats injure far more birds and other wildlife than they kill, too. Washington wildlife rehabilitators report at least 17 percent of all injuries they deal with are caused by cats.

Many cat lovers don't believe their pets hunt or hurt anything, or they believe that de-clawing or equipping a cat with a bell will take care of it. The truth is cats hunt instinctively and you cannot teach them not to hunt. De-clawed cats simply bat down their prey and bells don't work because wild animals don't associate them with danger.

There's lots more information about how to keep a cat happy indoors at the American Bird Conservancy's webpage on their "Cats Indoors!" campaign at <http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/>, and in both WDFW's books, "Living with Wildlife" and "Landscaping for Wildlife," available at WDFW offices and through http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/books_link.htm.

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary (cont. from page 1)

Seattle (Mill Creek) and Spokane. Those who complete the habitat inventory included in the packet and return it with a \$5 enrollment fee receive a BWS weather-proof yard sign and frameable certificate, and are added to our mailing list.

This newsletter was originally printed and mailed only to those who enrolled in the program. Most of the content is about managing a backyard wildlife sanctuary, although we also include a wide variety of information of interest to all wildlife viewing and appreciation enthusiasts who don't fish or hunt.

A few years ago we began providing an electronic copy of the newsletter for BWS enrollees who wanted to help us save paper and mailing costs, or simply preferred to read it on-line. Starting with last fall's edition, we shifted to an all-electronic newsletter (which can be downloaded and printed out for those who prefer something in hand), due to tight staff and goods and services budgets.

If you are a new reader of "Crossing Paths" and not enrolled in the BWS program, we encourage you to learn and involve yourself more by obtaining the extensive information packet and certifying your property with a yard sign and certificate. All details are at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/>.

"Nature-deficit disorder" author to speak in Spokane Valley

If you think your kids or grandkids aren't playing outside enough, you'll want to catch Richard Louv's talk in Spokane Valley this March.

Canadian Richard Louv, who wrote "*Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*," will be the keynote speaker at the annual Environmental Education Association of Washington (EEAW) conference at the Mirabeau Park Hotel on Sullivan Road in Spokane Valley, March 23-25.

The conference is designed for teachers, youth leaders, and others interested in environmental education, but the Thursday, March 23 "Evening with Richard Louv" (including dinner and musical entertainment after the talk), will be open to the public for \$50 tickets purchased by February 20. For more information see http://www.eeaw.org/conference/index_html.

For more information on Louv's book, see http://eartheasy.com/bookreview_Last_Child_in_Woods.htm.

Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy finalized (cont. from page 1)

zeroing in on the funded actions that show the most promise for long-range, cost-effective conservation.

This dual process has greatly refined the scope and breadth of our efforts. An initial list of thousands of species classified as wildlife in Washington was systematically narrowed to about 700, then down to about 200 species of greatest conservation need and their associated habitats.

Some of these species are in need because their numbers are so low, and others are still fairly common in some locales, but little is known about them.

For example, the white-headed woodpecker of the Ponderosa pine forests east of the Cascades appears to be common but we don't have population numbers, so our first strategy is to collect data.

The western toad is relatively common in a variety of habitats statewide, but rapid, unexplained declines have resulted in its absence from parts of its historic range; we need to learn more about possible problems with development in the path of their breeding movements.

We know populations of the Pacific Townsend's big-eared bat have dropped in the species' low-elevation forested habitat in western Washington, probably because of disturbance, so the plan is to identify roost sites and limit access to them.

You can read through all 200 species reports and strategies on our



CWCS webpage *Washington's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy* (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/cwcs/>).

Besides completion of our ecoregional assessments and application for federal grants, a few other things need to happen before our initial implementation of these strategies.

The first is development of the state budget. Washington state agencies develop and implement their budgets on a biennial basis. Each agency is expected to prioritize program activities and establish performance measures each biennium. So the first review and possible revision of the CWCS will be timed to coincide with the development of the 2007-09 biennial budget.

Our CWCS development to date has been lead by our Wildlife

Diversity Division, but will now also involve other WDFW programs to consider coordination of multi-agency land acquisition through the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, integration of management of marine and aquatic systems with terrestrial ecosystems, incorporation of identified species and habitat conservation priorities into operational work plans, correlation of identified conservation actions into WDFW's cost accounting systems, and other dove-tailing.

Finally, implementation of this CWCS cannot be fully accomplished by WDFW alone. We'll never be adequately

funded or staffed to address all the conservation problems and issues addressed. Even with additional funding, wildlife conservation is almost always more effective when accomplished through working partnerships with other public land management agencies, Indian tribes, conservation groups, local governments and the private sector, especially agriculture and forest landowners.

And that's where you might be involved again. I encourage you to do so if you can, as this promises to be the biggest conservation effort we've seen in decades.

For more information on any aspect of the CWCS, please contact Chris Sato (satocls@dfw.wa.gov) at (360) 902-2493 or Joe La-Tourrette (latoujel@dfw.wa.gov) at (360) 902-2247.

The Habitat Puzzle

(Editor's Note: This article is from the newsletter of the Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) of Lynwood, one of WDFW's licensed wildlife rehabilitators.)

by Kevin Mack, PAWS Wildlife Naturalist

Several weeks ago, I was standing in an Edmonds backyard at dusk, watching for bats to emerge in the fading light. I turned toward the south, and my view of the sky was framed by the silhouettes of two tall fir trees that stood about 50 feet apart. It was a warm, clear night, and the sky that was visible in between the two trees was just light enough that a hint of blue could still be detected. Conditions were perfect for viewing nocturnal flying mammals.

As I stood and gazed upward, a slight movement near the top of the tree on the left caught my eye. A small, oblong shape shot out from among the fir branches. Just as it began to fall, the object seemed to stretch and flatten, forming a rough rectangle. The object's descent slowed, but it maintained its forward momentum, moving diagonally downwards toward the fir tree on my right. As it passed in front of me, I could make out a rounded projection at the front of the rectangle, and a long, narrow extension that trailed behind.

It was too dark to see anything in great detail, but I had the distinct impression that the surface of the object was fuzzy. It continued on its trajectory and disappeared into the branches midway up the fir tree on my right. The whole event lasted three seconds at most, and my brain was still processing the visual input when I heard the words "flying squirrel" escape from my mouth.

The realization that I had just seen a Northern Flying Squirrel was exciting. Although they are fairly common in forested areas, these shy,

nocturnal creatures are seldom seen by humans. I should not have been surprised to learn that flying squirrels were living in this Edmonds neighborhood. I had seen members of this species come in to PAWS from areas as urban as the Northgate neighborhood in Seattle.

Still, catching that brief glimpse of the flying squirrel as it moved from one tree to the next immediately changed my perception of both the property on which I was standing and the neighborhood as a whole.

Without moving at all, I had been pulled out of a backyard, and transported into the middle of Northern Flying Squirrel habitat. The yard in which I made my observation certainly had several habitat features that would appeal to flying squirrels. In addition to the fir trees between which I had seen the squirrel glide, there were a few medium-sized cedars in the front yard, and two tall cedars, another fir, and a small apple tree in the backyard. All of the trees were easily within gliding distance of one another. In addition, the cedars and firs had many branches that were covered in lichen, a favorite food of the flying squirrel. Although they get most of their water from the foods they eat, the property also had two bird baths from which the squirrels could drink if the need arose.



Northern flying squirrel.

Despite the positive features of the property, however, it had one huge drawback: it was far too small to support a viable population of Northern Flying Squirrels. Why then was a flying squirrel spotted on the property? Because of the squirrel, the small property was just one part of a much bigger area of suitable habitat.

A quick glance at the properties adjacent to the one on which I had seen the flying squirrel revealed that they were all very similar in composition. All had a few large trees and other attributes that made them suitable for Northern Flying Squirrels. In fact, I could follow a relatively dense line of trees for many blocks. Even where there were busy roads, tall trees on either side of the road made safe flying squirrel passage possible.

Through human eyes, each individual property was separated by various styles of fencing. But there would clearly be no separation in the eyes of a flying squirrel who would be traveling through the treetops high above these human-created delineations. To a flying squirrel, the whole area would be just another forest.

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Winter feeding station visitors change

The chickadee at your winter feeder today is not necessarily the same one you enjoyed watching when you started filling the feeder last fall.

There are often large change-overs in individual birds at winter feeders, with immigrants far outnumbering year-round residents. Short stays at any one feeder are more common than not, with few birds coming back week after week.

Some birds you see now may be year-round residents that choose to stick around, but many more are likely migrants from areas farther north or higher altitudes that are moving as food sources become scarce.



Some species have “partial migration,” where some individuals migrate but others do not. Age and sex sometimes make the difference. Juveniles often migrate while adults stay. Many winter immigrants to our area are younger birds. Sometimes females migrate and males remain.

Periodic migrations or “irruptions” also occur. All of a sudden a mass of birds shows up in our area when normally they would have remained in Alaska or Canada. Evening grosbeaks, purple finches, pine siskins, snowy owls and rough-legged hawks are among the species that “irrupt” here. These mass southward movements are largely food based, sometimes combined with high population numbers.

For example, there may be a higher-than-normal population of evening grosbeaks in the north, combined with a failure of spruce and pine seed crops. Evenings grosbeaks must move south to find the necessary food available from our conifers, or bird feeders.

The Habitat Puzzle (cont. from page 6)

Every small piece of property in that neighborhood was part of a larger habitat puzzle. Although the owners of the properties hadn't planned it that way, resources on their land were arranged in a pattern that was appealing to Northern Flying Squirrels. The placement of trees on adjacent properties created a perfect corridor along which the squirrels could move in safety. Although the properties would be of little value to the squirrels as isolated islands of habitat, in this connected setting, every single property was essential.

So what would happen if the owners of a single property in this neighborhood decided to clear their trees? Depending on where the property was situated, this could have serious consequences for the habitat puzzle that I have just described.

Any removal of trees would likely reduce the total available habitat, and in turn reduce the number of flying squirrels that the area can support. If the property contained a concentration of food resources, appropriate nesting sites or other essentials, the impact of its loss would be even greater. In addition, a cleared property may act as a barrier to movement of the squirrels if it creates a large enough gap in their travel corridor.

As with a jigsaw puzzle, the more pieces that are removed, the harder it is for the audience to identify the picture. Remove too many small sections of habitat, and the flying squirrels may no longer identify the area as a suitable place to live.

Just as removing small sections of habitat may have negative effects on

the flying squirrels, adding small sections may have extremely positive effects. Planting appropriate trees on a formerly treeless property will serve to increase the available habitat, and may create a connection between two formerly non-contiguous patches of habitat. Even a relatively small piece of property may provide the crucial missing piece in the larger habitat puzzle.

This is why, no matter how small or large your property is, landscaping for wildlife can make an enormous difference to the animals that share your space.

Whether you have a tenth of an acre or 10,000 acres, your property is a piece of this larger habitat puzzle, and how you manage that property can make all the difference for the wildlife around you.

Sustainability includes your landscaping

The new buzz word “sustainability” usually conjures up visions of recycling, turning lights off, low-flow shower heads and other efforts to achieve its definition: meeting present needs without diminishing resources for future generations.

But your landscaping efforts in your Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS) can be sustainable, too.

Use of native, drought-tolerant plant species to provide food and cover for wildlife is a great way to save water and other resources. Since native plants are adapted to our natural environment in Washington, they will be a part of your landscape long after fussier exotics have withered away.

The landscaping that fronts the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) new regional office in Spokane Valley includes many native plants, thanks to help from long-time BWS manager, landscape designer, and Firwood Nursery owner Belinda Driscoll of Deer Park.

The new office, at 2315 N. Discovery Place (just off Mirabeau Parkway, north of I-90 between Pines and



Evergreen) just opened in August 2005, so the landscaping is still in its infancy.

But Belinda says that in time it will showcase what can be done, even on a conventional commercial site. Stay tuned to future editions of this newsletter for information about inclusion of WDFW’s Spokane Valley office in a “sustainable garden tour” later this year.

Wildlife license plates now available

You can show your support for wildlife by adding a wildlife-themed background —pictures of a bald eagle, killer whale, elk, black bear, or mule deer— to your vehicle license plate. These special plates cost \$40 in addition to your regular licensing fees. Proceeds go toward wildlife conservation, with the bald eagle plate dedicated specifically to wildlife viewing activities. See http://wdfw.wa.gov/license_plates/index.htm for more information.



Crossing Paths is a quarterly newsletter for Washington residents enrolled in the Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program.

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