

Crossing Paths



WITH WILDLIFE IN WASHINGTON TOWNS AND CITIES

Winter 2008

Everyone has a role in preserving Washington's biodiversity

By Jeff Koenings, Ph.D., WDFW Director

You've read here before about the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) development of a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy—our plan for helping keep common Washington species common—written at the direction of Congress and approved by the federal government.

Implementing that strategy is a joint effort among many partners. Last month the Department's strategy was incorporated into the Washington Biodiversity Conservation Strategy at a conference on "Sustaining Our Natural Heritage for Future Generations," attended by public and private, federal, state and local partners

The statewide biodiversity planning effort began in 2002 when the Legislature—recognizing Washington's declining environmental health in the face of growing human populations and land-use changes—directed development of a comprehensive framework to safeguard our rich biodiversity heritage for future generations. The Washington Biodiversity Council was formed in 2003 to create a 30-year prioritized strategy and implementation plan.

Continued on page 8



Photo by WSU Extension - Clark Cty.

Help reduce flooding with a rain garden

The damage from flooding in Washington this winter left many with a feeling of helplessness.

But there's actually something Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary managers and other property owners can do to help reduce flooding – harvest that excessive precipitation with a "rain garden".

A rain garden is a shallow depression in a yard that collects rainwater and absorbs runoff through plants. It doesn't hold water for more than a few hours, so it doesn't breed mosquitos or create other problems; in fact, a well planned and maintained rain garden attracts birds and insects that can control pest populations.

It may seem like a small thing, but collectively rain gardens might help stem the proverbial tide -- as more development occurs in the

Pacific Northwest, rain pours off roofs, driveways, sidewalks, and other impervious surfaces into our streams and rivers.

Continued on page 4

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.



| | |
|---|--|
| Westside: 16018 Mill Creek Blvd. Mill Creek, WA 98012 425-775-1311 | Eastside: 2315 N. Discovery Place Spokane Valley, WA 99216 • 509-892-1001 |
|---|--|

Crossing Paths Newsletter

Writer/Editor: Madonna Luers

Contributing Wildlife Biologists:

Russell Link (Seattle-Mill Creek)

Patricia Thompson (Seattle-Mill Creek)

Howard Ferguson (Spokane)

Michelle Tirhi (Tacoma)

Free wildlife posters at WDFW Mill Creek, Vancouver offices

Wildlife posters are available for pick-up free at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) North Puget Sound regional office at 16018 Mill Creek Blvd. in Mill Creek (just north of Seattle), and at the WDFW Southwest regional office at 2108 Grand Blvd. in Vancouver.

Four posters, which measure approximately 24 by 36 inches, depict ecosystems of Washington entitled “Celebrate Urban Wildlife In Washington”, “Washington’s Sea Stack Shoreline”, “Washington’s Shrub-Steppe Heritage”, and “Washington Watershed Restoration Partnerships.”

A fifth poster of similar size that features winter birds commonly seen at backyard feeders across the state is available at the Mill Creek office only.

Posters can also be mailed from the Mill Creek office at shipping cost. Send requests specifying poster type and quantity, with a check or money order payable to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for \$5 for the first poster and \$1 for each additional poster, to WDFW - ATTENTION Wildlife Posters, 16018 Mill Creek Blvd., Mill Creek, WA 98012-1296.

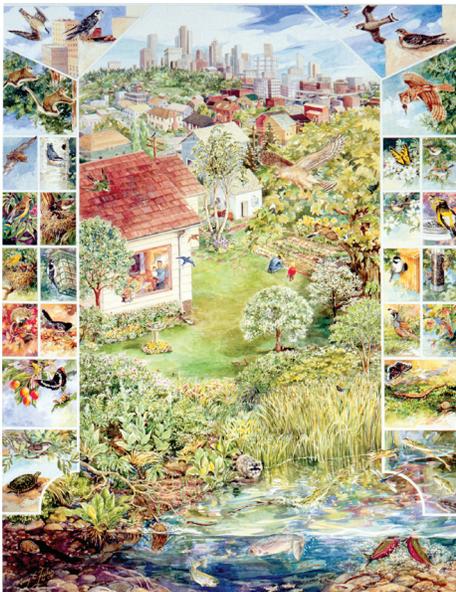
Sea Stack



Watershed Restoration



Urban Wildlife



Shrub-Steppe



Can landscape plants survive winter deer browsing?

This winter's snowy conditions, especially in eastern Washington, have hungry deer helping themselves to landscape plants on our homefronts even more than ever.

It's too late now to fence them out or replace tasty plants with less palatable ones. So the question becomes is there anything a gardener can do to save that forsythia or golden current now?

The short answer is "yes." Wrap that forsythia with burlap or plastic for the duration of the winter season. And don't worry about the golden current – as a native plant species, it's used to being browsed by deer in the winter and is likely to recover just fine.

According to a Utah study of mule deer use of ornamental plants, many plants that are heavily browsed recover vigorously during spring and summer, especially when regularly watered, fertilized and weeded. Many native plants are ecologically adapted to annual moderate or heavy browsing, which stimulates new vegetative growth in spring, even on dry rangelands.

The study showed that although re-growth of many ornamental

plants may increase if browsed during the growing season, some do not recover from heavy winter use and others may require two or more growing seasons to recover. Two growing seasons are often required to replace the vegetative and fruiting buds of apple trees browsed during the winter. Evergreen conifers, junipers, pines, firs and spruces are most susceptible to permanent damage by deer. In addition to direct browsing damage, occasionally heavy use exposes plant tissues and can lead to frost damage.

Ornamental plants that usually receive heavy use by deer – like forsythia -- are often permanently damaged and should not be planted in deer country unless they are completely protected. These plants, although generally highly preferred by and useful to deer, are less likely to survive and more likely to acquire an unattractive appearance due to browsing.

The study found deer will eat most ornamental plants, many of which can recover from moderate use during the spring and summer. These include aspen, cherry, cotoneaster, honeysuckle, pussy willow, and rose.

The study also found that some



Photo by Jim Cummins

Golden currants

plants, both native and non-native, are seldom browsed by deer except during very harsh weather when other forage is not available. These include birch, Douglas fir, red-osier dogwood, English holly, daisy and buttercup.

In addition, many native shrubs provide forage for mule deer on winter ranges, generally recover from that winter browsing during the growing season, and are attractive for landscaping. These include serviceberry, sagebrush, rabbitbrush, chokecherry, sumac, golden current, wild rose, and snowberry.

For a summary of this study and complete lists of plants to avoid or use in deer country, see <http://www.wildlife.utah.gov/habitat/deer-browse.php>.

Washington 11th in wildlife viewing, 7th in spending

Washington draws 2,331,000 wildlife watchers annually— both resident and non-resident— according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

That number ranks Washington 11th in the nation for wildlife viewing participation. (Washington is 15th in population and 18th in land area among the 50 states.)

Annual spending in Washington by wildlife watchers on travel, food, lodging, equipment and other goods

and services totals \$1,502,311,000, ranking the state 7th in the nation behind California, Florida, Texas, Michigan, Georgia and New York.

While the number of wildlife watchers in Washington is about the same as it was when USFWS conducted its 2001 survey, spending increased 53 percent from 2001 to 2006.

Forty-one percent of Washington's wildlife watchers, whether they are residents or non-residents, spend time away from home to see wildlife. Average time spent per

wildlife watching trip is two days. Based on the total of 9,104,000 days of wildlife watching in Washington annually, an average of \$165 is spent per day, or \$330 per trip.

The national survey has been conducted every five years since 1955. National results were released last year (reported in "Crossing Paths" Summer 2007 edition). State findings were released in December 2007. For complete reports, see http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/NationalSurvey/2006_Survey.htm.

Help reduce flooding with a rain garden (cont. from page 1)

In addition to excessive water, these flows transport pollutants such as fertilizer, oil, pesticides, and pet waste. Rain gardens keep runoff from leaving your yard and pollutants stay in the garden where they can be absorbed by plants.

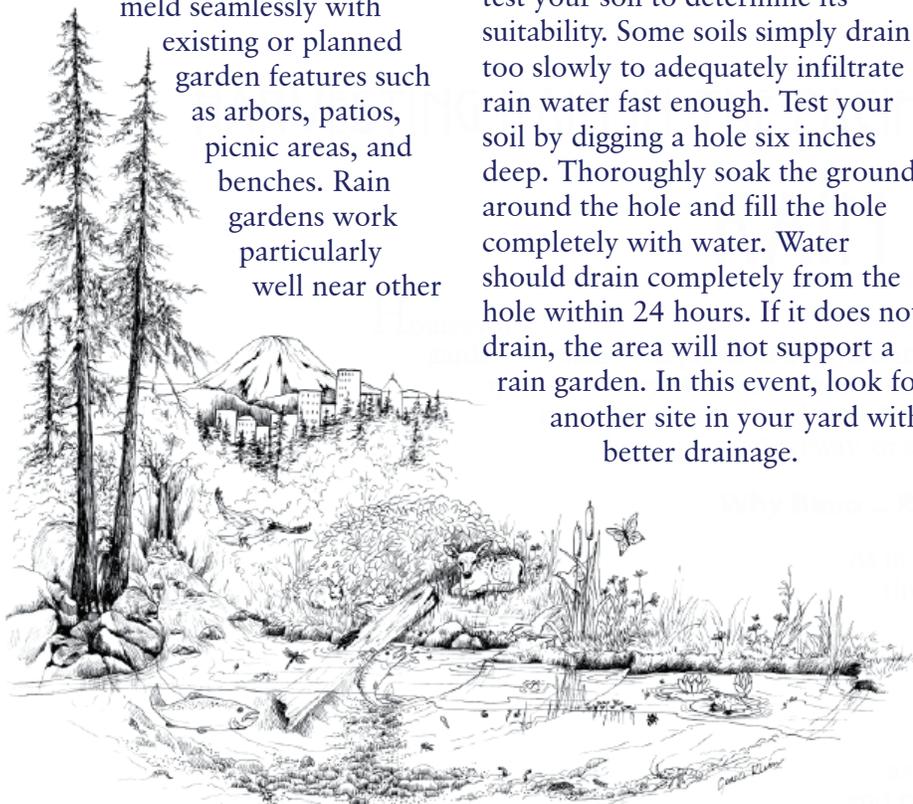
As an added bonus, a rain garden planted with the right types of plants attracts birds, butterflies, bees, and other wildlife.

The following information about rain gardens is excerpted from the Watershed Stewards program of Washington State University Extension of Clark County and the Clark County Clean Water Program.

Planning the Rain Garden

Think carefully about how the rain garden will function in your yard. Is the area sunny, shady, windy, or sheltered? Do you want to view the garden from inside your home or from an area in the yard? Consider the color and bloom time of plants incorporated into the garden. The rain garden should

meld seamlessly with existing or planned garden features such as arbors, patios, picnic areas, and benches. Rain gardens work particularly well near other



wildlife friendly features such as ponds, bird baths, and feeders.

Choosing a Location

Look for a relatively level site that is slightly downhill from your downspout(s) and at least 10 feet from the basement or foundation of the structure. Talk to your neighbor if the garden will be located on or near the property line. Do not locate a rain garden over a septic tank or its drain field. You should also mark the underground utilities even when digging the garden by hand. Shape the rain garden to your personal taste, but make sure rainwater will flow and pool where needed. A kidney or horseshoe shape may be best in the middle of the yard, while a long, narrow garden usually works best along a property line.

Testing the Absorption Rate of Soil

Before investing the time and expense of building a rain garden, test your soil to determine its suitability. Some soils simply drain too slowly to adequately infiltrate rain water fast enough. Test your soil by digging a hole six inches deep. Thoroughly soak the ground around the hole and fill the hole completely with water. Water should drain completely from the hole within 24 hours. If it does not drain, the area will not support a rain garden. In this event, look for another site in your yard with better drainage.

Determining Size

Almost any size rain garden will help remove pollutants from storm water, improve groundwater recharge, and reduce your impact on the environment. However, you can accurately size your rain garden by following some simple guidelines. You will need to estimate how much area will drain into the rain garden, the general type of soil you have, and the slope of the land where the rain garden will be.

First figure out the roof area that will drain to the downspout(s) feeding the rain garden. For example, a roof measuring 45 feet by 50 feet drains 2250 square feet. However, you determine that only half that will drain to the downspout(s) watering the rain garden. This leaves 1125 square feet of area. Remember to count only those downspouts draining directly into the rain garden when determining the roof area.

You can calculate the slope of the land by running a string from a stake pounded into the ground at an uphill spot to a stake pounded into the ground downhill. Measure the length in inches of the string (your width measurement) and then measure the height from the string at the downhill stake to the ground. Divide the height by the width to get the slope in decimal format. Multiply this times 100 to obtain the percent. (For example: a height of 26 inches divided by width of 240 inches equals 0.108, which multiplied by 100 produces a slope of 10.8 percent.)

A slope of 8 – 12 percent requires a rain garden depth of 8 inches; 5 – 8 percent requires 6-7 inches of depth; 3 – 5 percent requires 3-5 inches. Your soil type helps

Continued on page 5

Help reduce flooding with a rain garden (cont. from page 4)

determine square footage of the rain garden, according to the depth. For sandy soils use a factor of .08 for 8-inch depth, 0.15 for 6-7-inch depth, 0.19 for 3-5-inch depth. For silty soils use a factor of 0.16 for 8-inch depth, 0.25 for 6-7-inch depth, 0.34 for 3-5-inch depth. For clay soils use a factor of 0.20 for 8-inch depth, 0.32 for 6-7-inch depth, 0.43 for 3-5-inch depth.

Using the example of 1125 square feet of area and a clay soil, multiply the area drained times the size factor of 0.20 for an 8-inch depth to arrive at a rain garden area of 225 square feet.

Site Preparation

Define the edges of the garden using a hose, string, or marking paint. Dig the rain garden about 12 inches deep, sloping the sides at a 45 degree or less angle to reduce sloughing. Make the main “basin” of your rain garden as level as possible to ensure water spreads evenly and infiltrates the soil. Use excess soil from the excavation to create a berm or dam around the downhill edge of the garden so water remains in the garden after a hard rain. Place an outlet in the berm, usually just a small dip in the edge, to drain excess water from a particularly large storm into your yard without causing damage to your garden.

Next, determine how you will divert water from your downspouts to the rain garden. Choosing to simply allow water to flow across the lawn toward the garden can create muddy areas in the yard. A corrugated, non-perforated plastic drain pipe provides the simplest method to convey water to the rain garden. (Perforated pipes allow water to seep out and sediment may eventually block the pipe.)



Attach the corrugated pipe to your downspout using a downspout adapter and bury it in a 12-inch deep trench at a two percent or greater slope to your garden. After testing the system, cover the pipe in the trench. Add a few rocks at the outlet of the pipe inside the rain garden to break up the flow during a heavy rain and prevent erosion.

Water can also be conveyed in a dry creek bed. Dig a 4 to 6-inch deep trench about 12 inches wide from your downspout to the rain garden. Line the trench with weed cloth and cover with two or three inches of river rock. Add a meander or two to make your stream look more natural and complement your landscape. Test your layout by running water through the downspout. Be certain the water runs smoothly through the stream or pipe and spreads evenly across the bottom of your rain garden without eroding the sides.

Now work 3 to 5 inches of compost into the soil over the entire garden using a roto-tiller or shovel. This aids stormwater infiltration and gives plants a healthy start.

Plant Selection

A wide variety of plants work well in rain gardens, but species that do not require well drained soil work best. Vigorous perennials work great in sunny sites. Native plants are adapted to the area and usually resistant to disease. Coneflower, Oregon grape, snowberry and others that also provide food for wildlife are good choices.

After planting, mulch the entire rain garden with wood chips 2 to 3 inches deep.

Avoid bark dust since it will likely float away during a heavy rain storm. The large surface area of wood chips captures and holds pollutants, keeping them out of our streams and lakes. Wood chips also reduce your garden’s water needs during the drier summer months.

Maintenance

Rain gardens may require extra water during the first couple of summers to become established. Water thoroughly, deeply, once weekly to encourage deep roots and vigorous growth. The garden also requires more weeding during establishment. Weeds decrease considerably as the plants become established. After each growing season, stems and seed heads can be left for winter interest, wildlife cover, and bird food. They should be cut back in the early spring to allow room for new growth. As the rain garden becomes more established, the need for maintenance will decline.

Ten years of Winter Backyard Bird Surveys show patterns

By Patricia Thompson, WDFW
Wildlife Biologist

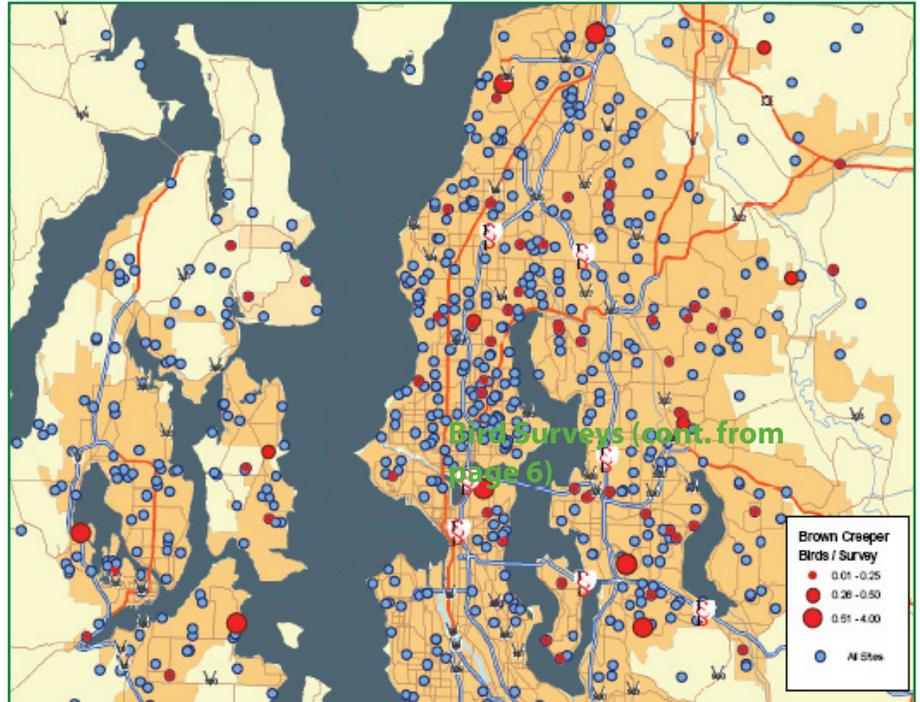
Thanks to hundreds of volunteers collecting data for WDFW's Winter Backyard Bird Surveys from 1993 through 2002, and some rigorous data analysis, we are able to start seeing some patterns in bird populations in Washington.

We are able to detect changes in abundance or the relative number of birds in a species (see "Top Ten" table), and distribution or where the species are found in Washington (see "Most Widespread" table).

We would like to use these data to identify landscape features, for example housing density or tree height, that affect the number of birds, the species of birds (species diversity) and how the birds use these landscapes.

The fact that most of our volunteers were in the Puget Sound area is both good and bad. It's good because we have a lot of data from a concentrated area. But it's bad because we need more data from the east side of the Cascades in order to come to any statewide conclusions.

We have two very good examples of how the surveys can show changes in abundance in Washington backyards. One is the Pine siskin (*Carduelis pinus*) which



Puget Sound distribution of brown creeper (*Certhia americana*)

is an irruptive species, or one that moves its wintering areas and shows up in large numbers at times.

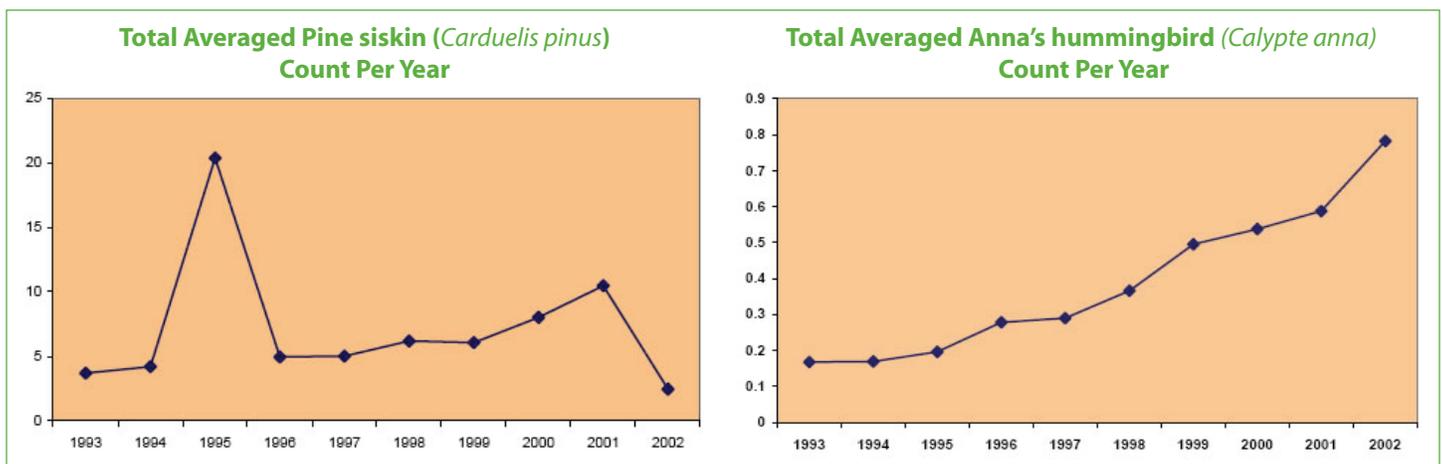
From the graph below, you can see that 1995 was an irruptive year for pine siskins, and 2001 was a lesser irruption. This does not mean that there are more pine siskins overall, or a larger population, but that they are concentrated in different areas.

Another example of a trend that we saw was in the Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*). Many of you have said that you

are seeing more and more Anna's hummingbirds over-wintering in Washington. The proof is in the data shown in the graph below.

Above is an example of a distribution map using the brown creeper (*Certhia americana*) in the Puget Sound area where we have a large amount of data. Brown creepers generally prefer mature, coniferous forests or mixed coniferous/deciduous forests, but we have them all over the urban environments. They are also found in drier eastern Washington but we

Continued on page 7

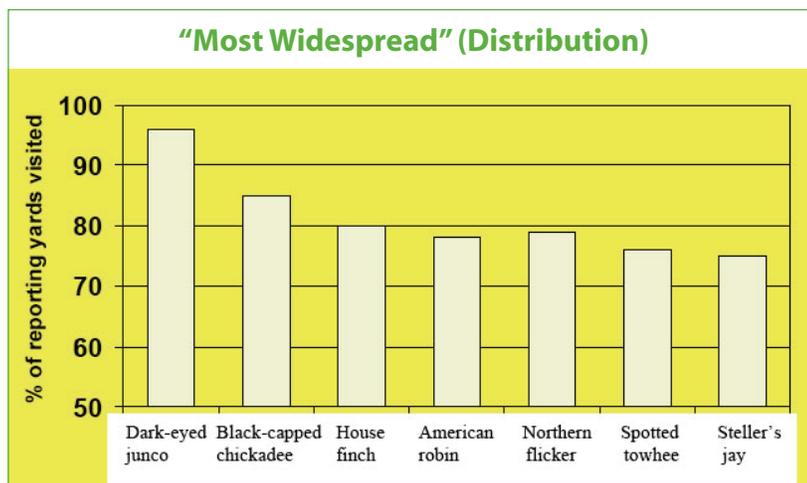


Bird Surveys (cont. from page 6)

do not have enough data from that region to be conclusive on the distribution.

Now that the data are validated and summarized we can move on to statistical evaluation to see if the trends we see are significant. Then we can look at the different habitat features and possibly tell which ones affect bird populations and species distribution.

We feel these surveys can tell us much about general trends so we hope to resume data collection in the near future using the vast wealth of volunteer energy in Washington state.



Top Ten Abundance

| Rank | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Junco | Junco | Pine siskin | Junco | Junco | Junco | Junco | Junco | Junco | Junco |
| 2 | House finch | House finch | Junco | House finch | House finch | Pine siskin | House finch | Pine siskin | Pine siskin | House finch |
| 3 | Black-capped chickadee | House sparrow | House finch | House sparrow | House sparrow | House finch | House sparrow | House finch | House finch | House sparrow |
| 4 | House sparrow | Black-capped chickadee | House sparrow | Black-capped chickadee | Pine siskin | House sparrow | Pine siskin | House sparrow | House sparrow | Starling |
| 5 | Starling | Pine siskin | Black-capped | Pine siskin chickadee | Black-capped chickadee | Black-capped chickadee | Black-capped chickadee | Black-capped chickadee | Black-capped chickadee | Black-capped |
| 6 | Pine siskin | Robin | Crow | Crow | Starling | Crow | Starling | Starling | Starling | Crow |
| 7 | Robin | Starling | Robin | Starling | Crow | Starling | Crow | Robin | Crow | Chestnut-backed chickadee |
| 8 | Goldfinch | Crow | Starling | Robin | Chestnut-backed chickadee | Steller's jay | Chestnut-backed chickadee | Chestnut-backed chickadee | Bushtit | Pine siskin |
| 9 | Crow | Spotted towhee | Bushtit | Steller's jay | Robin | Chestnut-backed chickadee | California Quail | Steller's jay | Robin | Steller's jay |
| 10 | Spotted towhee | Mallard | Spotted towhee | Spotted towhee | Steller's jay | Spotted towhee | Bushtit | Crow | Steller's | Robin jay |

Everyone has a role in preserving Washington's biodiversity, (cont. from page 1)

There are many aspects to this biodiversity plan, and you can view the plan and conference presentations at <http://www.biodiversity.wa.gov/conference.html>.

Some of the recommendations for action may be of special interest to those of you who take an active role in preserving biodiversity on your own property, especially those with suburban-rural acreage.

One key recommendation is to expand citizen-science networks to engage more people in biodiversity conservation efforts. Citizen-science programs—such as WDFW's community "BioBlitz" nature mapping—collect scientific data to determine biodiversity levels. Bringing these kinds of programs together could create a collaborative, statewide citizen-science initiative for biodiversity monitoring.

Universities with expertise in data management, monitoring and training citizens and K-12 teachers

in data gathering, could provide coordination of citizen-science efforts. Other partners could include museums, environmental and science volunteer programs, the Environmental Education Association of Washington, the Puget Sound Partnership, University of Washington's NatureMapping Program, Pacific Education Institute, conservation districts and regional learning centers.

Another recommendation for putting the biodiversity strategy to work would involve community stewardship programs that conserve biodiversity and restore and care for ecosystems. These programs are mostly citizen-led efforts based around specific areas or school districts, such as the National Wildlife Federation's "Community Wildlife Habitats" programs in several western Washington communities, from Bellingham to Tukwila. In a related effort, WDFW works through the Pacific Education Institute to update school environmental education programs

with hands-on, outdoor experiences.

Training and recognition are needed to link these programs with the citizen-science initiative where appropriate. In addition to existing community stewardship programs, potential partners in this effort include local governments, land trusts and conservancy organizations, environmental education organizations, the state Department of Natural Resources' Small Forest Landowner Office, grange organizations, conservation districts and cooperative extension services.

These and other parts of our state's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy are steps toward making sure the species and open spaces we enjoy today are there tomorrow for our kids and grandkids.

I know that's why many of you participate in WDFW's Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary program. I thank you for your work and encourage you to learn how you can do more through this statewide effort.

11th annual Great Backyard Bird Count is Feb. 15-18

If you like counting birds in your backyard, make your effort count for future conservation with participation in the 11th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), Presidents Day weekend, Feb. 15-18.

Sponsored by Audubon, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Wild Birds Unlimited, the North American on-line count creates a real-time picture of where birds are across the continent and contributes valuable information for conservation science.

Anyone of any age or experience level can count birds from wherever they are, home or afield, for at least 15 minutes during any or all of the four days, and enter their highest

tallies at <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>.

On the website you can compare results with others, as checklists pour in from throughout the U.S. and Canada. You can also view bird photos taken by participants during the count and send in your own digital images for the online photo gallery and contest.

"The GBBC is a great way to engage friends, family, and children in observing nature in their own backyard, where they will discover that the outdoors is full of color, behavior, flight, sounds, and mystery," said Janis Dickinson, Director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

In 2007, Great Backyard Bird Count participants broke records for the number of birds reported (11,082,387 birds of 613 species) and the number of checklists. (81,203).

Already, the count results show how the numbers of some birds species have changed in recent years, such as a decline in Northern Pintails and an increase in Hooded Mergansers, consistent with trends from the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey.

For more information on how to participate, including identification tips, photos, bird sounds, maps, and information on over 500 bird species, visit <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>.

Q & A with WDFW bios: Russell on bat houses

WDFW wildlife biologists regularly field questions that others are likely wondering about, too, so “Crossing Paths” will share their answers in this new feature.

A homeowner in Issaquah recently wrote Russell Link in the Mill Creek office:

I received a bat house for Christmas and would like to know the best place to locate it.

Russell answered:

A well-designed, well-constructed and properly located bat house can attract bats if they live in or pass through your Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary. I have four bat houses located on my Whidbey Island property and all have been occupied!

I’ve used the recommendations provided by Bats Conservation International, which has been researching bat house designs for more than 12 years. The following will answer your question about bat house location, and I’ve included answers to other commonly asked questions about bat houses.

Too little sun exposure is the most important known cause of bat house failure, even in hot eastern Washington. Female bats with “pups” need a warm, draft-free house, between 80 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The idea is to create a tight microclimate inside the house capable of trapping both the heat captured during the day and the warmth generated by the bats. (To achieve this I have had to recaulk my bat houses after they’ve been outside for a few years.)

To increase the temperature inside the bat house, paint the outside with multiple coats of dark exterior paint. Use black paint west of the Cascade Mountains. Use a dark or medium dark color east of the mountains in areas where the

average high temperature in July is 85 to 95 degrees.

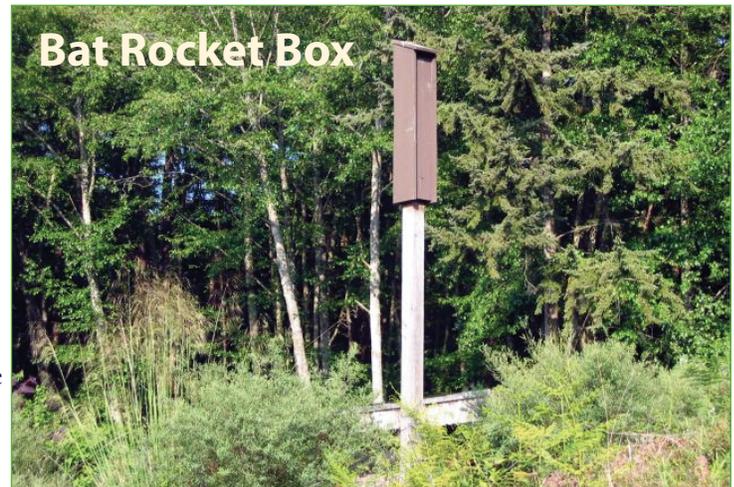
Locate your new bat house in full sun, preferably on its own post; the next-best location is on the southern side of a wood, brick or stone building--

in full sun. Don’t mount the house on a tree, as it will be in too much afternoon shade. Branches and twigs also make entry difficult and tree-mounted houses are more vulnerable to predators, such as hawks and owls. (Because bats tend to fly straight down when exiting a bat house, there must also be a vertical clearance of at least a few feet under a bat house.)

Even if you don’t have the ideal location available, it may be worth trying a house in a next-best site. I mounted a single-chamber house on the west side of my house, under an eave, and there are a few “bachelor bats” in there all summer. Males don’t seem to mind the slightly less than ideal conditions I’ve provided.

To prevent a bat house from overheating in hot summer areas add a couple of vents. These should be approximately six inches tall by ½ inch wide and located about halfway up the bat house. Bat houses west of the mountains do not need vents. My rocket bat box originally had vents, but I quickly covered them after observing wasps entering.

I know you were the recipient of a thoughtful Christmas gift, but I want to warn you that small, poorly made bat houses commonly sold in stores often fail to attract bats. This is mostly due to their small size.



Small lightweight bat houses are great for shipping, but not suitable for bats, which are used to roosting in large snags, attics and caves.

Based on years of experience with bat houses across the U.S. and Canada, Bat Conservation International recommends that bat houses be at least two feet tall and 16 or more inches wide. Taller and wider boxes are better. (Rocket boxes, seen on the links below, should be at least three feet tall.) A rough textured landing platform measuring 3 to 6 inches should extend below all bat houses.

One note on bat house location that I have found useful: One of my bat houses is located in view from our hot tub. I’ve done some of my best bat watching from there on July evenings!

Bats Northwest

<http://www.batsnorthwest.org/>

Bat Conservation International

<http://www.batcon.org/home/default.asp>

Living with Washington’s Wildlife: Bats

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/bats.htm>

Bat House Plans

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/construction/index.htm>

Let Them Eat Leaves

(Editor's note: The following is from a National Public Radio story by Ketznel Levine that aired November 21, 2007.)

The local “organigrocery” was stuffed this day before Thanksgiving, people cramming their baskets as if preparing for a famine. And every one of us was blissfully distracted from the true famine in our own backyards.

What’s starving? Wildlife. Are you growing native oaks and cherries for your saddleback caterpillars? Black-eyed Susans for your pearl crescent butterflies? What about white, yellow, or lodgepole pine for your imperial moths?

“Plants,” writes Douglas W. Tallamy in his spanking new book, **Bringing Nature Home**, “are the fundamental source of energy for all terrestrial creatures”. And note this: “Insects transfer the most energy from plants to animals”.

The punchline? If you want to sustain native wildlife -- whether butterflies, birds or mammals -- you best be making room for more native plants.

OK, so it’s not exactly breaking news. But if you’ve always thought planting natives was simply p.c., “a peripheral option favored by vegetarians and erstwhile hippies,” (hey, I resemble that remark), the honeymoon’s over. The stakes are the biodiversity of the world.

As a gardener, I’m the first to admit it’s not always easy to work with the color of Rudbeckia, black-eyed Susan. But it may become an increasingly compelling option, since its flowers provide nectar and its leaves sustenance for this pearl crescent, *Phyciodes tharos*, as well as dozens of other butterfly species.

Many of us tend to think that the problem with non-native plants is that they may become invasive.

And of course some do. But Tallamy gentles us into a different awareness.

It seems that many American herbivores -- e.g., caterpillars, katydids and beetles -- simply cannot eat the exotic plants we adore. Hence, the famine: starve the bugs, starve the birds, starve the predators (and I ain’t talking about cats).

If you see this moth, you’re doing something right, according to the author of **Bringing Nature Home**. It’s the polyphemus moth, a.k.a. *Antheraea polyphemus*, “wonderful evidence of backyard diversity”.

Here’s a brief excerpt from this very readable and morally even-handed book:

The predictions of mass extinction (note: he’s speaking of all our wildlife) are based on the assumption that the vast majority of plants and animals cannot coexist with humans in the same place at the same time. Nonsense! Evidence suggests that the opposite is true: most species could live quite nicely with humans if their most basic ecological needs were met.

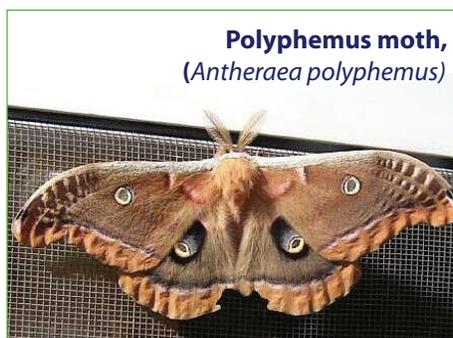


Photo by Bob Patterson



I found this passage particularly compelling as an argument against my own kind of shape and leaf-centric garden:

For the past century we have created our gardens with one thing in mind: aesthetics. We have selected plants for landscaping based only on their beauty and their fit within our artistic designs. Yet if we designed our buildings the way we design our gardens, with only aesthetics in mind, they would fall down. Just as buildings need support structures... to hold the graceful arches and beautiful lines of fine architecture in place, our gardens need native plants to support a diverse and balanced food web essential to all sustainable ecosystems.

Enjoying a meal of black cherry, *Acharya stimulea*, the saddleback caterpillar, has stiff spines with potent poison glands. According to author Tallamy, “one only knowingly touches a saddleback caterpillar once”. Still, it’d be worth seeing one, if all it really took was the right tree.

I’ve no doubt many of you have been gardening with natives for decades, but I would love to hear from folks who are creating change/ seeing change in unexpected places.

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:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Office of External Programs
4040 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 130
Arlington, VA 22203

