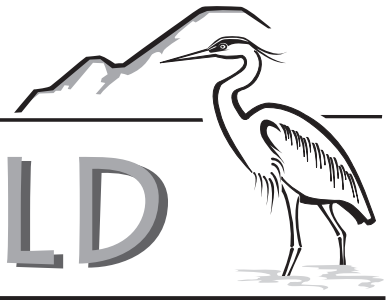


# THE HERON HERALD

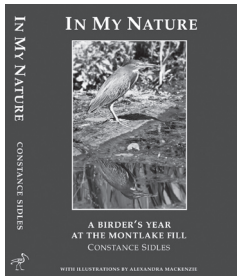


Rainier Audubon Society

December 2009

Monday, December 21, at 7:00 PM  
Federal Way United Methodist Church

## Connie Sidles: Birding at Montlake Fill



Master birder Constance Sidles explores the wonders of the wild at the Montlake Fill, a nature reserve in the heart of northeast Seattle. “The birds she finds here teach her to forget time. To leave worries behind. To experience joy. To find a refuge that gives peace of mind and a respite from the stresses of a fast-paced world.” If you would like to share in Connie’s birding experiences at the Fill, it’s easy

— she will be at our December 21st meeting to speak about the Fill, read passages from her book, and engage in discussion. Come and find the magic in everyday life, as she describes the sublime beauty of the birds of the Montlake Fill.

Connie Sidles, in addition to being a master birder, is a board member of Seattle Audubon, and an author who has written four books and more than 550 feature articles in 67 different publications. She has won two Maggie Awards for best nonfiction feature article. Connie graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Chicago with a degree in Egyptology. She began birding the Montlake Fill in 1986 and has seen 187 different species of birds there over the years. The Fill is her favorite place on earth, and she manages to bird there nearly every day. In fact, she wishes she could live there, if only the Powers That Be would let her.

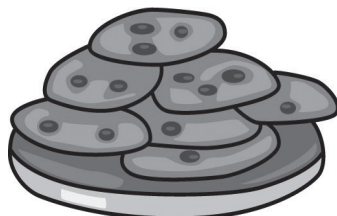
This promises to be an entertaining, educational, and insightful evening. We invite everyone to join us as we welcome Connie during the holiday season. And for all you bakers out there, feel free to bring some of your favorite holiday cookies to share with others, as we will

also have our annual Holiday Cookie Exchange! Good conversation (and cookies) available before, during, and after the program.

RAINIER AUDUBON PROGRAMS ARE HELD AT  
FEDERAL WAY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
29645 - 51st Ave. So. 98001  
(in unincorporated Auburn)

### Directions:

In Federal Way, take 320th St. EAST past The Commons, crossing over I-5 and Military Rd. At 321st St, turn left. Stay on 321st as it becomes 51st Ave. So. Follow 51st Ave. to 296th. Church will be on your left.



## Another Great Birding Class by Carol Schulz

Rainier Audubon’s Introduction to Birding Class was successful again this year. The instructors were Deb Russell and me. We had 11 students sign up, some of whom are new to Rainier. We held one lecture on an October evening at the church, and followed that up with field trips the next two Saturdays.

The first field trip was on October 31 and we went to Kent Ponds (Green River Natural Resources Area) and Boeing Ponds. We used the map from our website ([rainieraudubon.org](http://rainieraudubon.org)), which I printed out and brought along; it shows the general area, and both Kent and Boeing Ponds. One thing has changed down there. They have put big sandbags along Russell Road, which is the west side of Kent Ponds. Russell Rd. is now one-way going north. You can still access that area from So. 228th, and then drive north next to



the Green River. Those sandbags are going to remain for the next five years, according to the Kent Ponds site manager!

We went inside Kent Ponds through a gate that is usually closed to the public, in back of the animal shelter. The weather was clear.

We eventually got a raptor show! A student was the first to see a brown Northern Harrier flying over the field across the lagoon. Then a Bald Eagle came in to harass the ducks — and the harrier flew at the eagle. Then a couple of Red-tailed Hawks



flew over us and up into the air, flying close and touching in mid-air, which is how these hawks

(Continued on page 4)

## President's Message — by Nancy Streiffert

Autumn is in full swing in the lowlands and winter has come to the mountains. More juncos, chickadees, towhees, and House Finches may be seen in our yards and parks as they retreat from the cold and snow. Identification of birds in their usually less colorful winter plumage is trickier than when at least the males are sporting their bright breeding plumes. Good field guides will show both variations and careful observation of small details will make you an expert! Migration into our area of the waterfowl that stay for the winter is a feast for birders! Bundle up, bring a thermos of something warm, and enjoy the new sightings of the season.

I always wonder how wild animals tolerate the range of temperatures they endure without added outerwear and no thermostats to turn up in their shelters. Of course, they grow longer, thicker

coats if they are mammals. Most add some layers of extra fat, but birds who expect to fly cannot pork out too much! Birds fluff up their feathers. Geese and ducks have the original down jackets! All find shelter and some huddle together. Anna's Hummingbirds do their own version of hibernation, entering a sort of suspended animation called torpor overnight when it is very cold. Adorable photos of foxes and wolves show their furry tails wrapped snugly around their faces and necks. I shudder to remember that my mom, not a wealthy clothes junkie and the consummate animal lover who would nurse tiny bunnies, sick piglets, and injured birds back to health, had a neck wrap made of three (I think) mink. The clasp was one mink's mouth that opened to grasp the other one! It fascinated us kids who petted it and worked the clasp. This was long ago and far away before the "Fur is Cruel"

movement, although it must have occurred to me that these were once live animals, happy to use their own fur to stay warm. Thank goodness for polar fleece!

As a break from the food, fun, family, and shopping of the upcoming season, please join Rainier Audubon for our annual Christmas Bird Count on December 27. Beginners and amateurs are grouped with experts to count as many birds of as many species as possible in our assigned count circle. Please see Christmas Bird Count article on page 3 for more details! Enjoy the Solstice and the turning of the year!



### OFFICERS

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BOARD MEMBER-----	ERIN WOJEWODSKI-PRINSEN	---(425) 432-9965

\*Also serves as Board member

RAINIER AUDUBON SOCIETY  
PO Box 778. Auburn WA 98071. (253) 796-2203  
website: [www.RainierAudubon.org](http://www.RainierAudubon.org)  
email: [info@RainierAudubon.org](mailto:info@RainierAudubon.org)

## Field Trips — by Carol Schulz

Kittitas County Birding in Winter  
Sunday, December 6  
6:30 AM to Evening

Co-Leaders:  
CHARLIE WRIGHT  
AND ROGER ORNESS

Come enjoy a day of winter-season birding in central Washington. We will venture over Snoqualmie Pass and visit areas including Swauk Prairie and South Cle Elum along our route. Large numbers of raptors including Rough-legged Hawks and Prairie Falcons are seen wintering in the open snow-covered fields of Kittitas.

Proceeding east, we will reach the Columbia River at Vantage, where waterfowl are sometimes present in vast numbers. Some target species will include unusual loons, ducks, American White Pelicans, and possibly rare gulls. Chukar are occasionally seen in the basalt outcroppings here.

BRING: Many layers of clothing for cold weather conditions, a lunch, and snacks. Scopes are welcome. Space is limited.

MEET: At 6:30 AM at the Auburn Safeway store at Auburn Way and Main St.

DIRECTIONS: Take Hwy. 18 to Auburn and exit at Auburn Way (Hwy 164). Turn north (right) on Auburn Way and drive three blocks. Safeway sign and gas station will be on the left. Park in the Safeway lot just beyond the gas station and straight out from the Safeway door. We will meet and carpool (promptly) from there.

SIGN UP: Contact Roger at [r.orness@comcast.net](mailto:r.orness@comcast.net) or by phone at (253) 922-7516. Email is preferred.

Weekly Bird Walks at Nisqually  
Wednesdays 8:00 AM — 11:30 AM  
Leader: Phil Kelley

Join Phil on his weekly bird walk as he counts the birds at Nisqually NWR. The group takes the boardwalk/trail loop out to the Twin Barns, the Nisqually overlook area, and the riparian area, totaling about two miles.

BRING: Good walking shoes or boots, raingear, water, snacks, and \$3 for entry fee unless you have a pass. Scopes are welcome.

MEET: At the Visitor's Center.

DIRECTIONS: Take I-5 south from Tacoma and exit to Nisqually NWR at exit 114. Take a right at the light.

SIGN-UP: Call or email Phil to confirm details. (360) 459-1499, or [scrubjay323@aol.com](mailto:scrubjay323@aol.com).



Join us at Our  
Next Board Meeting  
Sunday, December 20, 4:00 PM  
Federal Way United Methodist Church  
(Directions on page 1)  
ALL RAINIER MEMBERS ARE  
WELCOME AT BOARD MEETINGS

### Shade-Grown Coffee for the Holidays

Holidays are the perfect time to share bird-compatible shade-grown coffee as a wrapped gift or party offering. Shade-coffee habitat mimics natural forests in the Neotropics and can potentially benefit birds with every cup of coffee served. This is a great time of year to track down shade-grown, bird compatible coffee from a local supplier. In fact, see if you can find “triple-labeled” coffee — shade grown, organic, and fair traded — for gift-giving and holiday visits. And remember, by doing this you will help make a difference to bird conservation, and that’s what counts.

*from the National Wildlife Refuge  
Association Birding Community  
eBulletin for November 2009*

### Kent/Auburn Christmas Bird Count Set for Sunday, December 27

Please join Rainier Audubon for our annual Christmas Bird Count, December 27, Sunday, any time from dawn until dusk.

Our circle has 10 areas and there will be an expert leader for each. Beginners and amateurs are welcome — the more eyes and ears, the better. Stay out as long as you like, a few hours or all day. While we need as many people in the field as possible, if that is not your “thing,” you can participate by counting the birds in your yard or at your feeders. And be sure to join us for a potluck at the church after 4:00 PM to share food and sightings. Please contact Nancy for more information at (253) 796-2203, or email [alexandra.gitman@yahoo.com](mailto:alexandra.gitman@yahoo.com) to sign up.

## A Great October Birding Class (continued from page 1)

hawks show that they are a pair. Wow! The students got to view the field marks of the flying redtails. Then Deb directed us to look above the trees — a beautiful Peregrine Falcon was flying over the trees nearby, and we got some quick looks at it. Amazing! Red-tailed Hawks, Bald Eagle, Harrier, and now a Peregrine!

The weather was still clear, and we even got some sun, as we headed over to the Boeing Ponds. There, we were able to study ducks, coots, and Pied-billed Grebes. Across the road from Boeing Ponds, there is a field with gravel and some grass. We viewed some geese from our cars there. There were a few close-in big Canada Geese, and one much-smaller Cackling Goose, which is now a separate species. The comparison was excellent.

Our second field trip the following Saturday, November 7, was called “Federal Way Parks and Beaches.” Well, the weather was just awful! There was heavy rain, it was cold (46 degrees), and the wind was blowing. Nevertheless, the students were patient and interested as we viewed ducks and birds at Dumas Bay Pond, and down on the saltwater of Dumas Bay. We viewed from the car when the rain was heaviest. We had good views of various ducks, and compared their sizes and field marks.

From there, we drove to the Dash Point pier and huddled under the shelter for awhile, seeing Surf Scoters and Horned Grebes. When the rains let up, we walked out on the pier and had good views of a Common Loon, a Red-necked Grebe, and a Pigeon Guillemot in winter plumage.

Despite having miserable weather almost the whole time, we saw or heard 27 species, and the students graciously said they didn’t mind the weather. They were a great group! Deb and I always enjoy the class. It’s a lot of fun, and we always learn a lot along with the students.

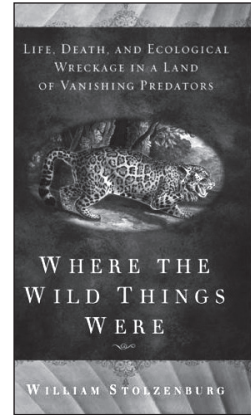
December 2009 - PAGE 4

## *Where the Wild Things Were: Life, Death, and Ecological Wreckage in a Land of Vanishing Predators* By William Stolzenburg A Book Review by Dan Streiffert

**O**n the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2009, I was photographing wolves in the Lemar Valley of Yellowstone National Park. To get closer to the road and the wolves, I had moved away from a group of wolf watchers who were up on a hillside with their spotting scopes. Something caught my eye, running along the far side of the river. To my surprise, it was a large grizzly. I quickly got my camera on him and started taking photos while he looked for a spot to cross the river. He soon found a spot, swam across, and then started coming towards the road. I continued shooting until he got to the road, where he stood up and looked both ways. There were cars parked to the left of me, and I was hidden in the sage brush just to the right and above them. That, of course, was where he decided to go. I decided I had enough photos, and had better make myself visible before the situation deteriorated. As soon as I stood up, he saw me and veered off to the right and up into a small valley.

This experience, of course, made my day, and I gained instant celebratory status from those watching me from above. This is the kind of experience one cannot get while photographing birds in one’s backyard!

Stolzenburg presents the case for bringing back wild predators based on their status as keystone species in ecological communities. During the 70 years that wolves were absent from Yellowstone, for example, elk herds there increased to a winter population of 20,000, one of the densest known. This resulted in extreme overgrazing,



to the point where the aspen groves literally stopped growing. The overgrazing from the elk created a biological desert, resulting in a dramatic decline in all kinds of species. Since the re-introduction of the first group of eight wolves into Yellowstone on January 12, 1995, the elk herd has been in steady decline, and the aspen forest has started to grow again. It turns out that

these keystone predators have a direct effect on the biodiversity of wild lands.

The same is true of sea otters and the kelp forest. Without the otters to eat the sea urchins, the urchins overpopulate, destroy the kelp, and there is a steep decline in all the species that shelter in the kelp.

The over-abundance of white-tailed deer in the east is resulting in a similar reduction of biodiversity. One researcher found 100% predation of makeshift nests with quail eggs in small “islands” of forest. Similar nests only suffered 2% predation in the Smokies where bears and bobcats still roamed. In the absence large predators, many birds are in decline as their nests are robbed by fearless raccoons, cats, and other tree climbers whose populations have exploded.

Stolzenburg provides a well-documented page-turner that describes how alpha predators are the primary regulators of ecosystems, and that their removal is crippling our planet’s diversity. Personally, I believe we need them for that unexpected grizzly that made my trip to Yellowstone a real kick.

See my grizzly photos at: <http://danstreiffert.smugmug.com/National-Parks/Yellowstone-2009>.

# Mewsings from Millie

*Note: Millie is the big, beautiful cat who hangs out at the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Burien. Millie is very observant and has decided to write this monthly column to pass on to us what she sees and overhears while supposedly sleeping.*

**H**ello again! Can you believe how time flies? (no pun intended). I'm here once again to share things I've seen, learned, heard, and thought about over the last month.

Goodness gracious, everyone was excited when Paul Bannick stopped in the store one day! He is an outstanding photographer of birds and nature, and the author of *The Owl and the Woodpecker: Encounters with North America's Most Iconic Birds*. Paul traveled all over the country photographing owls and woodpeckers and documenting the unique relationship that these two birds have. It is a beautiful and very interesting book!

I've heard that Project Feederwatch began on November 14 and is continuing until April 9, 2010. Researchers use the data to learn about winter bird abundance and distribution. The project was begun in the mid-1970s and is a cooperative research project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bird Studies Canada, the National Audubon Society, and the Canadian Natural Federation. More than 15,000 people participate! For more information, go to [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/).

The most frequently asked question in the store in the past few weeks has been, "Should I be taking my hummingbird feeders down, now that winter is coming?" The answer is "No." As the weather becomes colder and natural food sources decrease, the Anna's Hummingbird needs a helping hand from humans to keep its metabolism fueled and survive the winter months. My people suggest that you have an extra feeder on hand, so if it gets really cold like it did last year and your feeder freezes, you have one to put out while the frozen one is thawing.

The animated cartoon character, Woody Woodpecker, was created by Ben "Bugs" Hardaway in 1940. He also created Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. The Woody Woodpecker Show was first broadcast in 1957 and remained popular until 1972



when the studio owned by Walter Lantz was closed down. Woody has a motion picture star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 7000 Hollywood Boulevard.

I was pondering the fact that monkeys, mice, dogs, and even fruit flies have been sent into space, but why not birds? I learned that birds need gravity to swallow, so if they became weightless, they would become dehydrated and most likely die!

I was also wondering why Herring Gulls and other closely related species have been observed rapidly stamping their feet on areas of grass. Apparently, they do this to attract worms closer to the surface!

## Fun with Words

If you are a mellivorous bird, what do you eat? (Answer: Honey!)

And now for a few nouns describing groups of birds:

a plump of ducks (flying)

a flight of swallows

a host of sparrows

Finally, I heard someone talking about a TV show that is on Saturday mornings at 7:30 AM on FoxSports. It is called "Birding Adventures." This is a show about birdwatching and takes viewers on adventures all over the world. The show also emphasizes conservation and the importance of preserving the bird life of our planet. Check it out or go to [www.birdingadventures.com](http://www.birdingadventures.com).

Until next time,

— **Millie, the Muse of Mews**



Rainier Audubon Society  
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