Upcoming Events

Everyone’s health and well-being are our priority. Until the state changes it’s Covid-19 stay-at-home order, all LCBAS meetings and events are canceled.


Canceled:

- All April events
- The May First Saturday Bateman Island Bird Walk
- The Malheur NWR Field Trip. Contact Kathy Criddle for a refund if you paid for Malheur.
- The May Nuthatch Count

Tentatively upcoming:

May 28: Monthly meeting. Benton PUD. 2721 W 10th Ave, Kennewick If the stay-at-home order is still in effect, we will look into alternatives for the meeting; stay tuned for more information.

For more information see www.lcbas.org

Are You Engaging in Bird Therapy?

By Charlene Burge

Many of us have been taking advantage of the nice weather to enjoy birding and nature in our yards and from our porches, our local parks, and our immediate area. It feels odd to not be able to go further afield, and look for some of our favorite springtime birds, and visit new areas to enjoy nature and go birding. But we can boost our spirits and improve our mental health by being outside, even if we’re not going beyond our yard or porch to do so.

For birders young and old, new and experienced, birds help bring balance to our lives, and being outside, even if only by the front door, or from our favorite window, can help keep us interested and engaged in nature.

The American Bird Conservancy is encouraging people to observe birds each day. Take photos / notes of observations, then share your information, either on social media such as Facebook and Twitter with the hashtag #BirdTherapy, or on their website https://abcbirds.org/.

We don’t need to go beyond our homes. Check out the many virtual events that have popped up as entities such as Audubon, museums, aquariums, some national and state parks, and other entities have streamed online opportunities for education and enjoying the outdoors. There are opportunities for nature and bird lovers of all ages!

For example, check out Audubon’s Birdy Care Package: www.audubon.org/joy-of-birds

More ideas on pages 2 and 3.

Are books more interesting to you?

David Allen Sibley’s new book, What It’s Like to Be a Bird, is a combination of his research and his stunning bird illustrations. “A bird’s experience is far richer, complex, and ‘thoughtful’ than I’d imagined.” is how it starts—and Sibley writes about how his research led him to understand that birds experience emotions and regularly make complex decisions.

Sibley also encourages people to become more active in their birding. He doesn’t mean traveling to exotic locations, or even across the state. Rather, he invites you to sketch, write poetry, take notes and/or photographs. Those sound like great activities to start, or improve on during these time when we need to stay home, stay safe.
First Saturday Bateman Island Bird Walk — March 7, 2020

By Kathy Criddle and Dana Ward

The Bateman Island Bird walk was really fun thanks to all of the enthusiastic participants. The morning seemed like it was going to be rainy and cold but, at precisely 8:00 am, the rain stopped! Unfortunately, the cold wind did not! At least 20 people, most of them new, were eager to learn what birds we might encounter. On the causeway we found the usual species: Mallards, Common Mergansers, Double-crested Cormorant, Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup, and Common Goldeneye Ducks. We heard our first Belted Kingfisher and saw the first Canada Geese. There were American Robins, Song Sparrows, and a Blue Heron.

Off the causeway and into the relative protection of the shrubby woods we found a flock of 12 American Goldfinch, some Red-winged Blackbirds, Northern Flickers, and a Northern Harrier. Ivar heard and saw two Cooper’s Hawks about the time the Goldfinches decided to scatter in all directions! I saw a flock of Cedar Waxwings fly overhead and the usual Ring-billed Gulls kept pulling our heads upwards. Four of the new participants were college students from CBC attending the walk so they could get extra credit. Their enthusiasm and questions were fun. Occasionally they would all drop to their knees in a huddle which I discovered meant they had found an interesting plant they wanted to inspect! My kind of people! Another group of four was a family with two young brothers who kept us on our toes asking questions. While searching the Locust Grove for raptors for them, we found an American Kestrel and we got to share a twitchy flock of Golden-crowned Kinglets.

At the beach we checked out more ducks including Green-winged Teal, several Common Loons, and some Hooded Mergansers. Most folks turned around and went back home because of the cold but Ivar’s group continued as did Dana and my group. We saw the Red-tailed Hawk, Downy Woodpecker, a couple of Horned Grebes, and a chattering flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers. My favorite birds of the morning were the sweet Black-capped Chickadees. All in all, we saw a total of 44 species. Not bad for a very cold morning.

Nature Therapy! More Virtual Resources to Feed your Need for Nature


The Blue Mountain Land Trust’s Wild and Scenic Film Festival: https://bmlt.org/wild

Washington State Parks “Adventure Awaits” Adventure blog: https://www.adventureawaits.com/

The Burke Museum (Seattle’s premier nature and cultural museum): https://www.burkemuseum.org/burke-from-home

The Monterey Bay Aquarium’s live webcams including the aviary and penguins: https://www.montereybayaquarium.org/animals/live-cams

National Park Service 50th Anniversary Celebration of Earth day: https://www.nps.gov/subjects/npscelebrates/earth-day.htm
Ideas and Projects to Make Birding at Home More Enjoyable

The current need to social distance, and keep people as safe as possible, has some people wondering how to enjoy birding and nature while staying safe. Here’s some more ideas to keep us all active and interested, and having fun with birds, while protecting us and them.

**eBird:** Is it time to learn how to use eBird? You can practice at or near your home, while developing your experience with a tool which will enhance your birding skills and help you find what you seek: https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/product/ebird-essentials/#_ga=2.43100640.414911218.1584995382-2094279690.1579802792

**Increase your bird ID skills** by watching videos on the four key elements to identifying birds: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL89FAA014C9EF59BC

Still can’t ID that bird? Try **Merlin:**
https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/

**eBird Quizes:** https://ebird.org/quiz/

**Bird Song Hero:** An introductory game that will help you develop skills to bird by ear. https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/features/bird-song-hero/bird-song-hero-tutorial

Engage in a Citizen Science Project, such as Hummingbirds @ Home, or Project Feederwatch: https://wa.audubon.org/ways-help/birds-and-community-science

Enjoy watching Cornell’s bird cams: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/all-cams/

Attract birds to your yard: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/the-best-ways-to-attract-more-songbirds-to-your-property/

**All about birdhouses:** Have you ever wanted to add a birdhouse or two in your yard, but wasn’t sure how to build one, or the best type to buy for the birds that would use your habitat? Here’s a great starter resource: https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/

**How to choose the right bird feeder:** I think we’ve all wondered what would be the most appropriate feeder for our habitat, our birds, and our bird-seed predators (Squirrel!) . https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/how-to-choose-the-right-kind-of-bird-feeder/


**More Audubon Activities and DIY:** https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/activities

Experienced birders with years of birding under their belts, novice birders, and everyone who falls in between, have at times wondered to themselves….what exactly was that little brown bird?  Gull, what kind of gull?  Who is that singing/calling at night? Birding can be a lifetime pursuit of learning, experience, and understanding.  I hope that these resources will provide you with new opportunities to continue that pursuit.

Please contact Communications@LCBAS.org if you would like the list of links sent directly to your email address.
WDFW-LCBAS Partnership for Burrowing Owl Conservation

By Jason Fidorra

This spring the Department of Fish and Wildlife began working with LCBAS on artificial burrow maintenance for Burrowing Owls. Wildlife Biologist Jason Fidorra has 120 burrows in the Tri-Cities area but couldn’t manage them on his own. This spring several LCBAS volunteers were trained on burrow maintenance and procedures for the Burrowing Owl Project. Volunteers will be responsible for maintenance and monitoring of artificial burrows through the year.

Our Burrowing Owls mostly migrate, but the mild winter allowed many owls to stay onsite or return early with many owls and even a few pairs being seen as early as the first trips on February 11th! Volunteers met on several days to repair artificial burrows that needed replaced in order to be functional housing for Burrowing Owls—the world’s only underground nesting owl!

Burrowing Owls in Washington begin nesting in April, and young fledge in June and July. They typically lay 7-11 eggs, which is a huge clutch size for an owl. During high food years, it’s not uncommon for a pair to raise 10 chicks successfully! LCBAS also purchased equipment for the project which will be used to trap and band owls as part of a regional population study conducted by The Global Owl Project.
Learned Behavior by Birds: Some Fun Examples

By Dana Ward

We mammals sometimes don’t give credit to birds for their intelligence. The old phrase, “bird brain” is applied to a person who did an unwise act or they did something that appeared to be just plain stupid. Compared to a human, a bird’s brain is small, but in relation to their body size a bird brain is the right size and is as complex as mammals. Some of the following actions might give you a better understanding of the intelligence and creativity of birds.

In Western Europe, a Common Crow was repeatedly witnessed taking a jar lid to the peak of a snow and ice covered roof and then placing both feet inside the lid and riding down the length of the roof. The crow did this several times before flying off. It was filmed and put on national television many years ago. The crow certainly learned this behavior on its own. It certainly would not have been instinctive.

In America, a few crows were noted sitting on an electrical wire when one of the crows “fell” forward but did not completely loosen its grip on the wire. It did a complete circle! Once could probably be called an accident but the crow kept repeating the full swing. Was this avian gymnastics or a bored crow having fun? Continued on page 6.

April 22, 1970, Earth Day—The 50th Anniversary:
Have We Accomplished Enough?

By Charlene Burge

During the last 50 years we saw popular, and powerful legislation, including updates to the Clean Air Act, the creation of the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency. We saw people celebrating the environment, the planet, and taking important steps to reduce the hole in the ozone, and reduce cancer-causing radiation.

Climate change is the number one threat to birds and we haven’t done enough to slow or stop human-caused climate change. The detrimental effects of climate change have become more and more apparent, and at a rate faster than previously predicted. From more extreme and damaging wildfire behavior, hurricanes, and other damaging storm activity, to sea level rise, flooding, or extreme drought, the story is playing out in the lives of both people and wildlife. The mostly unseen world within the oceans is endangered too, with temperature and acidity rising, species declining, coral reef bleaching, and giant accumulations of plastic. All species on the planet are losing in more subtle ways, too, as seemingly small variations in climate temperature endanger the habitats they depend on.

Now is the time to fight harder for the planet, as the current administration rolls back important environmental legislation, and reduces protection for birds and other species important to our lives on this planet.

Learn more about climate change and it’s current, and future, effects on us, and our planet.


Your ecological footprint calculator. How many Earths would we need if everyone lived your life? Can you make small changes that will have a positive and cumulative effect, and reduce your impact? www.footprintnetwork.org

Climate change, birds, and our National Parks: https://www.audubon.org/climate/national-parks
Learned Behavior by Birds, continued from pg 5  Crows in Japan learned to use cars and traffic lights to crack nuts. The crows would drop nuts in the intersection and watch the cars crush the nuts. The crows would wait for the light to turn red and swoop down to collect the meats from the nuts while the cars idled. In a similar action, one day I was running along Thayer Street in Richland, when an American Crow dropped an English walnut in front of me from an overhead light. I did not stop. The crow picked up the walnut flew ahead of me and dropped the nut again. I passed it by. Again the crow picked up the nut and flew ahead of me and dropped the nut. This time I obliged the crow and crushed the nut under my foot. I looked back and the crow was picking out the meat from the crushed shell.

A crow was dominating a feeding station and would not let a Blue Jay in to eat. The Blue Jay found a stick nearby and came back to the feeding station and proceeded to jab at the crow, trying to evict it from the station. It would have been a happy ending for the jay except the crow took the stick away and expelled the jay! Scrub Jays have excellent memories and good taste. It has been observed that Scrub Jays can collect and stash up to 8000 food cashes in their territory. Not only do they remember where they hid each item, they are also known to retrieve and eat cached food first that is about to spoil.

A gull with a taste for Cheetos learned how to trigger the door sensor to a quick market. The gull would activate the door and walk inside to the snack section, grab a bag of Cheetos and stroll out the door. Oddly enough the bird had a favorite flavor and would choose that flavor each time. The owner got used to this and allowed it to go on for some time.

One interesting bird story was related by noted ornithologist Professor Bruce Fleury of Tulane University. “In the early 1920s, Blue Tits in Great Britain learned to pry or tear the cardboard caps off milk bottles to get the cream. Flocks of Blue Tits started following milk trucks around for a free meal. To foil the birds, dairies switched from paper caps to aluminum foil caps. But the birds learned to open the foil caps – by patiently tearing them into thin strips. Even more amazing, other species of birds learned to imitate them; by the end of WWII, eleven other species were doing this.”

Do you know what a spring house is? A spring house is just what it sounds like. It is a stone structure (small house) built over a cold flowing spring where you could store food such as milk, meat or vegetables in the cold water, and often you could live upstairs. Most were built in the 1700s before modern refrigeration. In Pennsylvania, where I am from, spring houses were common, especially where flowing springs entered a water course. My dad was hunting water fowl up along the Conococheague Creek when he saw a single male Hooded Merganser. Upon closing in on the duck it dove to avoid the danger. But this duck never surfaced! This happened multiple times on separate trips. Dad got an idea and walked over to the spring house and looked in the open door. There was the Hooded Merganser safe and sound. The bird had learned to escape predators; it was safe in the spring house.

One of the more serious learned behavior actions by birds was recorded in Australia where two species of kite, and Brown Falcons, were often seen to feast on small animals fleeing brush fires. It was noted that these birds would also pick up small burning twigs and drop them in unburnt areas to start new brush fires! Not so good for firefighters.

Finally on a more enjoyable note, Green Herons have been noted to use insects, seeds and flowers to bait fish to come to the surface where they could be nabbed. In some area where popcorn or bread is available Green Herons have learned to use these items to their advantage. Dropping popcorn and bread crumbs on the surface was as good if not better than insects.

I hope you enjoyed some of the examples of learned behavior by birds. Some of these stories were taken from The Great Courses, The Scientific Wonder of Birds. Others I have witnessed or learned from other sources.
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NEW NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERS: We have been sending you complimentary issues of The Curlew newsletter to keep you up to date on local happenings. After three issues, the complimentary mailings end. To continue to receive The Curlew newsletter without interruption, please become a paid subscriber. Doing so is fast, easy, and secure at our website http://lcbas.org/JoinLCBAS.html

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Find out more at www.lcbas.org or www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org

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Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Membership Form

LCBAS membership benefits include a year’s subscription (10 issues) to The Curlew and priority registration for space-limited field trips. LCBAS is a 501c(3) organization and dues are tax deductible.

____ Regular membership ($20)
____ Full-time student membership ($10)
____ I would like to make an additional donation of __________.

Total:__________ (Make check payable to LCBAS)

Mail your form and dues to: Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society, PO Box 1900, Richland, WA. 99352

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