



April 2018

Naturalists

EXPLORE. LEARN. CONSERVE.

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In the Native Plant Garden

If spring has come, can spring be far behind? Walking through the native plant garden signs of spring are there for any naturalist, but blooms are few and far between. Yet some shrubs; red flowering current, shiny Oregon grape and hairy Manzanita are in full bloom. There is also a mat of blooming stream violets and a few trillia shining forth. The white trout lilies will be flowing by April and then we're off to the races.



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March Hikes

Robust and Resilient Life

by Thomas Bancroft



Neckera pennata—Feathered Neckera



Leucolepis acanthoneuron—Palm Tree Moss

A massive thick forest stretches for what looks like miles, and I appear to be perched on the edge of a precipice for

it is straight down with no dirt in my view. Towering trunks rise through the air, some brown and others green. Enormous knots lie along the trunks, and branches run back and forth across the opening, each with large triangular-shaped leaves projecting from both sides of the almost translucent stems. Rosettes, black in the middle with green outer rings, others all green, sit on the tops of some trunks. The view is a thick

tangle, impenetrable, and pitch black just a little ways into it. It is startlingly different, like nothing I'd ever seen, prehistoric.

I lean back to catch my balance and take the 20-power magnifying glass away from my eye. I'm kneeling on the ground along the South Fork of the Snoqualmie River. Massive hemlocks, cedars, and firs surround me, but I've been trying to identify this clump of moss that is only an inch high. Green cylindrical globes also hang from reddish-green stems that extend slightly above the moss's canopy, the sporophyte capsules for this species. With my naked eye and from only a few inches away, these miniature plants almost look like palm trees, and just like the Palm Tree Moss in our guide.

I'm here with Gary and Bruce; they organized this moss-focused field trip and are helping ten of us learn these miniature plants.

When they confirm my identification, I'm reminded of a line in Robin Kimmerer's *Gathering Moss*. "The revelation of suddenly seeing what I was blind to only moments before is a sublime experience for me." I stare into this Lilliputian patch, astonished by the beauty of the miniature plants whose leaves are only one cell thick and run my finger across their soft texture, feeling their life. The mosses evolved more than 500 million years ago. These are some of the first life to invade the land from the aquatic world. We're in a temperate rain forest in the Pacific Northwest, and it's perfect for these water-loving plants. They have no vascular system, like the surrounding trees, so are depended on a moist, humid atmosphere.

I shift a dozen feet along the trail to another moss-covered log and begin to peer through my magnifier. These are badge mosses, towering trunks with a red-cast that have large flat leaves with a thick mid-rib and pointed ends projecting out. But other leaves, much smaller almost like a thin snake, are weaving through the understory. Maybe these are golden short-capped moss. I look around, but everyone is fifty yards down the trail, clustered around the trunk of a big tree.

It has taken us several hours to cover less than a mile along the river, so much to see in the carpet of mosses, lichens, and liverworts that cover trunks, logs, rocks, and the ground. A treasure trove of life lies right under our eyes. Crowds of people pass us by, hiking as fast as they can to see the waterfalls, many who went by then return before we've covered a quarter mile. Kimmerer writes, "So far above the ground, and on our way to somewhere else, we run the risk of missing an entire realm which lies at our feet." I watch a group of ten pass me, several looking at their phones, one with a headset over his ears, music blaring, but it is so exciting to see all these people out here, enjoying nature. The age and ethnic diversity has been as broad as the mosses.

My friends are clustered around a trunk and several logs on the forest floor. I fall to my knees; the moss radiates a damp, musty scent that is different from anything so far experienced. The leaves are yellow-green, but the stems are an orange-red, glowing slightly in the filtered light. The tufty tips mean this is the Electrified Cat's-Tail Moss; the name runs off my lips. On a stick behind me is a cluster of yellow-green leaves that make the stem look like a bottle brush. The long, thin, glossy, leaves turn up like a ski jump but are soft to the touch. Gary says look at the leaf tips to separate the three Neckeras apart, but I can't tell.

I take a large breath of the sweet, damp, forest, and straighten up to look at all the mosses spread across the understory. They look delicate, fragile, and so elegantly textured, but yet they are robust, hardy, able to withstand drying, turning brown, looking dead. With a little rain, these mosses all bounce back instantly.

(see more mosses on other pages)

Upcoming April and early May hikes

Sign up online under *Explore*, *Find Activities* and check *exploring nature* (or click the register buttons below).

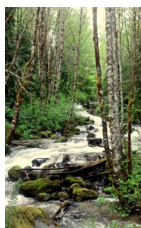


Bowman Bay/Deception Pass

APRIL 1 – GORDIE SWARTZMAN

Join Stewart and Gordie for birding, mossing, and flower greeting as we head up to this exposed eastside like area to catch Harlequin Ducks, oystercatchers and seabirds as well as enjoy burgeoning spring. This hike is currently “full” but in fact we can take a few more, so join us if you can.

[Register Here](#)



Middle Fork of Snoqualmie River

APRIL 5 – DANIELLE GRAHAM, GORDIE AND STEWART

This area has recently opened up with a new road and services (ie. Parking lots) and we will explore trails along the river looking for signs of spring. This is a midweek hike.

[Register Here](#)

Wahclella Falls, Memaloose Hills and Catherine Creek

The Columbia Gorge is known for early spring blooms and we are going to enjoy them at several locations. We will be staying at a hotel in Hood River, so if you do sign up please e-mail Gordie or Stewart so you can get details (already given to those signed up earlier) on where we have a group rate to stay the night. Camping is also an option (beware of trains coming through in the night). The trip is full, but we can take a few more.



DRY FALLS & WAHCLELLA FALLS - APRIL 7 – STUART HOUGEN

[Register Here](#)

CATHERINE CREEK- APRIL 8 – STUART HOUGEN

[Register Here](#)



Cowiche Canyon

Cowiche Canyon, beyond Ellensburg, is known for spring flowers and they should be out by then. The originally listed hike, by Dee Anne Kline is heavily overfull, so we added a second hike on April 12 (midweek) led by Danielle and with Stewart and Gordie tagging along.

APRIL 12 – DANIELLE GRAHAM

[Register Here](#)

APRIL 14 – DEEANN KLINE WITH GORDIE SWARTZMAN & STEWART HOUGEN COLEADING

[Register Here](#)

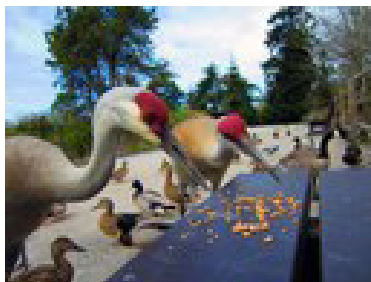


Whiskey Dick Mountain

APRIL 24 - STEWART HOUGEN & GORDIE SWARTZMAN

Join Stewart and Gordie on Whiskey Dick mountain, towering above the Columbia River. It is lonesome, birdy and as wet as it gets for flowers. Fine mammalaria cactus in bloom are in the offing.

[Register Here](#)



Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary

APRIL 28 - ANITA ELDER

Birding is great at the sanctuary and April/May is one of the best times of the year to see the biggest variety of birds!

[Register Here](#)



Westberg Trail/Manashtash Ridge

APRIL 28 - GORDIE SWARTZMAN & STEWART HOUGEN

Enjoy birding, flowers in abundance and views from Manashtash ridge. Gordie and Stewart crack the whip..

[Register Here](#)

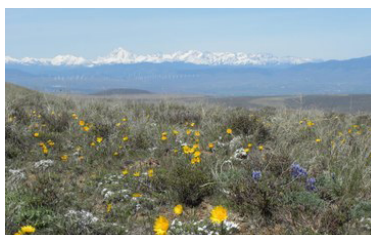


Stillwater Natural Area

MAY 4 - TOM BANCROFT

Join Tom Bancroft in exploring the birding treasures at Stillwater Natural area. See Tom's article in the newsletter about bitterns and his finding them there.

[Register Here](#)



Umptanum Ridge

MAY 10 - DANIELLE GRAHAM

This steep trail winds up on Umptanum Ridge. Birding and flowering should be good.

[Register Here](#)



Black Canyon

MAY 12 - STEWART HOUGEN

This old jeep road goes through geologically fascinating Black Canyon. Birding is often good (and we bird along the way as well) and flowers are abundant and varied. The quintessential east side canyon hike. We will catch the arrival of Lazuli buntings and many warblers.

[Register Here](#)



Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge

MAY 12, 2018 - ANITA ELDER

Join Anita for a trip out to the coast to see bird migrations in full swing.

[Register Here](#)

WA Native Plant Society Program

Natural History and Nature's Future

THURSDAY, APRIL 5, 7:00PM, DANIEL MATHEWS

Mountaineers Program Center, Seattle, Goodman Room

Doors open at 6:00 PM for the Native Plant Identification Workshop; Program begins at 7:00 PM.



Daniel Mathews will start with highlights from his 2017 book, "Natural History of the Pacific Northwest Mountains". He will then preview the book he's currently working on — "Trees In Trouble: Western Landscapes At Risk". In this book, Daniel attempts to answer some questions that many of us have been asking ourselves: how is our beloved natural world going to change in a changing climate? How green will it still be after 30 more years of megafires and insect epidemics? What policies offer any prospect of protecting forest integrity from the inevitable effects accompanying climate change?

Daniel Mathews is a science writer probably best known, around here, for his book, "Cascade-Olympic Natural History". At North Cascades National Park, backcountry rangers call it, The Bible. He has also had a hand in several other well-known, broad-coverage field guides, including one guide to things you can see from a jetliner window. Aside from books, he has written interpretive signs for nature parks and has worked as a naturalist-guide on cruise ships and on backpacking trip seminars organized by the North Cascades Institute. For parts of two summers he served as fire lookout at Desolation Peak. He currently lives in Portland, Oregon with his wife Sabrina. "Trees in Trouble" is due out for publication next year.

Upcoming Programs

- 4-10-18 Jon Bakker "The Prairies of Western Washington"
Bellevue Botanical Garden, Aaron Education Center
- 5-3-18 Frederica Bowcutt "The Tanoak: An Environmental History of a Pacific Coast Hardwood" (at Mountaineers Program Center)
- 6-12-18 Julie O'Donald "Birds in Our Midst: Creating Gardens Filled with Life"
Bellevue Botanical Garden, Aaron Education Center
- 9-6-18 TBA The Mountaineers
- 11-1-18 Scott and Susan Freeman "Saving Tarboo Creek", The Mountaineers
- 12-6-18 Holiday Party! The Mountaineers



Rhytiadelphus triquestrus—Electrified
Cat's tail Moss

Odds & Ends

Poetry

by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting-over and over again announcing your place in the family of things.

NATURE IS WHAT WE SEE

by Emily Dickinson

"Nature" is what we see—

The Hill—the Afternoon—

Squirrel—Eclipse—the Bumble bee—

Nay—Nature is Heaven—

Nature is what we hear—

The Bobolink—the Sea—

Thunder—the Cricket—

Nay—Nature is Harmony—

Nature is what we know—

Yet have no art to say—

So impotent Our Wisdom is

To her Simplicity.

by Emily Dickinson

A LIGHT exists in spring

Not present on the year

At any other period.

When March is scarcely here

A color stands abroad

On solitary hills

That silence cannot overtake,

But human nature feels.

It waits upon the lawn;

It shows the furthest tree

Upon the furthest slope we know;

It almost speaks to me.

Then, as horizons step,

Or noons report away,

Without the formula of sound,

It passes, and we stay:

A quality of loss

Affecting our content,

As trade had suddenly encroached

Upon a sacrament.

PINE TREE TOPS

by Gary Snyder

*In the blue night
frost haze, the sky glows
with the moon
pine tree tops
bend snow-blue,
fade into sky, frost, starlight.
The creak of boots.
Rabbit tracks, deer tracks,
what do we know.*

RIPRAP

by Gary Snyder

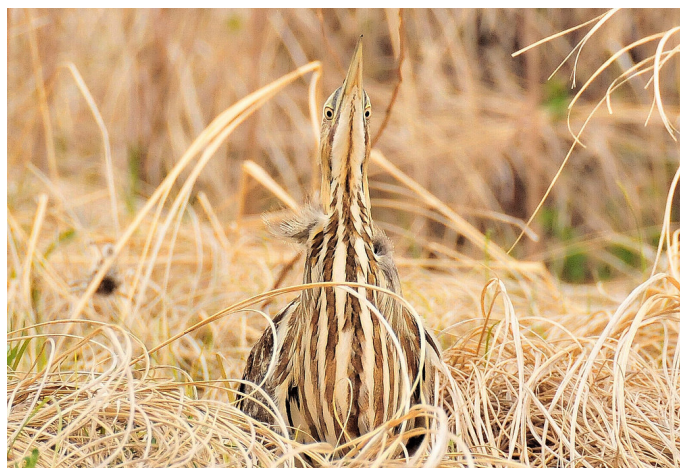
*Lay down these words
Before your mind like rocks.
placed solid, by hands
In coice of place, set
Before the body of the mind
in space and time:
Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall
riprap of things:
Cobble of milky way,
straying planets,
These poems, people,
lost ponies with
Dragging saddles--
and rocky sure-foot trails.
The worlds like an endless
four-dimensional
Game of Go.
ants and pebbles
In the thin loam, each rock a word
a creek-washed stone
Granite: ingrained
with torment of fire and weight
Crystal and sediment linked hot
all change, in thoughts,
As well as things.*

Preview of May 4 field trip to Stillwater Wildlife Unit near Carnation

A Breathtaking Baritone

by Thomas Bancroft

The trees are just beginning to show a little shape as I inch my way along the dike at Stillwater Wildlife Area. It is 5:00 AM on a Sunday morning in early May, and sunrise will not come for another hour, even longer before the sun hits this area at the western base of the Cascades. My flashlight is off so as to not disturb any wildlife. The songs of American Robins fill the air. Their “cheerily, cheer up, cheer up, cheerily, cheer up” melody proclaims spring has arrived, and they are ready for another day, even though it looks like night.



A different sound makes me stop, a gulping, like someone is swallowing large mouthfuls of air. It comes from the marsh across the small pond to my south. Five gulps are quickly followed by an eerie call: “pump-er-lunk,” then another “pump-er-lunk” and finally a “dunk-a-doo.” A male American Bittern is trying to woo a female.

I’ve come to record this exact sound, so I settle onto the ground to put my stereo microphone rig on a tripod and see if I can hold still for the next hour. I slide off the gravel-topped dike to station my mic with its back to the bank,

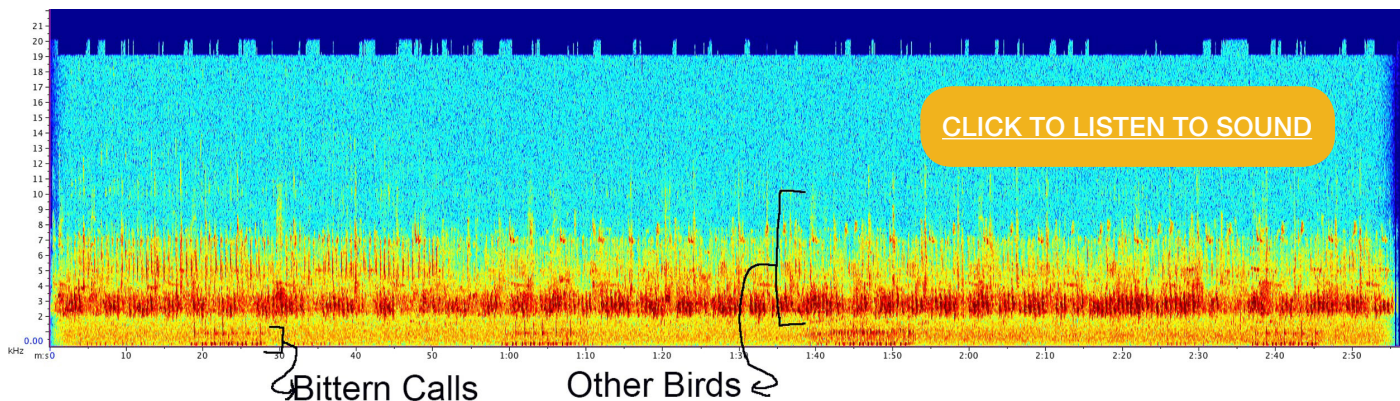
partially blocking sounds from behind me. The water is ten feet below, and a few bushes and cottonwoods line the pond’s edge. Open water extends fifty yards to a thick marsh. The bittern is probably sitting at the water’s edge, hoping a female will like his display.

A second male begins gulping; he is roughly a hundred yards east of my seat. The closer one instantly responds with his answer. Last week, I was here with a group of birders. The sun had risen as we searched along this old railroad bed, now a hiking trail. One person discovered a male bittern, probably this same one, lurking in the reeds and focused her spotting scope on him. We watched the male contort its neck as it lunged forward to gulp in air, expanding its esophagus like a balloon, and then used that air to make this resonant “pump-er-lunk” sound.

In five decades of birding, I had never heard their call until last week. They don’t breed in Florida where I lived for more than two decades and were not common breeders near my Maryland home either. The sound last week took me by surprise; I watch the male for a long time while the birding party walked farther down the dike. Every few minutes, the bittern would begin again to blow up his esophagus and bellow out this resonating sound. This behavior and sound was so astonishing that I felt the need to return to see if I could record this spectacular call.

Their courtship boomings have a ventriloquistic nature, and rural people have given them some interesting names; “stake-driver,” “thunder-pumper.” These are low-frequency sounds that will travel much farther through thick vegetation than the high pitch songs of most birds. Ornithologists think that these calls function both to attract females and tell rival males that this marsh is taken.

American Bitterns are members of the heron family. Their streaky brown and buff plumage allows them to disappear into the reeds, blending perfectly with the vertical shoots. They often freeze in a pose with their bills pointed



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skyward, neck stretched, so the streaks in their plumage will run parallel with the reeds. If they see people, they usually sulk back into the marsh.

But today I'm alone along this dike; no other person is out this early. I am hunched low; I have headset over my ears; my stereo mic pointing right toward the marsh where the bird just called. My eyes are closed so I can concentrate on absorbing the morning chorus of birds. It is still 45 minutes until sunrise. In addition to the robins, the Red-winged Blackbirds have started their "conk-la-ree" song,

and I can imagine them drooping their wings while leaning forward and puffing out their bright red shoulder patches as they bellow. They remind me of my high school years when the football jocks would strut down the aisle, not moving aside for anyone, puffing out their shoulders when passing a pretty girl. The six-phrase melody of a Song Sparrow comes from right above me. He is probably sitting at the end of a branch, looking across the marsh, and raising his head, puffing out his chest when he sings his beautiful song. Individual male song sparrows have about nine different melodies, and they mix them up in their morning repertoire. He hopes this diversity will impress a mate.

These birds will be a good background to the bittern, creating musical-filler between this heron's calls in my recording. He's my quest today. To think a bird could be such a breathtaking baritone. Each time the sound comes across the marsh, I am amazed by how these notes are made and want to show others this unique love song. Another bittern calls not far away to my left, and a third about at the limit of my hearing on the right. A long pause happens between their trumpets and then once one starts to gulp in air, the others follow. I try not to move or say anything in spite of my excitement as my recorder picks up every nuance of the morning.

Book Review: The Word-hoard: Robert Macfarlane on Rewilding Our Language of Landscape

The article concerns the sources of words that are used to describe natural phenomena and that have passed out of common vernacular, in part through reduced connection to the natural world. For example, *ammil* is a Devon term for the thin film of ice that lacquers all leaves, twigs and grass blades when a freeze follows a partial thaw. Many examples are given in the article and highlight that our world (certainly the 'developed' world) has lost, or is fast losing a connection to nature that comes from observation and living close at hand with the out-of-doors. Macfarlane has published a book called *Landmarks* (Hamish Hamlin published this March) which contains many such terms because "we lack a *Terra Britannica*, as it were: a gathering of terms for the land and its weathers – terms used by crofters, fishermen, farmers, sailors, scientists, miners, climbers, soldiers, shepherds, poets, walkers and unrecorded others for whom particularised ways of describing place have been vital to everyday practice and perception."

This article from the Guardian was brought to my attention by Gary Brill.



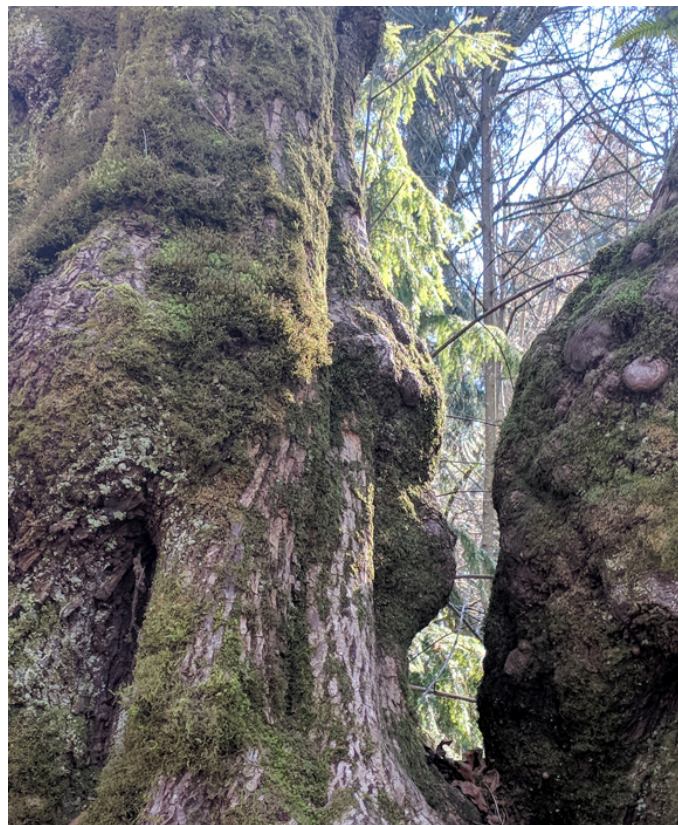
Original Artical

Photographs

What's Happening Around Town

by Gordie Swartzman

Cherry blossoms on the quad (UW), Wolf Creek Nature Trail coltsfoot, skunk cabbage, tree with mosses, Siberian miner's lettuce, Early spring migrants (cock-of-the-rock and oropendula on trees near my house [like the zoo]).



Photographs

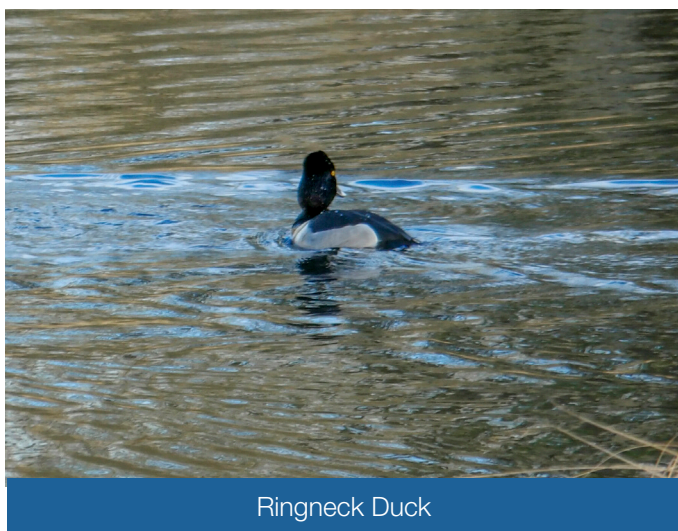
Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

by Anita Elder

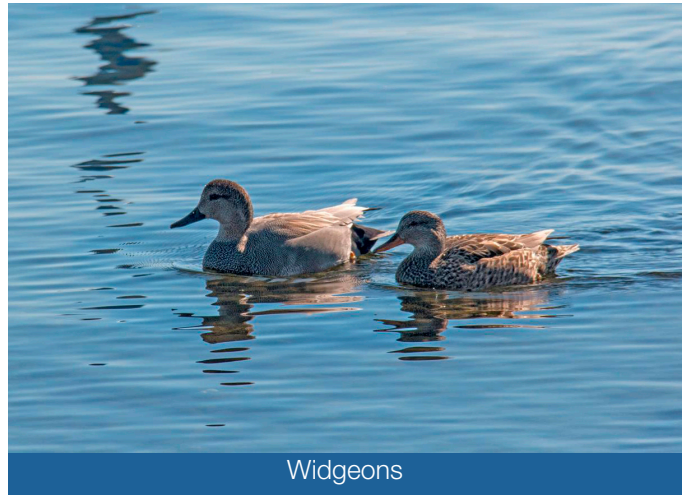
Nisqually is one of my favorite places to walk and see lots of birds. A chilly Saturday in March didn't leave me disappointed!

Several deer were grazing along the trail on the east side of the visitor center. I had just moved on when something in the water caught my eye – a river otter! I wasn't able to get any good photos of him, other than his tail as he moved inside a hollowed-out tree trunk (I'm assuming its den).

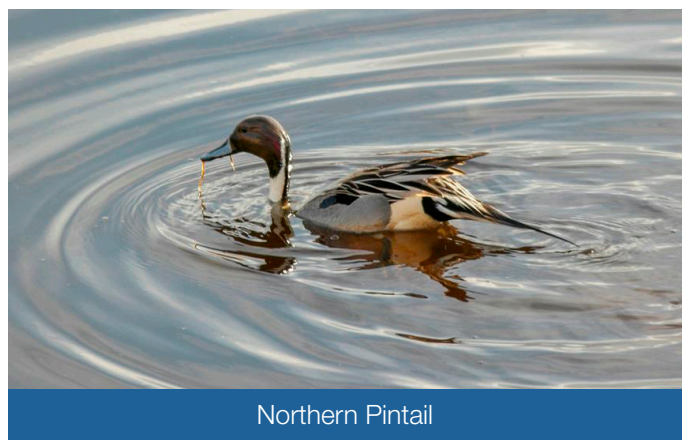
Further down the trail, I saw a great horned owl sitting on her nest. I had to really strain my eyes, even with a scope, to see her, since her color really camouflaged her in the tree!



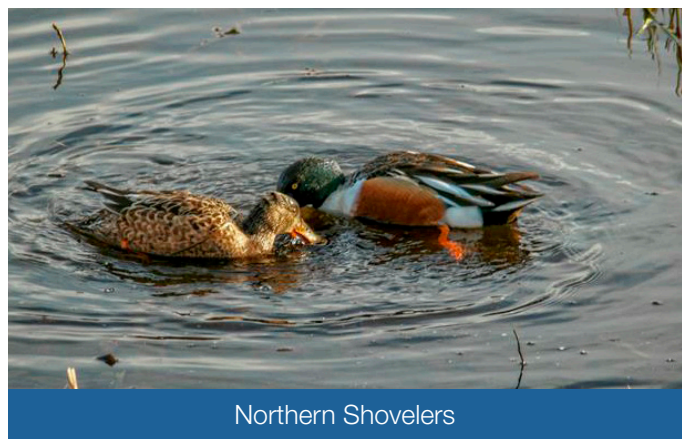
Ringneck Duck



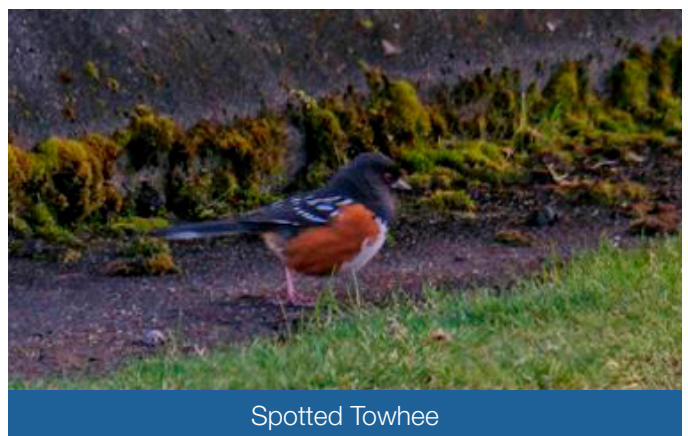
Widgeons



Northern Pintail



Northern Shovelers



Spotted Towhee



Plagiomnium insigne—Badge Moss

Seattle Naturalists Committee Officers and Subcommittee Chairs

Committee Chair	Gordie Swartzman	g.swartzman@gmail.com
Committee Co-Chair	Danielle Graham	pedergraham@gmail.com
Study Group Coordinator	Stewart Hougen	sehougen@comcast.net
Native Plant Garden Co-Chair	Rob Stevens	dlibfrom@yahoo.com
Native Plant Garden Co-Chair	Sandy Bowman	bowman@seanet.com
Website Page	Maggie Willson	maggienum@yahoo.com

We welcome comments, ideas, information to share, original short articles, and photos. If you have information you'd like to have appear in the newsletter, please send it to Gordie (g.swartzman@gmail.com).

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