



August 2018

Naturalists

EXPLORE. LEARN. CONSERVE.

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In the Native Plant Garden

The native garden is displaying the effects of our summer heat. The alpine garden is lovely. The rest is somewhat ragged. The cluster orchids bloomed and dried. They must have been lovely (I missed them). If you can go to the mountains, do that now. The species garden will be back again later. BUT, if you want to see scarlet gilia like you've never seen it before, go down and have a look.



Scarlet gilia with rockmat and penstemon – who ever saw gilia like this?



[Facebook](#)



[Flickr](#)

July Naturalist Hikes

MOUNT TOWNSEND | JULY 6



Candystripe



Tufted saxifrage



Over the field and far, far, away

TALAPUS LAKE, MASON LAKE, IRA SPRING LOOP
| JULY 14



Noble fir and Mt. Rainier from above Ollalie Lake



Beargrass at Rainbow Lake



Butterfly on aster



A splendid butterfly day



Bog laurel

NACHES LOOP | JULY 21 DEE ANN KLINE
Photos taken next day on same loop



Magenta paintbrush and avalanche lily



White flowered azalea



The group on Naches Loop – Intro class field trip



Fritillary on pasqueflower mopheads

**BUTTERFLY TRIP WITH MAUREEN TRAXLER|
JULY 21 & GREEN MOUNTAIN | JULY 26**



Upcoming Hikes

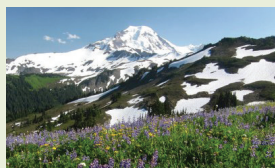
Sign up online under *Explore, Find Activities* and check exploring nature (or click the register buttons below).

MOUNT BAKER AREA HIKES

Do them all and stay at the lodge

[Reserve Your Bed](#)

3 hikes on consecutive days in the Mt. Baker area. To commit to this you will want to sign up to stay at the Mt. Baker lodge for all or part of the weekend. There is also a stargazing event on Saturday night led by Rich Lawrence at the lodge (no signup for that necessary). You can sign up to stay at the lodge online and pay in advance. I think it is \$80 for both nights per person and includes dinners and breakfasts. Lodge digs are communal but civilized and the food is generally healthy and plentiful. The photography group is also planning to stay the weekend and has events available. This is a great opportunity to share our love of the outdoors together and develop an enhanced sense of connection. Views of Glacier peak begin soon and last throughout as the panorama widens. The trail switchbacks through swaths of wildflowers and the top has alpine flowers. Led by Gordie and Stewart.



SKYLINE DIVIDE – AUGUST 10

Switchback through forest to the divide and roam through views and wildflower meadows as far as the eye can see.

[Register Here](#)



CHAIN LAKES LOOP MT. BAKER – AUGUST 11

Close to the Mt. Baker lodge this hike traverses several enticing lakes with wildflower meadows, views and scree. Can be done as a loop or as a shorter hike. Starts high and stays high.

[Register Here](#)



Lake Ann near Mt. Shuksan

AUGUST 11 - TOM BANCROFT

Join Tom Bancroft on this hike that begins near the lodge and ends at magical Lake Anne.

[Register Here](#)



YELLOW ASTER BUTTE – AUGUST 12

Full of flowers all the way up, with tarns, meadows and views.

[Register Here](#)



HANNEGAN PASS – AUGUST 12

We will hike to the Pass which is a little over 2000 feet of climb. We will go slow looking for flowers, butterflies, trees, and nature in general

[Register Here](#)

Alternative Hikes for people staying at Baker Lodge

Anita Elder will lead a couple of shorter hikes on Saturday and Sunday (August 11 and 12) near the Mt. Baker Lodge.

One is a Saturday hike that is a partial Chain Lakes Loop (the part near Artist Point) and partial Ptarmigan Ridge

[Register Here](#)

| The other is a Sunday hike of the Bagley Creek Loop

[Register Here](#)

Upcoming Hikes

(Continued)

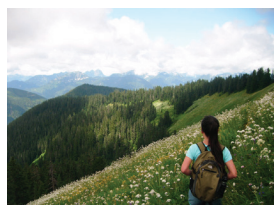


Summerland

AUGUST 2 - GORDIE SWARTZMAN

A more strenuous hike to a lovely subalpine meadow through woods and flowers and along streams. Then, we will likely head up into what looks like the moon, toward (but probably not to) panhandle gap and alpine flowers galore. Good chance for goat and bear sightings.

[Register Here](#)



Scorpion Mountain

AUGUST 8 - STEWART HOUGEN

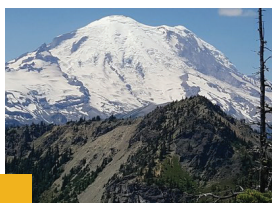
A longish hike north of US 2 with unusual wildflowers, good views and noble fir.

[Register Here](#)

AUGUST 20 - DAVE

Join David Shema on
on one hike..

[Register Here](#)



Crystal Mountain

SHEMA

this annual pilgrimage to see most of the conifer species in the state,

Odds & Ends

Mountaineers summer camp goes on a nature walk

On July 19 Gordie and Peg Swartzman, Danielle Graham and Lisa Kraft led groups of Mountaineer summer campers on a nature walkabout in Magnuson Park. Our focus changed with the kid's interest. We explored the strategy of seed formation, looked at pied billed grebe's building a nest and got to taste edible berries (gooseberry and Oregon grape) and talk about pond muck. If you are interested in participating in this next year or in helping develop a youth program contact Danielle Graham.



Mystery Plant – Can you identify this plant? Win accolades. Seen on Naches loop near a stream.

Naturalist facebook group:



The Facebook Group is a group of Mountaineers Nats who have a passion for the natural world and want to learn more about it.

It is called The Mountaineers Naturalist Group. It is open to Mountaineers Members who are affiliated with the Naturalist Program, either as a current or past student of the Intro to the Natural World course or as a member of the Naturalist Study Group. It provides a place for members to share photos of their hikes and trips, as well as to help with identification of species.

People can search for it on Facebook and ask to join. If they are a current member of The Mountaineers and affiliated with the Naturalist Program, they will be added.

The group is open only to Mountaineers Members as it helps us build camaraderie among our members. (There are many other Facebook groups open to all such as the Washington Native Plant Society and Western Washington Birders.)

Tom Bancroft on Lincoln Sparrows and Black Backed Woodpeckers

FINDING WILDNESS

The crisp morning air, maybe in the low 40s, gave the June morning freshness as I hiked along the trail by Lower Tiffany Lake. Tall living lodgepole pines and Engelmann spruce dotted the shoreline while straight skeletons of burnt trees rose above sapling pines and spruce on the slope above the trail. I had not heard an airplane or car motor since my buddy and I left Winthrop early on the previous day to head north into the Okanogan National Forest. This lake was more than an hour drive from any human habitation and quite a ways back from the nearest dirt road. The sun had not yet crested Rock Mountain to the east and the water, flat as glass, reflected the granite ridge on the west side. A bird sang, and my first thought was House Wren, but then I paused to look back and forth across this area, mumbling, "Not the right habitat, too high in altitude and the wrong plant community."

The song was bubbly, a jumble of trills, often husky in nature, lower in pitch, then going up, before coming back down. It was a musical song that seemed to have gurgles, trills, and buzzes. After ten minutes of searching, I found the bird sitting about eight feet up on an Engelmann spruce that grew right along the lake's bank.

A small plump sparrow with crisp streaks, a gray face and buff wash across the breast, and when it moved, its unmarked white belly flashed briefly. A Lincoln's Sparrow was defending its territory with a beautiful song and sitting prominently in plain sight. I had only seen this species outside of the breeding season when they tend

to be secretive, skulking through thick brush often by themselves or with just a few other sparrows. The last time I saw one; it appeared at the edge of a brier patch for only a second before disappearing back into the thicket.

I found half dozen more along the eastern shore of Tiffany Lake. All of them were in the narrow boggy strip between the trail and the lake. They like wet areas with a thick cover of bushes and small trees. In 1833, John James Audubon discovered this species in Labrador and named it after his traveling buddy, Thomas Lincoln. This bird nests in montane forests of the Cascades and the Rocky Mountains and throughout the boreal forest of Canada and Alaska. Unlike the Song Sparrow, their song repertoire varies little across their range. Humans in the United States seem to have a more diverse dialect than these guys.

It was almost 7 AM when I turned to hurry back to camp, hoping my buddy was starting to stir; we had stayed up until 2 AM watching the half-moon rise over this wilderness valley and set behind the granite cliffs. The shadows, reflections, and winnowing snipe had kept our attention. He would be envious of my discovery. Lincoln's Sparrows are one of the more elusive of North American birds. Audubon had commented, "We found more wildness in this species than in any other inhabiting the same country."

[Listen Here](#)



BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER

A persistent "Kyik, Kyik, Kyik, Kyik, ..." filled the ponderosa pine forest and muffled incessant begging of nestlings in a nearby dead snag. An adult Black-backed Woodpecker was agitated even though I was 200 feet down the road from the nest. A scouting party had found this nesting pair along the road in Conboy National Wildlife Refuge. Many people over the last several days had had a chance to add this enigmatic woodpecker to their list. I was stopping one last time on this June day to listen to these babies let their parents know that they were still hungry. Their calls seemed to stir something deep within me that filled me with strength for the five-hour drive back to Seattle.

Earlier this morning, I had brought four birders to see this elusive species. Black-backed Woodpeckers respond to forest fires, moving into recently burned areas where they stay for a few years before shifting to another. They feed on the larva of beetles that bore into the coniferous trees to feed on the cambium layer under the bark. Their dark black backs, wings, and bodies allow these woodpeckers to disappear against the charred trunks.

Ponderosa pine forests are fire-dependent, and this forest looked like a low-intensity burn had occurred several years ago; most of the trees were vigorously growing, and the understory was alive with new growth. The pair had built their nest cavity in a leaning snag, and the entrance was on the backside of the tree, just out of sight, maybe 15 to 20 feet up.

When we stopped by early this morning, the male woodpecker was thirty feet up in a live ponderosa pine just hanging on the trunk by his three toes. Every minute or two, he would drum on the tree as if to tell the world that this was his place, and he was happy. The young were calling not a hundred feet from him, but he seemed to have no concern with what they were saying. The female came in once during our half-hour stay. When she fed the nestlings, they chattered even more.

On the previous Thursday, I had searched for Black-back Woodpeckers in the coniferous forests surrounding the Aiken Lava Flow. The area on the southern flanks of Mt. Adams wasn't burned in 2013 when I hiked the trail to Snipes Mountain, but many of the towering ponderosa pines and grand firs were now dead, and others fire scarred. I'd only seen a black-backed once when traveling in Alaska, but based on the scientific literature, I thought this should be ideal habitat. One woodpecker did tap on a tree while I was there. I spent 45 minutes searching for it but succeeded in only finding one Nashville Warbler and one House Wren. Still, I brought eleven people to that Mt. Adams site on Friday. My hopes rose when one participant said he had seen Black-backed Woodpeckers at that place just a year earlier.

We began to search the forest surrounding the trail that

runs along the thirty-foot-high basalt lava flow. Within 20 minutes, someone said “woodpecker” with a little-added emotion. Twenty-four eyes had done what two old ones couldn’t! Two Black-backed Woodpeckers were working the trunks of a dozen grand firs. As I focused my binoculars on the male, he flew across a 50-foot gap to land on a horizontal branch where he then passed a morsel to the female before flying in his typical woodpecker undulating flight to another tree. The tension instantly lessened in my muscles, I had found a “tier 1” bird for my group, a rare bird in this county and sought after on field trips.

As I stood along the road at Conboy, the male drummed a few times, and the babies called even louder. He was back in the woods and out of my sight. Ponderosa pine forests do best if a fire happens every decade or two. The trees and understory vegetation prospers, and the forest then supports birds like the Dark-eyed Juncos, Chipping Sparrows, Grays Flycatchers, and White-headed Woodpeckers. Humans, though, naturally become fearful of fire because their homes and structures now dot these fire-dependent ecosystems. Fire suppression has caused many forests to become thick, and when fires do come, they often kill trees that would have survived a more regular fire frequency.

The area near the Aiken Lava Flow had many dead grand firs. These trees were several feet in diameter and must have been two hundred years old. The intense fire was too much for them, and most were dead. Climate change will only aggravate the situation. Managers at Conboy seem to be keeping fire in their forest, and the Forest Service is working to reintroduce fire into the national forests where years of suppression has allowed fuel loads to build high. Persistence and perseverance will be essential, and we need to provide the moral and financial support to land managers to maintain this new paradigm.

[Listen Here](#)



Poetry

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

By Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE

By Camille T. Dungy

A fifth of animals without backbones could be at risk of extinction, say scientists. BBC News

Ask me if I speak for the snail and I will tell you
I speak for the snail.
speak of underneathedness
and the welcome of mosses,
of life that springs up,
little lives that pull back and wait for a moment.

I speak for the damselfly, water skeet, mollusk,
the caterpillar, the beetle, the spider, the ant.
I speak
from the time before spinelessness was frowned upon.

Ask me if I speak for the moon jelly. I will tell you
one thing today and another tomorrow
and I will be as consistent as anything alive
on this earth.

I move as the currents move, with the breezes.
What part of your nature drives you? You, in your cubicle
ought to understand me. I filter and filter and filter all day.

Ask me if I speak for the nautilus and I will be silent
as the nautilus shell on a shelf. I can be beautiful
and useless if that's all you know to ask of me.

Ask me what I know of longing and I will speak of
distances
between meadows of night-blooming flowers.
I will speak
the impossible hope of the firefly.

You with the candle
burning and only one chair at your table must understand
such wordless desire.

To say it is mindless is missing the point.

IOWA CITY: EARLY APRIL

By Robert Hass

This morning a cat—bright orange—pawing at the one patch of new grass in the sand-and tanbark-colored leaves.

And last night the sapphire of the raccoon's eyes in the beam of the flashlight.

He was climbing a tree beside the house, trying to get onto the porch, I think, for a wad of oatmeal
Simmered in cider from the bottom of the pan we'd left out for the birds.

And earlier a burnished, somewhat dazed woodchuck, his coat gleaming with spring,
Loping toward his burrow in the roots of a tree among the drying winter's litter
Of old leaves on the floor of the woods, when I went out to get the New York Times.
And male cardinals whistling back and forth—sireeep, sreeep, sreeep—

Sets of three sweet full notes, weaving into and out of each other like the triplet rhymes in medieval poetry,
And the higher, purer notes of the tufted titmice among them,
High in the trees where they were catching what they could of the early sun.

And a doe and two yearlings, picking their way along the worrying path they'd made through the gully, their coats the color of the forest floor,
Stopped just at the roots of the great chestnut where the woodchuck's burrow was,
Froze, and the doe looked back over her shoulder at me for a long moment, and leapt forward,
Her young following, and bounded with that almost mincing precision in the landing of each hoof
Up the gully, over it, and out of sight. So that I remembered

Dreaming last night that a deer walked into the house while I was writing at the kitchen table,
Came in the glass door from the garden, looked at me with a stilled defiant terror, like a thing with no choices,
And, neck bobbing in that fragile-seeming, almost mechanical mix of arrest and liquid motion, came to the table

And snatched a slice of apple, and stood, and then quietened, and to my surprise did not leave again.

And those little captains, the chickadees, swift to the feeder and swift away.

And the squirrels with their smoke-plume tails trailing digging in the leaves to bury or find buried—
I'm told they don't remember where they put things, that it's an activity of incessant discovery—
Nuts, tree-fall proteins, whatever they forage from around the house of our leavings,

And the flameheaded woodpecker at the suet with his black-and-white ladderback elegant fierceness—
They take sunflower seeds and stash them in the rough ridges of the tree's bark
Where the beaks of the smoke-and-steel blue nuthatches can't quite get at them—
Though the nuthatches sometimes seem to get them as they con the trees methodically for spiders' eggs or some other overwintering insect's intricately packaged lump of futurity
Got from its body before the cold came on.

And the little bat in the kitchen lightwell—
When I climbed on a chair to remove the sheet of wimpled plastic and let it loose,
It flew straight into my face and I toppled to the floor, chair under me,
And it flared down the hall and did what seemed a frantic reconnoiter of the windowed, high-walled living room.
And lit on a brass firelog where it looked like a brown and ash grey teenaged suede glove with Mephistophelean dreams,
And then, spurt of black sperm, up, out the window, and into the twilight woods.

All this life going on about my life, or living a life about all this life going on,
Being a creature, whatever my drama of the moment, at the edge of the raccoon's world—
He froze in my flashlight beam and looked down, no affect, just looked,
The ringtail curled and flared to make him look bigger and not to be messed with—
I was thinking he couldn't know how charming his comic-book robber's mask was to me,
That his experience of his being and mine of his and his of mine were things entirely apart,
Though there were between us, probably, energies of shrewd and respectful tact, based on curiosity and fear—
I knew about his talons whatever he knew about me—
And as for my experience of myself, it comes and goes, I'm not sure it's any one thing, as my experience of these creatures is not,
And I know I am often too far from it or too near, glad to be rid of it which is why it was such a happiness,
The bright orange of the cat, and the first pool of green grass-leaves in early April, and the birdsong—that orange and that green not colors you'd set next to one another in the human scheme.

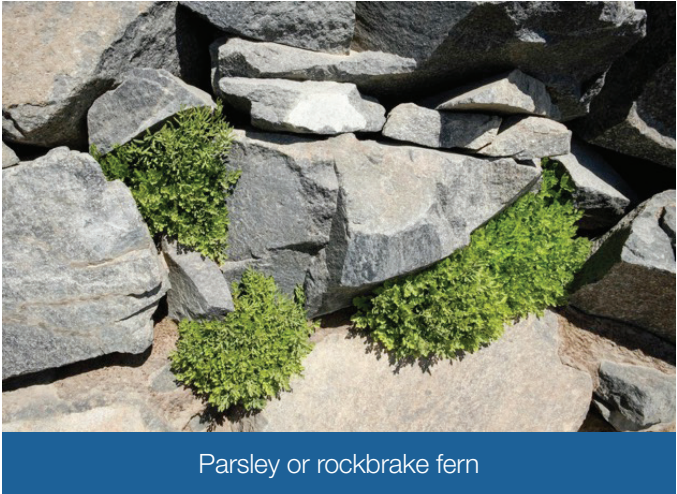
And the crows' calls, even before you open your eyes, at sunup.

Photographs

TOM BANCROFT AT BERKELEY PARK



Alpine buckwheat



Parsley or rockbrake fern



Checkerspot butterfly on valerian



Shrubby penstemon



Shrubby penstemon



Magenta paintbrush



Large flowered agoseris



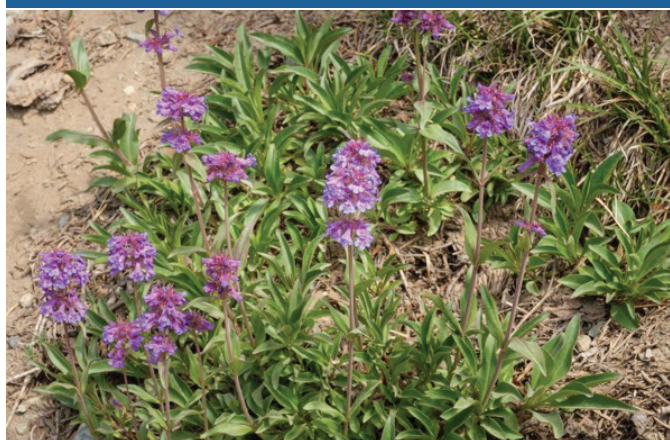
Rainier lousewort



Alpine smelowskia



Shrubby cinquefoil



Cascade penstemon



Ladybug on false Hellebore near Tipsoo Lake by Anita Elder

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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).