

BIRD EXPLORER

The Starlings of autumn

BY PETER J. THIEMANN



Starlings flock in large numbers to reduce threats from predators such as peregrine falcons. Have you seen their murmurations as the sun sets? Photos courtesy of Peter J. Thiemann flickr photo stream.



Peter J. Thiemann

The European Starling is a Eurasian species introduced to North America by the Shakespeare Society in New York City in 1890. Starlings were mentioned in Shakespeare's work as a charismatic birds. Mozart kept one as a pet. Books were written about the Mozart starling, with some suggesting that this bird influenced his music compositions.

The starling is a very handsome bird species, with iridescent colors that show when the light falls right. Starlings sing year-round. In fall, here in the Rogue Valley, you can see flocks of hundreds if not thousands gathered on our autumn-colored trees to roost and sing.

Some biologists don't like this bird species—regardless of its insect-control diet—because it aggressively outcompetes other native bird species for cavity nesting sites.

Starlings have multiplied rapidly in North America, but the population seems to have leveled off. In Europe, however, it is another story—this species is in a sharp decline, and nobody knows why. So this is another reason to cherish a beautiful bird here in its adopted land.

One of the starlings' survival strategies is to flock in large numbers, which reduces threats from predators such as peregrine falcons. If you have ever seen their truly spectacular murmurations as the sun sets, you have witnessed synchronized aerobatic maneuvers that are matched by few bird species.

Starlings can be found in many habitats often associated with man-made structures but also in wild places. This year I saw starlings in Yellowstone National Park riding the backs of bison—just like blackbirds.

Ornamental trees with colorful autumn leaves, like those in Costco's old parking lot in Medford, are good places to find and listen to a starling concert in autumn.

Peter J. Thiemann
peterjthiemann@yahoo.com

Duskywings of the oak woodlands

BY LINDA KAPPEN

Duskywings, which belong to the butterfly family of Hesperidae, are also known as Skippers. Our largest duskywing, the Propertius Duskywing (*Errynnis propertius*), is also the most strongly marked on a smoky gray and soft brown base color, while other duskywings are smaller and darker, with much less contrast. The Propertius Duskywing can be up to 1-3/4 inches across on open wing.

The Propertius Duskywing lives in oak woodlands where its host plant is the oak species Garry oak, also known as Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*). A nest of oak leaves provides shelter for the larvae to overwinter while they wait for pupation in early spring. In southern Oregon, the period from spring through summer can produce a few generations of the Propertius Duskywing.

The Propertius Duskywing can be seen in flight from March through July. They are most likely to be seen in and near the oak woodlands with which they

are associated. They fly quickly through grasses, stop to nectar on flowers, and open their wings to bask in a sunny spot. They are easily mistaken for moths.

They range from southern British Columbia to Baja, California, and follow the Garry oaks from the coast to the Siskiyou and east to Nevada. It is one of the larger groups of butterflies flying in spring in our area.

In southern Oregon and here in the Applegate, where we have a good number of oak woodlands, their populations are healthy. The leaves that fall under the oaks in our natural areas need to be left undisturbed to provide their habitat.

When children net butterflies at Applegate School, duskywings are the first Skipper they learn about. Cries of "There goes a duskywing!" are frequent.

Fun fact: The Propertius Duskywing butterfly is named after the Greek poet Sextus Propertius.

Linda Kappen
humbukkapps@hotmail.com



Propertius Duskywing. Photo: Linda Kappen.

Applegater Fundraiser News



The Applegater's 2018 Savory Shindig fundraiser at Valley View Winery was fun for all. Thank you to our sponsors and donors and everyone who attended! Stay tuned for plans for our 25th birthday celebration in 2019! Photo: Cathy Rodgers.

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