

# BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Lane County Audubon Society is alive and flapping BY DASH PAULSON

In May, as the sun sets each evening, thousands of small birds swarm above the brown brick chimney of Agate Hall on the University of Oregon campus. They are Vaux's swifts, newly arrived from Central America. When the light begins to die, the cloud flies together and spins into a funnel above the chimney mouth and the swifts dive down to roost for the night.

Below in the parking lot, a dozen people watch the show, including Maeve Sowles, president of Lane County Audubon Society.

"I had a friend from Hawaii tell me once that if this happened on the islands, there would be tour buses and tickets to this," says Sowles, originally from Hawaii as well. Right now, the birds are free of charge.

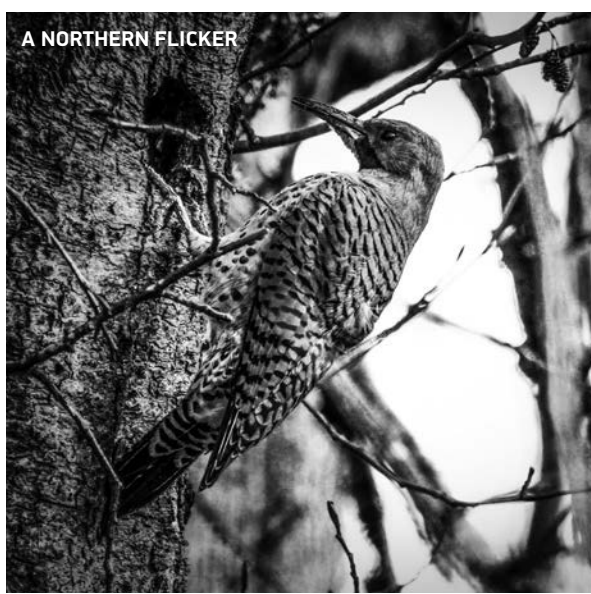
There are few hobbies as convenient as birdwatching, also known as birding, or in England, twitching.

"My daughter calls birding a gateway drug to the natural world," says Jim Maloney, a photographer and ecologist at the Lane County Audubon.

According to Maloney and other members of the society, birding in Oregon and the U.S. is alive and flapping.

A national survey by the U.S. Forest Service backs him up. In 2013, some 85 million Americans spent time observing, photographing or feeding wild birds. About 18 million people made special trips in 2011 to see or count birds by sight or sound.

"If you're outside, then you can be birdwatching," Sowles says. "It allows us to be closer to a non-human part of the world, and adds another dimension to enjoying the outdoors."



A NORTHERN FLICKER

PHOTO BY KYLE LYNCH-KLARUP

At the society's early May meeting, members discussed education efforts in local schools and conservation issues around the county. Talk veered occasionally into stories about crows chasing eagles or suspicious turkey activity around Spencer Butte.

Birding is auditory as well as visual for keen observers. An eagle can be detected, and even identified, as much by its cry as its feathers. Migration patterns mean new species arrive and depart year round and, like every good hobby, there's always a new challenge awaiting.

The National Audubon Society, a registered nonprofit, began in 1905 after a growing outcry against bird slaughter for fashion or development. Conservation, education and grassroots organizing became their main tools.

The branch in Lane County began as the Oakridge Audubon Society during the late '60s. In 1975, it expanded into a countywide organization and, in addition to local outreach, now helps traveling birders find rare and uncommon fowl.

Vaux's swift is one of those birds. These swifts, which migrate between Central America and Canada every year, remain in flight constantly except when resting. Their natural roosts are enormous tree snags, now scarce because of logging, though chimneys are an attractive, urban alternative.

Sowles emphasizes that Lane Audubon loves to encourage birding, but education and conservation are their real missions.

"We're very fortunate to have a well-preserved environment in Lane County," Sowles says. "You can still see what it was like 200 years ago."

However, the ecosystem is changing. "Winter temperatures are higher now, and we have birds that we've never had before in the Willamette staying here all the time," she says, like black phoebes. Others — like the Western meadowlark, Oregon's state bird — are now rare.

Lane Audubon, which claims about 1,600 members, recommends beginners or interested parties join its monthly bird walk. They organize a walk every third Saturday of the month and provide knowledgeable guides. Binoculars can be loaned upon request.

The next Audubon walk is 8 am Saturday, June 20. Birders meet at the South Eugene High School parking lot for carpooling.

Armchair birdwatchers can follow the adventures of local birder Noah Stryker as he travels around the world trying to document 5,000 species for his Big Year at [audubon.org/features/birding-without-borders](http://audubon.org/features/birding-without-borders). ■



MT. WASHINGTON  
PEEKS OUT BEHIND  
BURNT TREES, WHILE  
THE THREE SISTERS  
FLANK ITS LEFT SIDE

## SET OFF FOR SANTIAM

Hike offers post-fire forests and mountain views STORY & PHOTO BY JOHN WILLIAMS

Despite the potentially disastrous effects a multiyear, recording-breaking drought will have on the people and wildlife of western Oregon, there is a small consolation prize: early season hiking near the Cascade Crest.

Typically trails in the Mount Jefferson Wilderness are under snow through late June, but with snowpack in the Willamette Basin at an abysmal 8 percent of the normal snowpack for that area, the majority of snow below 6,000 feet has already melted.

Situated 2 miles west of Three Fingered Jack is 15-acre Santiam Lake. There are two primary ways that Santiam

Lake can be reached: from the west via the Duffy Lake Trail or from the south via the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) near Santiam Pass.

I suggest hiking via the PCT because of the unique post-fire forest. This area burned in the 2003 B&B Complex fire. Lodgepole pine and beargrass are the primary plants repopulating the area. Post-fire early seral forest is very rare because it is often salvage-logged. Thankfully, this area was spared because it's within a wilderness boundary.

After gently ascending for nearly 1 mile you will come to the Santiam Lake Trail junction. As you begin to walk west, Mount Washington and South Sister can be spotted through

the fire-killed trees. Three small lakes that make for a decent camp are just off trail to the west after you begin to walk north again. You will continue northwest while weaving in and out of areas that were spared from the B&B fire. These patches of forest that were not burned provide welcome refuge from sun.

Subalpine fir, mountain hemlock and western white pine are all found within these unburned patches. Near the 3.5 mile mark, you will ascend a few hundred feet towards a small pass just south of Upper and Lower Berley Lakes. These lakes can be accessed by following an outlet stream west from the Santiam Lake Trail.

If you walk past a van-sized boulder, you've gone too far. You will then pass through two nearly flat sandy areas before ascending into a dense mountain hemlock dominated forest. Mount Jefferson quickly comes into view along with stunning views of Three Fingered Jack in the meadow above Santiam Lake.

There is a small grassy area just east of where the trail reaches the southern shores providing a beautiful area for lunch. If you're planning to camp in the area, be sure to set up at least 200 feet from the shore of Santiam Lake. Return the way you came. ■

**DIRECTIONS FROM EUGENE:** Follow Hwy. 126 east for 68 miles, merge right onto Hwy. 20, follow for 8.8 miles; trailhead is a well-marked left turn.

**HIKE DISTANCE:** 11.5 miles round trip

**HIKE TYPE:** Out and back

**ELEVATION GAIN:** 700 feet

**TRAILHEAD ELEVATION:** 4,800 feet

**USAGE:** Moderate

**DIFFICULTY:** 2 out of 5

**FEES:** \$5 or a Northwest Forest Pass