

BIRDING BLISS

The Columbia-Pacific region is 'for the birds' — and that's a good thing

By MARILYN GILBUAGH

If you're a bird, winter in the Pacific Northwest is a good place to be. While the majority of us people-types can't help nattering about the long damp and gloomy season, most of our feathered friends — whether here for the short, medium or permanent stay — find the mild dark days a bountiful wonderland.

"To get some perspective, what we're observing is not just another bird at a feeder, but a bird as a life," said avid birder and well-known local conservationist Neal Maine about bird watching. "We're looking at a creature that weighs around 16 ounces on a good day, and it might be one that flies the length of the planet each year for its reproduction. It's way more than a bird that we're watching; it's part of the entire universe."

"I wonder what the quality of our lives could be like if we learn to be quiet, pay a little bit more attention to what surrounds us and learn to listen?" he asks.

According to birder, scientist and North Coast Diaries blogger, Mike Patterson, in 2011 somewhere around 375 different bird species had been documented in Clatsop County; 250 of them alone making Seaside and its surroundings their year-round or seasonal home. Today the count remains about the same, though each winter provides a few new-to-the-area sightings. This winter there's been a flurry of birder buzz as at least two new species not seen around here before dropped in. A mocking bird came to call, (or as is its talent, to imitate many other calls), showing up in Seaside. And another first timer, a gorgeously marked Baltimore oriole is also visiting in the area.

All birds have basic needs: water, food and resting. Our year-round locals don't migrate, getting what they need by staying put. They are able to find adequate year-round water, food and shelter in grasses, trees or burrowing alternatives.

Escaping the cold can be a migrating bird's motivating factor. But many species, including local hummingbirds, can withstand freezing temperatures as long as an adequate supply of food is available.

Migrating birds move seasonally. Some travel only short distances just like our four-legged wildlife, moving from higher elevations to lower. Some birds make medium moves, traveling a few hundred miles. Long-distance migrants cover thousands of miles, typically moving from breeding ranges in the United States and Canada to wintering grounds in Central and South America. Despite the demanding journeys involved, long-distance migration is a feature of some 350 species of North American birds.

The red knot (*Calidris canutus*) is a migrating bird you may see in the Columbia-Pacific area.



WHAT'S THAT BIRD?

Several bird-identification apps are available on your smartphone. If you're a novice, try Merlin Bird ID, which is free. Other good apps include Audubon Birds of North America (free) and iBird Pro (\$14.99).

NEAL MAINE/PACIFICLIGHT IMAGES

This red knot, a type of sandpiper, was observed on Del Rey beach in the spring migration of 2016. The bird was banded in 2006 in the Gulf of Mexico. The red knot has one of the longest migrations of any bird, nesting and breeding in the arctic and migrating as far south as the southern tip of South America.



NEAL MAINE/PACIFICLIGHT IMAGES

A snowy plover enjoys Gearhart beach in January. The bird was banded as a nestling on the Central Oregon Coast.



PHOTO BY JOY JAEGER

Western bluebirds appreciate nesting boxes in which to make their homes. Their summer breeding range extends north into the Pacific Northwest, and more breeding pairs have been spotted locally in recent years.

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