

wanted the park to feature every bird ever mentioned by William Shakespeare. This original group of 60 starlings has since ballooned to a staggering 150 million across North and Central America, which may be found in flocks of up to several thousand. Not only do these birds compete with native species like kestrels for nesting sites, they also cause hundreds of millions of dollars in crop damage each year.

Another nest thief is the European house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). This small, brown bird tends to stick to cities and towns, where it competes aggressively with swallows, chickadees and other native small birds for nesting sites, including birdhouses. Male house sparrows are easiest to identify, with a black throat patch and a chestnut stripe on the head behind the eye. Female house sparrows are a nondescript brown with a pale stripe behind the eye, and are often confused with native sparrows at first glance.

And birds are not the only invaders found on the coast. The deep croak of the bullfrog (*Lithobates catesbeianus*), a native species found east of the Rocky Mountains, can be increasingly heard amid the calls of smaller native Pacific tree frogs (*Pseudacris regilla*) and northern red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora*). These species are threatened by bullfrogs, which are voracious predators that will eat other adult frogs, tadpoles and any other small animals they can get their jaws on.

Recently, the green crab (*Carcinus maenas*) has also been showing up in our area, and is known to decimate shellfish populations. They often prey on younger shellfish, which are easily dug up from nesting beds. Green crabs also prey on other young crabs, like the Dungeness, and when digging for food often damage or even kill the coast's native eelgrass beds, which are crucial habitats for aquatic life.

It can be tough to get people on board with removing invasive animals. This can be a difficult topic for nature lovers to handle. Many feel compassion for these wild animals that just happen to be in the wrong place, often due to human activity. Some folks who may have no problem pulling up English ivy or Scotch broom but will draw the line at exterminating house sparrows. However, efforts to curb invasive animal species can help to restore local ecosystems by removing competition for native species. Residents can make a positive difference by discouraging invasive species from visiting feeding sites, as well as by removing their nests

Some species, like green crabs, may also make for a good meal. In fact, if you catch one of these crabs in Oregon, it's ille-



Charles Gates

**Sixty European starlings were introduced to the United States in 1890. There are now an estimated 150 million scattered across North and Central America.**

gal to put it back. Washington state, however, does not allow the harvest of green crabs because they look similar to some native crab species. Both states do allow year-round hunting of bullfrogs, though, so may I suggest frog legs for dinner instead? This emphasizes the need to correctly identify a species as a non-native before removal. If you're not sure, contact your county's Soil and Water Conservation District, or your state's Department of Fish and Wildlife.

One final note: Yes, we humans are more widespread than any other species, and have caused the most destruction. But efforts to curb invasive species are one way we've been trying to undo some of our ecological damage, by removing competition for native species and protecting the integrity of entire ecosystems. And that long-term positive result is worth the effort.

*Rebecca Lexa is an Oregon Master Naturalist, nature educator, tour guide and writer living on the Long Beach Peninsula. More about her work may be found at [RebeccaLexa.com](http://RebeccaLexa.com).*

A photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a light blue surgical mask and light blue scrubs. She is holding a white tablet computer in her hands. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting, likely a medical office or clinic.

**Catch up on preventative care.**

Early on in the pandemic, many people put off in-person doctor visits. It's time to catch up on any preventative health services you missed. These can include:

- Mammograms and pap smears
- Screenings for diseases and cancer
- Childhood vaccines and annual visits
- Flu and pneumonia shots
- Routine checkups to get advice on diet, exercise and safety

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