



We are excited to launch Bird University, the next generation of the master birder program. Class and unit formats will be structured around Washington's distinct ecoregions and the birds that inhabit them. Classes will be offered via a hybrid of remote and asynchronous learning, in addition to in-person classroom, small-group study time, and field instruction. Programming will likely begin in mid-fall of 2023.

FAQs:

**What do you mean that units will be formatted by ecoregion?**

Washington has a tremendous diversity of ecosystems, including prairies, wetlands, estuaries, rainforests, shrub steppe, marine waters, and grasslands. In addition, Washington is home to two ecosystem types found nowhere else on the planet: the Olympic rainforest and the scablands of the Columbia Plateau. The Bird University program will be divided into units (a.k.a. modules) based upon the birds and natural history most found in each ecoregion. For instance, birds of the Puget Trough will be one module. Birds of the Columbia Plateau will be another module. Each module will consist of 4-10 two-hour classes, plus field trips, study groups, and at-home study.

**Do I sign up for all modules at once?**

No. Students may sign up for the modules that meet their interests and availability. There is no set timeframe for which one must complete all the modules, and students may choose the number of modules in which they participate. For instance, Student A may sign up for the Puget Trough and PNW Coast modules in 2023 and be satisfied with their learning. Student B may sign up for the Puget Trough module in 2023, the PNW Coast module in 2024, and all of the remaining modules in 2025. This format is intended to enable students to tailor their learning and time commitment.

**How will admissions work?**

There will be no entrance exams or written application. Prospective students who feel ready for university-level ornithology courses are encouraged to sign up. Prospective students should: feel comfortable using binoculars; have spent time observing birds on their own and/or with others; and would, perhaps, benefit from taking some of Birds Connect Seattle's foundational classes, or study in other ways that meet their individual needs and interests.

**Who should sign up for Bird University?**

People who want to learn A LOT about Washington State birds and natural history should sign up! The modules will be university-level ornithology courses, so prior birding experience would help with readiness. If you are a newer to birding and/or still building your skills, we encourage you to start with other Birds Connect Seattle classes, field trips, and Neighborhood Bird Outings.

**So I just sign up?**

Class sizes will be small enough for the instructors to get to know their students, and for the students to get to know each other. Also, field trips get unwieldy if the groups are gigantic. If there is substantial interest in a class module, we will do a lottery drawing for admittance.

**What is expected during class?**

Students are expected to participate in discussions, checks for understanding, and be focused on the class while it's in session. We expect students to do their best to show up for the live classes (via Zoom) prepared to learn and participate. Students should check their calendars before registering to ensure they are available to attend classes and field trips. Students should avoid other distracting activities like cooking meals, watching TV, painting their nails, or having personal conversations during class.

**What about non-bird ID and natural history topics?**

Birding by ear, birding by shape, observational strategies, and birding resources such as technology (eBird, Merlin, etc.) and optics are important foundational topics for birders. These topics will be both wrapped into the ecoregion modules and offered as stand-alone classes.

**How do I graduate? Do I get a fancy title like \*master birder\* at the end?**

Grades for Bird University are pass/fail. Students who show up and participate during classes and field trips, complete homework assignments, and who commit to out-of-class study time will surely pass. While there may be quizzes and other checks for understanding during the coursework, we hope this won't be scary or stressful.

At the end of each module, students who pass will become "Bird Guides" for that ecoregion. For instance, one could become a Puget Trough Bird Guide, and a PNW Coast Bird Guide, and Columbia Plateau Bird Guide. Students who complete all ecoregion modules will be Washington State Bird Guides.

**What will this cost?**

Each module is expected to be anywhere from \$200-\$400 per student, depending upon the number of classes and field trips included. Field trip expenses such as carpool fees, meals, and lodging will be extra. Scholarships are available.

**Is there a volunteer expectation for Bird University?**

For the master birder program, students were expected to contribute at least 100 volunteer hours to Birds Connect Seattle (then Seattle Audubon) over a two-year period. Going forward, we kindly ask that students contribute a sliding scale of volunteer hours, based upon the number of instructional hours in each course module, to either Birds Connect Seattle or the community organization of their choosing.

For other questions, please email [christines@birdsconnectsea.org](mailto:christines@birdsconnectsea.org)