

# EARTHCARE NORTHWEST

Summer 2024



## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Birds Connect Seattle Members,

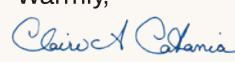
As the warmer first days of summer arrive, I am delighted to share our latest newsletter with you. This issue is a reflection and celebration of the vibrant and intricate connections between humans, birds, and our shared habitats. Each article aims to highlight a different perspective on how the well-being of birds and their ability to thrive in urban landscapes is inextricably linked with our own.

The concept of interconnectedness is one of our organizational core values at Birds Connect Seattle. It is more than a guiding principle; it is the foundation of our work. Every action we take, and every choice we make should promote the survival of birds, healthy urban habitats, and the preservation of biodiversity.

In this issue, you will find articles that explore these different facets of interconnectedness. Our Speaker Series is bringing new perspectives, shedding light on how diverse approaches to conservation can benefit wildlife and ecosystems. We will also peel back the curtain on Bird University, showcasing the vital relationship between birds and their habitats in both Eastern and Western Washington.

Additionally, we share with you our expanding focus on preserving our urban tree canopy and our work to advocate for equitable urban forests to insulate our community from climate change impacts and improve the well-being of city dwelling birds and people.

As always, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to our members. Your continued support and engagement are the backbone of our organization. Together, we are making a difference, one bird, one habitat, and one connection at a time.

Warmly,  
  
Claire Catania  
Executive Director

## MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Birds Connect Seattle advocates and organizes for cities where people and birds thrive. We envision our local cities integrating and valuing nature, minimizing threats to birds, and protecting habitat. As a staff-led and volunteer powered organization, we value: Inspiration, Interconnectedness, Equity and Inclusion, Diversity, Humility, Collaboration, and Science.



Osprey | Douglas DeFelice | Audubon Photography Awards

## OUR TEAM

### STAFF

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AmeriCorps Service Member*  
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Ella Denman  
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# COMMUNITY SPEAKER SERIES

## GROWING, CENTERING, AND CONNECTING TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

As we emerge from the challenges of the past few years, we recognize the deep need for meaningful social connections and community. Prior to 2020, Birds Connect Seattle would host regular meetings of and for the community, under the name of “member meetings,” “nature nights,” or “program meetings.” Many would gather, enjoy a speaker on a bird- or nature-related subject, say hello to some familiar faces, and head home. However, we realized that these meetings were more than just educational sessions; they were opportunities to build connections within our community.

When the idea of bringing back these quarterly meetings was proposed, I knew that we couldn’t just repeat what was done before. Our public surveys continue to surface comments that we should “focus on the birds.” This tells us that Birds Connect Seattle needs to communicate more clearly and more often about how our mission for birds aligns with environmental justice principles—cities where people AND birds can thrive.

Community and social connection seem to be something we both crave and need. With the recent return of our newly named Community Speaker Series, we have chosen to focus these presentations on the themes of Grow, Center, and Connect. In doing so, we believe we can foster a more inclusive and impactful conservation movement that more clearly illustrates the interconnectedness of avian conservation and environmental justice and will shape the future of urban conservation.

### GROW

Increase membership and program participation, particularly with people who have been historically excluded from conservation work and expand our understanding of urban conservation.

### CENTER

Hear from diverse perspectives in the world of environmentalism and conservation.

### CONNECT

Come together around our shared appreciation for birds and nature and help one another.

This past March, we kicked off with a visit from Demarus Tevuk, who spoke on Indigenous Perspectives of Sustainability. Attendees were encouraged to reflect on their own relationship to nature and how they might challenge their own understanding of science. Our second event welcomed Taha Ebrahimi, who took us on a lovely tour of the diverse street trees of Seattle, encouraging us to think about how these urban trees reflect our humanity.

We are beyond excited for our September event, where we will welcome Alison Mariella Désir, athlete, activist, television host, and author of *Running While Black*.

We hope that you, our members, will be part of our ongoing journey to grow, center, and connect with birds and one another.

—By Hanae Bettencourt, Community Engagement Manager



Demarus Tevuk presents at Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center  
Photo by Carol Roll



# WHO SPEAKS FOR THE TREES?

Tree advocates in Seattle have long been a fairly homogenous group. Frontline communities, that is folks living in the areas most impacted by tree canopy loss, are rarely given a seat at the table. We're overdue for a hard look at the big picture of tree equity in our city and to diversify what this work can be and who is doing it.

Enter the Tree Equity Network, a promising new collaboration between Birds Connect Seattle and Seattle Parks Foundation, to bring together legacy environmental groups, government agencies, and frontline community leaders from around King County, who are addressing tree loss and habitat restoration from their own unique perspective. So far, we have connected with over 30 different organizations working on various aspects of the urban forest. The group's focus areas cover advocating to protect legacy trees, planting trees in Seattle's developed parks, addressing tree canopy inequities, educating people on tree care and pruning, protesting permit and Growth Management Act violations, and more.

The primary aim of the Tree Equity Network is to sustain a long-term coalition that will help Seattle meet its goal of 30% equitable tree canopy coverage by 2037. We have already started bringing together these many different stakeholders to identify our collective strengths and resources within the network. Next, our work will be to align around high-level shared goals and to develop a clear roadmap to achieve them.



First Tree Equity Network meeting  
Photo by Kristen Milliron, Seattle Parks Foundation

Initial conversations with community members have revealed issues like the cultural significance of trees, including but not limited to the culturally modified tree (CMT) in Wedgwood ("Luma", a Western Redcedar) brought to light by the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe. We're also hearing legitimate concerns about safety around large trees and the financial burden of managing their care in low-income areas. These historically marginalized perspectives deserve significantly more attention in city- and county-wide conversations about trees.

Achieving canopy and equity goals won't be easy. We're up against powerful lobbying groups like the Master Builders Association and the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections wielding a deeply flawed tree ordinance. That is why another important goal of the Tree Equity Network is to align the groups with a shared understanding around addressing the conflict between tree canopy advocates and construction/development in the city. A condition of participation in the Tree Equity Network is that we recognize that we must have both housing and a healthy, growing, equitably distributed urban forest. The only way we will make this vision a reality is if we *all* speak for the trees.

—By Claire Catania, Executive Director



Birds Connect Seattle bird sit at Western Redcedar  
Photo by Glenn Nelson



The Brown Creeper relies on a mature coniferous tree canopy and is especially fond of Douglas fir. It spends its time on tree trunks and limbs using its curved beak to extract insects, spiders, and pupae that they find hidden in bark crevices.

The Brown Creeper song is high and delicate with just a few short notes. The sound is often likened to the phrase "trees, beautiful trees"—a fitting description for a bird that is so linked to the fate of urban trees.

# BIRD UNIVERSITY

## BIRDING ACROSS WASHINGTON STATE'S ECOREGIONS

Washington State has incredibly diverse ecosystems. An ecosystem is a community of living things interacting with their surroundings. Within our state borders, we have prairies, shrub-steppe, wetlands, marine waters, rain forests, grasslands, estuaries, and high alpine ecosystems. Washington also has two unique ecosystems found nowhere else in the world: the temperate rainforest of the Olympic Peninsula and the scablands of the Columbia Plateau. An ecoregion is an area where ecosystems are generally similar in geology, landforms, soils, vegetation, climate, land use, wildlife, and water. Washington has nine distinct ecoregions.

Birds are crucial to ecosystems' health, serving as natural pollinators, controllers of insect populations, and seed dispersers. Birds help to regulate populations of plants and animals within their ecosystems through consumption and predation. Their stable presence is an indicator of a balanced ecosystem, as they depend on a diverse range of food sources and habitat features to thrive. Birds connect different ecosystems and ecoregions, serving as messengers of nature's interconnectedness.

Some bird species, such as the Dark-eyed Junco, thrive across a wide range of ecosystems. These generalists can be found nearly year-round in all nine of Washington's ecoregions. Some Dark-eyed Junco communities stay put in one area, particularly in the western Washington lowlands, whereas others migrate during breeding season. Conversely, some species, such as the Greater Sage-Grouse, are specialized to

live in a singular ecosystem type. The Greater Sage-Grouse is only found in Washington's shrub-steppe ecosystem and would be ill-equipped to survive elsewhere due to its reliance on sagebrush as a food source and important habitat feature.

People have recently played a significant role in shaping ecoregions for birds and other wildlife. Through urbanization, resource extraction, deforestation, and climate change, we have altered the landscapes that birds call home leading particularly to a decline in the populations of ecosystem specialists. The Greater Sage-Grouse formerly ranged from the Columbia River, north to Oroville, west to the foothills of the Cascades, and east to the Spokane River. Now, a smaller population of about 600 birds is located in Douglas and Grant Counties, on mostly private land. The Yakima Army Training

**"I enrolled in Bird University because I've been birding for a few years now and nothing brings me more joy and connection to the land we share. Through the course, I've deepened my knowledge of bird identification and the unique ecosystems we call home for my own practice but also to share with others as I work to expand the community of young and queer birders in Seattle and beyond." —Hilary**



Dark-Eyed Junco | Jeremiah Zurenda | Audubon Photography Awards



Greater Sage Grouse | Vida Ward | Audubon Photography Awards



Bird University participants | Paul Meier

Center in Kittitas and Yakima Counties has another population consisting of 300-400 birds. That is all that is left.

This is why the conservation, science, outreach, and education work of organizations like Birds Connect Seattle is vital for bird and ecosystem health. The adage of "we protect what we know and love" is the foundation of Birds Connect Seattle's education programming and what fuels our conservation work. Our science projects, in addition to collecting valuable data that tracks bird population trends over time, also weave in foundational education and conservation action.

The classes, field trips, outings, and science programs of Birds Connect Seattle have the unique ability to bring people together and build community. Organized birding classes and outings provide a space for folks to share their passion for birds, exchange knowledge and experiences, and form lasting friendships. This sense of camaraderie and shared interest creates strong bonds among members of the birding community.

Over the past few months, a new community of birders has formed around Bird University, an online and field class program for intermediate to advanced birders. The Bird University program is organized around Washington's ecoregions, offering nine distinct course modules based upon the birds and natural history of each ecoregion. For instance, birds of the Central Puget Lowlands is one course, Birds of the Columbia Plateau is another. Some of the species covered in curriculum may migrate between the two ecoregions, many

other birds are covered only in one course because they are adapted to only live in a particular ecoregion. The ecoregion module gives Bird University students a deeper understanding of the importance of habitat to their understanding of bird biology and behavior, as well as the option to choose a course that meets their interest, study pace, and prior bird knowledge and experience.

In the coming weeks, Bird University students will visit urban forests and shorelines in the Seattle area, the volcanic plains of the Columbia Plateau around Kennewick, and the lakes and valleys of the Okanogan ecoregion around Omak and Republic. Time in the field is essential for learning about an ecosystem and the birds that live there, connecting people to beautiful places in Washington, and bolstering friendships new and old.

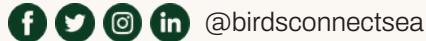
The connection between birding and people is multifaceted and profound. From providing a therapeutic escape and building community to offering educational value and fostering conservation efforts, birding enriches the lives of individuals and contributes to the greater good of society. So, next time you spot a bird soaring through the sky, take a moment to appreciate the intricate bond between these winged creatures, the places they connect, and the people who admire them.

—By Christine Scheele  
Program Director / Senior Education Manager



## BIRDS CONNECT SEATTLE

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# UPCOMING SPEAKER SERIES EVENTS THIS FALL

## SEPTEMBER

Alison Mariella Désir, athlete, activist, television host, and author of *Running While Black*, will present on Tuesday, September 24 at MLK FAME Community Center.

## NOVEMBER

Dr. Alejandro Rico-Guevara, Biologist, University of Washington Assistant Professor, and hummingbird researcher, will present on Thursday, November 14 at Centilia Cultural Center.

## WATCH PAST SPEAKERS

Recordings are still available for our past presentations with  
Demarus Tevuk: Indigenous Perspectives of Sustainability  
Taha Ebrahimi: Street Trees of Seattle

Visit: [birdsconnectsea.org/speakerseries](http://birdsconnectsea.org/speakerseries)

