

PENNY BOLTON



What got you into birding?

I've always been an outdoorsy person and have been interested in animals and plants around me. When I took a Natural Science Illustration course, I started looking more closely at birds - their bodies and their behavior.

What can people expect from a bird outing with you?

I like to share what I have learned. Birding by ear and observing behavior are my real jam. Since I am also a Master Gardener, we look at plants along the way. We talk about what different birds and animals eat and how that affects their lifestyle. We also talk about bird "body language" and how movement can help us identify a bird. Having people who are interested and engaged make bird outings fun. I love any questions or insights that folks have. We try to include everyone in our learning. I am not a "lister" but we do use Merlin and eBird to record our sightings.

What values do you lead with?

Curiosity, compassion and community.

How did you acquire your knowledge? Are you self-taught, trained in a school, had a mentor?

I have done a lot of reading, classes at the UW for Natural Sciences Illustration and Applied Animal Behavior plus Birds Connect Seattle Master Birder Program in 2013. Connie Sidles was an important encourager for me and I want to do the same for new birders.

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What is your personal approach/mindset toward birding?

I would rather sit and watch or listen for a while than run from bird to bird. I like to use my ears and watch the behaviors of all the birds in an environment to find birds. I am more of a “sitter” than a “flitter” or “twitcher”.

Where do you personally see the intersectionality of birding and creating safe spaces for folks who have often been left out of the conversation before?

I like to include everyone in my chats about what we see. I ask questions of all about what they are interested in. In my animal training work, I enjoy working with neurodivergent handlers and have been developing skills for communicating with all kinds of people. As an assistance dog trainer/facilitator I am accustomed to working with people where they are.

Do you have an area of expertise or focus that you prefer?

I enjoy birding by ear and talking about behaviors and adaptations. Not an expert in seabirds.

What was the best advice you got when starting out as a birder?

Look at every bird closely. You never know what might turn up.

What is your favorite ecosystem to bird in?

Puget Sound though I also love desert habitats.

Dare I ask, what your favorite bird is?!

Common Raven.....or Steller's Jay....Gimme a corvid any day.

