

# Sharing Birds With Young People

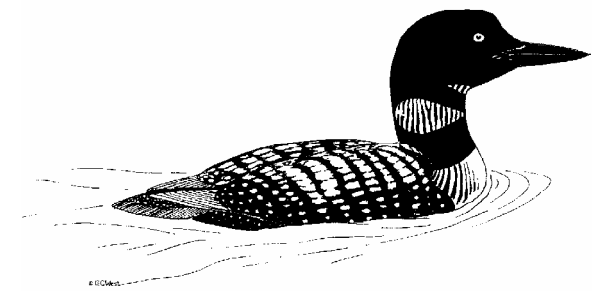
Please make every effort to care for these materials and return them in the best condition possible.

Thank you, and ENJOY!



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## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

“Sharing Birds with Young People” was created by Seattle Audubon Education Staff and Volunteers to accompany our “Family Field Packs” and “Birds in the Field” kit.

Both the packs and the kit include all the tools you need to have a rewarding experience observing birds in their world.

### FAMILY FIELD PACK

The *Seattle Audubon Family Field Pack* includes:

- Two sets of binoculars with cases
- Petersons’s *Field Guide to Western Birds*
- Audubon Bird Call
- A set of laminated flash cards
- Maps and checklists for local field trip destinations
- A clip board with two Field Notes Booklets

NOTE: The pair of binoculars in the small case without the *National Audubon Society* insignia is the pair for children to use. Need more than 2 set of binoculars? Have a larger group? You might want to rent:

## BIRDS IN THE FIELD

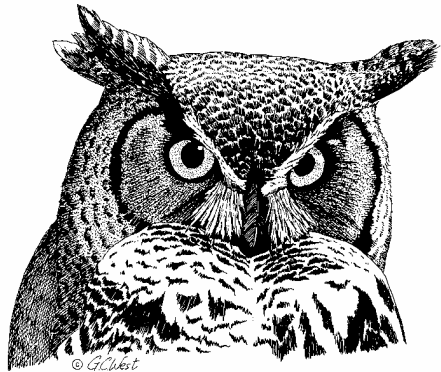
The *Birds in the Field* Kit is one of 6 different kits that Seattle Audubon rents to classes and other groups. This kit includes ten field packs and one larger leader pack, each of which include:

- One set of binoculars
- Petersons’s *Field Guide to Western Birds*
- Audubon Bird Call
- A laminated card listing 40 common Seattle birds
- A Washington bird checklist (to keep)
- Two clip boards, each with a Field Note Booklet (to keep)

To reserve these, or any of our other education kits contact our Kits Coordinator at (206) 985-6832 or [kits@seattleaudubon.org](mailto:kits@seattleaudubon.org)

## SHARING BIRDS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

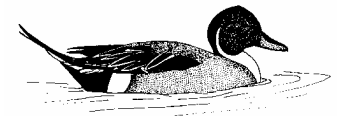
It doesn't take an expert to enjoy birds and the natural world with young people. We've all seen hotshot birders calling out the name of every bird that flies by. It's easy to be intimidated and feel that since we might not have that level of competence, we are not fit to head-up a bird watching trip. IT'S JUST NOT TRUE. With a little preparation, anyone who truly wants to share the wonder of birds with kids CAN DO IT and have a terrific time as well.



*Please read this entire guide. It has suggestions for activities, tips on preparing for a successful outing, and important information on caring for the optical equipment in this kit.*

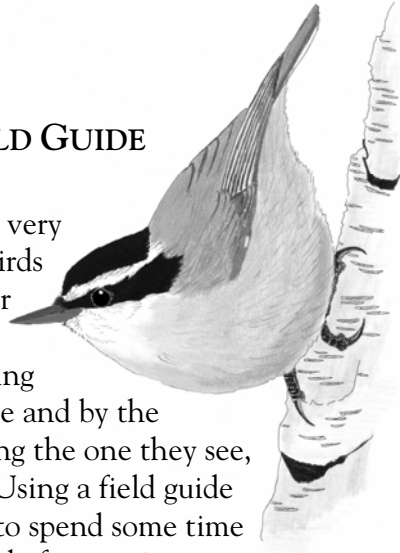
## TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

- Remember – the purpose is to ENJOY birds and nature. Don't try to overload the kids with tons of information.
- Prepare first to avoid frustration. Practice using field guides and binoculars before going into the field (suggestions are included in this guide).
- Use REAL NAMES for the species of birds that you know, and encourage kids to do the same. Young people are ABLE and WILLING to learn the real names for birds, other animals, and plants. Look at how well some five year olds can rattle off the long scientific names for dinosaurs! If the name of a species is difficult, repeat it together three times.
- Dress for the weather! There's nothing like wet feet and cold skin to ruin a fun trip.
- Bring snacks if you will be out for more than an hour. Low blood sugar can really distract from enjoyment of the natural world.
- Expect UFO's! Even expert birders encounter unidentifiable flying bird-objects. Let the kids know that not all birds can be identified by everyone, and that's O.K. It's part of the mystery that keeps bird watching fun.
- Sometimes kids will be smarter than you by the end of the trip – that is, quicker to tell the difference between species, bird, songs, etc. Don't get defensive! Congratulate them and yourself – it means you've done your job.



## USING THE FIELD GUIDE

At first, the field guide can be very daunting. With hundreds of birds listed together, who could ever find the ONE bird they are looking for? People end up going through the guide page by page and by the time they find a bird resembling the one they see, the real bird has flown away! Using a field guide takes some practice - it's best to spend some time getting familiar with the book before setting out on a trip.



### How the Guide is Set Up

In most good field guides, birds are listed in taxonomic order – according to the order in which they may have evolved, and with closely related birds listed in the same sections. Most ornithologists agree that loons and grebes are some of the most “primitive” birds in North America, while wood warblers and sparrows are among the most recently evolved, so loons appear first in the guide, while warblers and sparrows are at the end. A lot of this is not exact.

In the Peterson's guide, the common and scientific names of the birds appear on the left side, followed by the bird's length (from tip of beak to tip of tail), a description of the bird, and some notes on its voice and range. The bold-faced number across

from the name indicates the “range map number” for this species. Find the maps in the back of the book.

On the right side are the paintings of the birds by Roger Tory Peterson. Peterson created the first guides based on the “field mark” system. The arrows point to characteristics of the bird, or “field marks” that are particularly helpful in identification of that species.



### Getting to Know the Guide

Here are some suggestions for getting to know the guide before setting off into the outdoors. Spending some time before your bird watching trip will help you have a more enjoyable time in the field.

- To start, don't worry about the order of birds in the guide, or finding a specific bird. Just let the kids flip through the guide and enjoy the incredible array of birdlife. Have them pick their favorite bird, the most colorful, the most drab, and the weirdest-looking bird.
- Get familiar with the order of bird GROUPS in the guide. Look at the contents of the Peterson guide on page 13. The general groups of birds appear in boldface type (for example, Duck like birds, Birds of Prey, etc.). Look them up with the kids and get a sense of what the characteristics of birds in each group are, and

how they are ordered in the guide. When you see an unknown bird in the field, this familiarity with the guide will give you a place to start looking.

- Practice finding the range maps for individual birds. Could you see this bird in Seattle?
- Practice using the index. Give the kids the names of a few common birds to look up.  
NOTE: The index is arranged alphabetically according to the general kind of bird. For example, you would find “House Finch” under “Finch,” not “House.”
- Look up two similar birds in the book and compare the two. A good pair might be the American Robin and the Varied Thrush (page 275). How could you tell these two birds apart?



REMEMBER: It takes lots of practice to use a field guide efficiently. Don't worry if you can't find every bird. It's fun just to find the birds that you can, and simply enjoy observing the rest.

## COMMON BIRDS IN AND AROUND SEATTLE

To help, here is a list of birds that are common in and around Seattle, and their page numbers in the *Peterson's Field Guide*. If you like, you can familiarize yourself with some of these common species before venturing into the field.

Pied-billed Grebe –p. 27	Northern Flicker –p. 227
Double-crested Cormorant –p. 29	Violet-Green Swallow –p. 249
Canada Goose –p. 41	Barn Swallow –p. 251
Mallard –p. 45	American Crow –p. 253
Gadwall –p. 45	Steller's Jay – p. 255
American Wigeon –p. 47	Black-capped Chickadee – p. 259
Green-winged Teal –p. 49	Bushtit – p. 261
Northern Shoveler –p. 49	Red-breasted Nuthatch - p. 263
Lesser Scaup –p. 57	Bewick's Wren – page 265
Bufflehead –p. 59	Golden-crowned Kinglet – p. 269
American Coot –p. 65	American Robin – p. 275
Ring-billed Gull –p. 93	European Starling – p. 281
Glaucous-winged Gull –p. 95	Cedar Waxwing – p. 283
Great Blue Heron –p. 111	Common Yellowthroat – p. 303
Killdeer –p. 127	Red-winged Blackbird – p. 309
California Quail –p. 167	Song Sparrow – p. 325
Red-tailed Hawk –p. 175	Spotted Towhee – p. 331
Bald Eagle –p. 181	House Finch – p. 343
Belted Kingfisher –p. 207	American Goldfinch –p. 345
Rock Dove –p. 209	House Sparrow –p. 347
Downy Woodpecker –p. 225	



## BINOCULARS

Binoculars add a whole new dimension to our observations of the birds around us.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE: You will find two sets of binoculars in your Family Field Pack. One of the cases does not have a shoulder strap, and has a center focus lever rather than a knob. It does not have *National Audubon Society* insignia on the case. THIS IS THE PAIR FOR CHILDREN TO USE. This is the binocular recommended for kids by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It is relatively sturdy, and the eyecups can be moved quite close together.



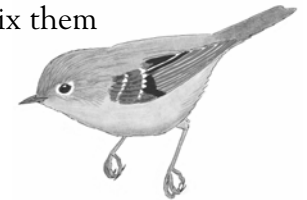
### Caring for Binoculars

BINOCULARS ARE  
FRAGILE, AND  
MUST BE HANDLED  
WITH CARE.

Before allowing kids to use the binoculars in this kit, review this section on proper care and handling.

- When you remove the binoculars from their case you will notice that they have four lens covers – two on the front and two on the back. Remove these and put them in the case, then velcro the case closed and put it in your field pack while binoculars are in use.

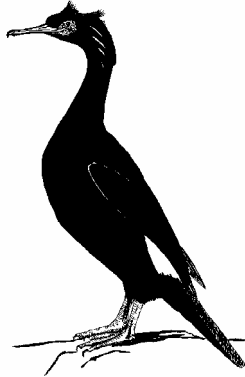
- All binoculars in the field pack have a neck strap. USE IT. Whenever you are handling the binoculars, even if it's just for a few minutes, put the neck strap around your neck. If you are sharing with someone else and passing the binoculars back and forth, just put them around your neck first thing when it's your turn to use them. Never swing binoculars around by their neck strap or let them dangle from your hand while you're walking around.
- Never leave binoculars directly on the ground – dirt and dampness can damage them.
- Never eat or drink with the binoculars around you neck because crumbs and other gunk can drop onto the lenses. If you are having lunch or a snack on your trip, remove the binoculars and put them somewhere safe where they won't get knocked around (preferably in their case)
- If the binocular lenses are dirty, wipe them gently with the soft felt cloth that is in their case. Don't wipe the binoculars with anything else! If they have sand or grit on them, try blowing it off rather than wiping it off to prevent scratching of the lenses.
- When finished, replace all four lens caps and put the binoculars safely back in their case.
- If there are any problems with the binoculars, tell Seattle Audubon when you return the field pack rather than attempting to fix them yourself.



## Adjusting Binoculars

Proper adjustment is the key to binocular success. The first thing to do with a set of binoculars is adjust them to fit the eyes of the person that will be using them.

All binoculars in the field pack have two adjustment knobs. The one in the center is the main focus knob. Adjust it back and forth to bring the image you are looking at into the best focus for your eyes. You will have to adjust the focus every time the distance of the object in your view changes.



The other knob is on the right eyepiece just before the eyecup. It is called the diopter adjustment, and it is used to accommodate difference between the right and left eye.

To adjust it properly, follow these steps:

- Examine your binoculars to find the center focus adjustment and the diopter adjustment.
- Look at something a fair distance away, like a tree or a swing set.
- Close your right eye and use the center focus knob to get the clearest image you can.
- Now close your left eye and focus on the object, this time using the diopter adjustment knob.

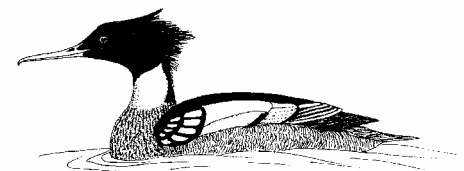
- Repeat these last two steps. The image should now be perfectly focused for both eyes.
- Take a look at the diopter adjustment and make a note of the setting. This is the permanent adjustment for the person who just completed the steps.

The diopter adjustment, once set, will stay the same for an individual. Unlike the central focus, you don't have to adjust it every time you look at something.

When a few people are sharing a pair of binoculars, you can reset the diopter adjustment for each person.

IF THIS SEEMS LIKE TOO MUCH HASSLE, you can set the diopter adjustment on "zero" and leave it there, which will work for a good cross-section of people. If folks are having trouble getting a clear image, check the diopter adjustment. Sometimes it gets moved around, making it hard to focus.

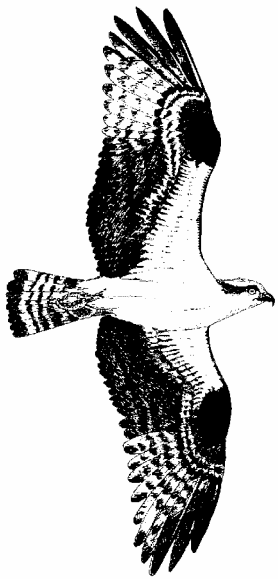
The third important adjustment is the distance between the eyepieces. While looking through the binoculars, squeeze the two sides together until you see one unified image with no black patch in the middle.



## Using Binoculars

Binocular proficiency takes practice. Here are a few tips:

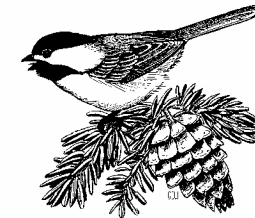
- Practice on a non-moving target such as a tree or a sleeping dog.
- Practice on large, relatively still birds first (like ducks) before moving on to flitty little birds (like sparrows).
- Locate a bird with your eyeballs first, then look through the binoculars rather than trying to find a bird with the binoculars.
- Keep looking at the bird as you raise the binoculars to your eyes.
- Practice – and don't worry if it's difficult at first. It is for everyone.



### **REVERSE BINOCULARS**

Kids are quick to discover one of the miracles of binoculars: If you look through them backwards – through the small lenses – then objects at a distance look really small. Let kids explore this phenomenon. What happens when something gets very close to the backward binoculars? They turn into a perfect magnifying glass. Experiment!

## **IN THE FIELD**



The most important thing on a trip with young people is to have an enjoyable time that increases their interest in birds and the natural world. You don't have to be seriously and silently slinking around, stalking birds every second. It's probably best to go on a bird watching walk – a fun hike punctuated by times that everyone stops to look for birds.

VERY IMPORTANT! The following list of birding ethics comes from the American Birding Association. PLEASE read it before going out into the field.

1. Birders must always act in ways that do not endanger the welfare of birds or other wild life.
  - Observe birds without disturbing them in any significant way.
  - Keep an appropriate distance from nests.
  - Avoid chasing birds.
2. Birders must act in ways that do not harm the natural environment.
  - Stay on existing roads and trails.
  - Leave all habitats as you found them.
  - If you notice an environment has been degraded, report it to the proper authorities.
3. Birders must respect the rights of others.
  - Respect the privacy and property of others by observing “No Trespassing” signs and

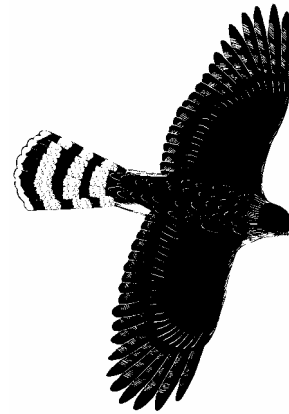
by asking permission to enter private or posted lands.

- Observe all laws and rules which govern public areas.
  - Behave in a way that will enhance the image of birders in the eyes of the public.
4. Birders in groups should assume special responsibilities.
- Take care to alleviate disturbances that are multiplied when many people are present.
  - Teach others birding ethics by words and examples.



## ACTIVITIES AND TECHNIQUES

Being out in a natural place, working with binoculars and field guides, and searching for birds is a lot to do. You don't have to overload the day with planned activities. Here are some simple suggestions that can be incorporated into your day.



### Enter a Place Quietly

Groups of people have to be particularly aware of the noise they make. The less talking on a bird trip the better. If you scare all the birds away at the start, they may not come back until your group leaves! If you enter a natural area quietly and respectfully, the birds will grace you with rare glimpses into their lives.

### Experiment with birding methods.

What works best? Some birders walk around and just see what they see. Others see a bird from afar and then quietly sneak up on it until they have a good view with their binoculars. Some birders sit quietly in one place that looks promising and wait for the birds to come near. Experiment with these methods and see what you think works best. Do some birding strategies work better for some species of birds than others?

### Calling Birds.

Attached to each field pack is a red Audubon Bird Call. When the metal piece is twisted against the wood, the call makes “tweeting” sounds. Many birds are attracted to such sounds and will hop out of the bushes to investigate, sometimes coming very close. Ducks, gulls, and shorebirds don’t care for the call, but many sparrows and warblers will respond to it. With practice, these calls can actually imitate many of the birds that you hear. *Please leave the calls attached to the packs while you are using them – they are very small and we don’t want to lose them.*

### Pishing

This is a secret technique that birders use to get birds to come out of the bushes and show themselves. Make a sort of spitty pishing sound – “PISHHH-PISHHH-PISHHH.” Many birds are curious about this sound and will come out to investigate. If you sit very still and don’t talk (other than to PISH), some birds may come startlingly close. Very fun!



## WHAT BIRDS SHOULD WE LOOK FOR?

The kinds of birds you are likely to see on your birding trip depends on what time of year it is. In the spring, many birds fly north after spending the winter in warmer climates. Here are the approximate “homecoming” dates for different birds:

**February:** Tree Swallow, Mourning Dove, Wood Duck

**March:** Rufous Hummingbird, Violet-green Swallow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, House Wren, Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Orange-crowned Warbler



**April:** Common Yellowthroat, Swainson’s Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Solitary Vireo, Townsend’s Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, Nashville Warbler, MacGillivray’s Warbler, Warbling Vireo

**May:** Cedar Waxwing, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Northern Oriole, Veery

## O.K. HERE'S A BIRD – NOW WHAT?

Great! You're in the field and there's a beautiful bird sitting cooperatively on a branch in plain sight. No one knows what it is. What do you do?

First, make as many concrete observations as you can before you turn to the field guide. All too often we flip madly through the guide trying to find a match and when we take our noses out of the book, our bird is GONE! Instead of going right to the guide, ask yourself some questions about the bird in front of you:

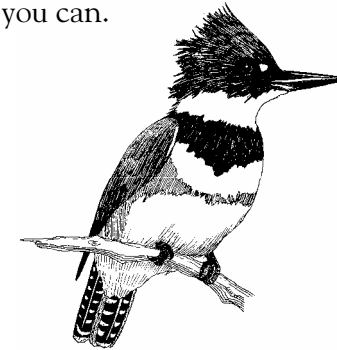
- What sort of bird is it? Is it a songbird, a duck-like bird, a woodpecker, a hawk? Make an educated guess. If you're wrong you can always try to figure it out later.
- Next, what are the bird's major physical characteristics? Is it small and round? Tall and slender? Is its bill long or short? How about its tail?
- What *field marks* does the bird have? Does it have a stripe over its eye? Does it have wing bars? Is its crown a different color from the rest of the body? What colors are the wings, the breast, the tail?
- Try to focus on the face and beak – these are often the most distinctive characteristics of a bird.



Is the bird still there? Good! Sketch it in your field notebook with as much detail as you can. This will help you to REALLY SEE the bird.

Now you are ready to go to the field guide. First, find the group of birds that you think is likely to contain your bird (you can use the contents on page 13 of the field guide to help). Look at the birds in that section and try to find one that resembles your bird. Compare the field marks that you noticed with the ones in the book. Check the range map to make sure that it is possible to see your bird here.

Can't identify it? That's O.K. Maybe you will see it again sometime and be able to figure out what it is, and maybe you won't. Many birds are extremely difficult to identify. With patience and practice you will be able to identify more birds each time you go into the field. *Let the young people in your group know that identifying every single bird is not the ultimate goal of watching birds.* If you can't identify a bird, you can still learn a lot from its behaviors and you can hone your observation skills by describing it as well as you can.



## FIELD NOTES

Keeping a field notebook is probably the best thing anyone can do to learn about birds in the field. It's a place to record individual observations, sketches, strange things that birds do, new species – literally ANYTHING that occurs during the day that may help you to remember the trip and the birdlife experienced. It's a place to ask questions and seek answers from the birds themselves. By putting pencil to paper in the field notebook, observations become crystallized and experiences become focused. In this kit there is a Field Notebook for each person to use and keep.

The Seattle Audubon Field Notes booklet allows you to record all the kinds of things that a “real” field ornithologist would keep track of.

### Record of the day.

The first page has space to record the basic facts of the day – date, time of day, location, weather, and the other observers in the group. If you are working together as a family, then the other family members are the “other observers.” This kind of information not only helps us to remember the trip in the future, but also is relevant to the kinds and numbers of birds we might see. Is it June? Then migrant birds might be present. Is it December? Then there might be wintering waterfowl. Is it raining? Then we might be too cold and wet to really look for birds very



well, or the birds might be hiding out until the weather clears!

### Journal.

This page is for a record of the day's events to be completed after the outing. This is the place for subjective observations. Did you see something really amazing and beautiful, like a Bald Eagle soaring gently overhead? Did someone spill ice cream all over themselves on the ride home? Did a Ring-necked Pheasant leap from the grass and scare you out of your mind? Did you fall in love with a Killdeer? Write it down here!

### Bird Observations.

This is a page to list the specific birds that you see, as well as your observations about them.

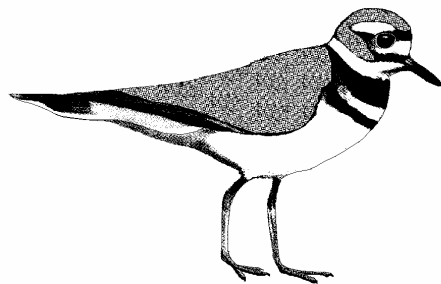
- In the “Species” column, list the name of the bird if you have identified it. If you don't know what it is, you can just give a brief description – “big duck with green head.”
- If you have identified it, write in the bird's page number in the field guide. This is just to get people to refer to the guide. Even if you already know what kind of bird it is, practice finding it in the guide.
- In the “Habitat” column, make a note about the kind of place that the bird was observed. For younger kids this can be simple – a tree, a pond, etc. Older kids can be as specific as they like: stream in a riparian woodland, understory of mixed conifer forest. This is important because

it helps kids to start making THE HABITAT CONNECTION – certain birds depend on certain kinds of places. You will start to see patterns in the occurrence of birds in different habitat types.

- Behaviors/Voice. Make notes about what the bird was doing while you observed it. Was it taking a dust bath? Feeding? Could you tell what it was eating? Was it singing or calling? What did its voice sound like? Etc.

**Sketches and Descriptions.** This is not the place to be picky about artistic talent! Ovals, triangles, and a few lines are all you need to make a workable sketch in the field. Make simple sketches that will allow you to note the basic features of each bird you see. Draw arrows to any special markings and colors on the wings and other features. What are the bird's feet like? What shape is its bill? Consider the adaptations of the bird's physical appearance to its environment/habitat. You can make notes about your speculations here.

Sometimes kids have their own ideas that will make their Field Notes meaningful *to them*. Encourage them to be creative and incorporate their ideas.



## WHERE TO GO

### **Birds are Everywhere**

One great thing about watching birds is that you pretty much always find them. It doesn't have to be an exciting rarity. Crows, pigeons, and starlings are all good examples of "birdness" that are readily available. They walk around vocalizing and exhibiting interesting behaviors all day long. Even if you can't swing a major trip, you can take advantage of the birdlife that is around you every day – in your backyard or in a nearby park.

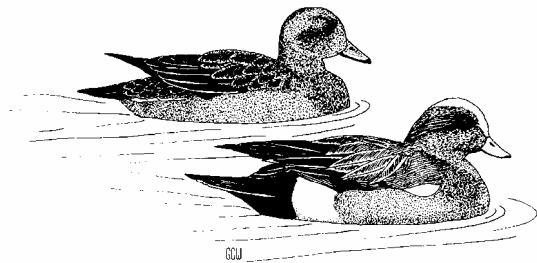
### **Suggested Seattle-area Field Trips**

Seattle is a terrific place to go bird watching. We have lots of beautiful, quiet, "birdy" parks and natural areas. Here are a few favorite places that are easy to go to as a family and where you can pretty much always find good birds.

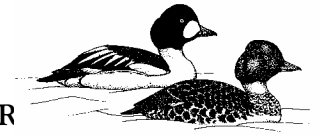
**THE MONTLAKE FILL.** This is an ecological research area on the University of Washington Campus near the Center for Urban Horticulture. It used to be a landfill, but it was covered over in the early seventies and is now a grassy wetland with several ponds (some of them seasonal), deciduous trees, and lakeside habitats. The ponds are wonderful for waterfowl in the winter and breeding ducks in the spring. Quiet bird watchers can

discover songbirds, geese, quail, pheasants, woodpeckers, and sometimes even exciting raptors (hawks, eagles, and owls). There are always treasures to be found at Montlake Fill! NOTE: Each vehicle will need a \$1.50 parking permit that can only be purchased at the parking lot WITH SIX QUARTERS. There are no change machines and smaller coins are not accepted.

GREEN LAKE. This park sports a terrific diversity of birdlife. Because many of the waterfowl are so accustomed to people, we can get great close-up looks at birds that we could only view from a huge distance in “wilder” locales. Though there are often several “escapee” domestic ducks and geese on Green Lake, for the most part the birds are wild, native animals. Look for Gadwalls, American Wigeons, Buffleheads, Ruddy Ducks, and several other ducks. Sometimes a Bald Eagle soars over the lake or perches high in a tree on the lake’s perimeter. Woodpeckers drum, warblers nest, Belted Kingfishers fish, and Red-winged Blackbirds scold unwanted interlopers along the path around the lake.



DISCOVERY PARK. This park overlooks Puget Sound from the Magnolia bluffs. It is unique in that it contains many different habitat types, including mixed conifer forest, deciduous woodland, freshwater pond, meadow, and saltwater shore. Because of this diversity of habitat-types, the bird species-count for this park is extremely high. Depending on the season, there are warblers and other songbirds on the shore, and seabirds on the water. Raptors soar, hunting overhead. A great place to explore and discover!



### PLEASE REMEMBER

When you are bird watching, PLEASE BE RESPECTFUL OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS. If kids are running wild in a natural area, making lots of noise and scaring the birds, then your group could be doing serious ecological damage. Observe birds quietly and *from a distance at which the bird seems comfortable*. If all the birds are flying away, then you are too close, too noisy, or both. If you are privileged enough to see a parent bird on a nest or with its chicks, disturb it as little as possible. Watch it through your binoculars rather than trying to get really close. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO SEE THAT YOUR FAMILY IS RESPECTFUL OF WILD ANIMALS AND PLANTS! Your efforts will be rewarded by a memorable experience observing birds in their natural environment.