



Okanagan Similkameen
Stewardship Society

OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP NEWS

Local Communities Dig In!



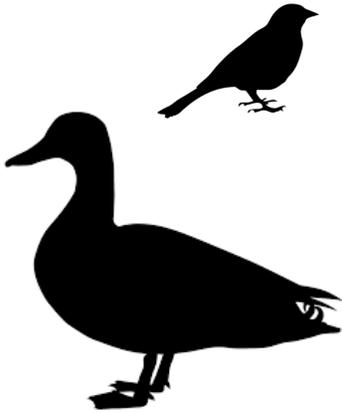
Last fall, Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship supported several community conservation projects. In Penticton, at Riverside Marsh, we partnered with TD Tree Days and the City of Penticton to plant continue improving habitat for local birds and other wildlife. Over 90 volunteers from Penticton and the surrounding area dug in to plant 1000 trees, shrubs and grasses in phase 2 of the Riverside Marsh enhancement project.

Similarly, the Sonora Gardens Homeowners Association, with matching funds from the Community Foundation of South Okanagan | Similkameen's neighbourhood grant partnered with Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship to enhance the buffer of their pond by planting over 300 native plants. This pond and surrounding upland habitat is home to Western Painted Turtles, a healthy bat population, Tiger Salamanders, mallards and many other wildlife species.



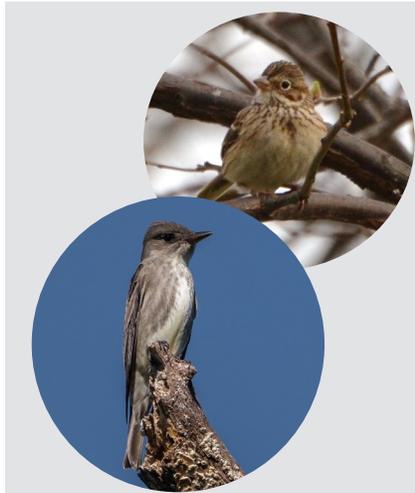
Bird Identification Tips

Last November, OSS organized Birding for Beginners workshops throughout the South and Central Okanagan. Local birder Matthias Bieber explained the basic steps for bird identification, how to use a guidebook, and how to keep birds safe while attracting them to backyard feeders. Afterwards, participants went on a bird walk to put their new skills to use. Some of the species sighted included Black-capped Chickadees, Belted Kingfishers, Northern Flickers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Brown Creepers. Want to go birding yourself but don't know how? Here are a few basic pointers to get you started:



1) Size/Shape

How big was the bird? Was it the size of a crow? A sparrow? Look at its overall shape, too. Many birds have very distinctive silhouettes – think of the shape of a duck versus a tiny hummingbird versus a robin. Knowing these two things should help you narrow your choices down to just a few bird families in your guidebook.



2) Behaviour

What was your bird doing? Perching at the tip of a twig? Hopping through low bushes? Different bird groups have different behaviours by which they can be identified. Flycatchers perch on the tips of shrub branches looking for flying insects and sparrows hop along the ground and low understory searching for bugs.



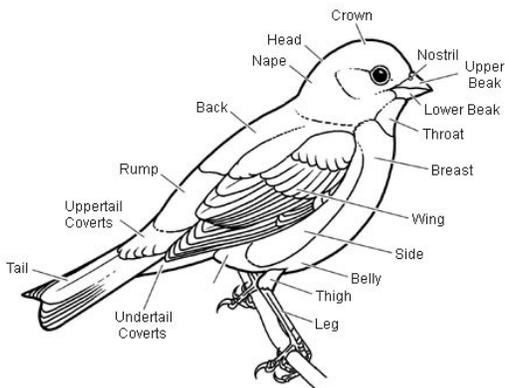
3) Habitat

Where is your bird living? If you've figured out your bird is a type of wren, knowing whether it is living in a marsh or in the brush pile beside your home will tell you whether it is a Marsh Wren or a House Wren.



4) Colouration

What colour is your bird? Grey? Brown? Were there black spots on its breast or white stripes on its head? Looking for certain marks will help distinguish between similar birds. If your guidebook lists several different forest dwelling sparrows, then looking for a rust-striped head versus brown streaks on the breast will tell you whether your bird is a Chipping Sparrow or a Fox Sparrow.



If birding still seems overwhelming, OSS will be holding more Birding for Beginners workshops in the spring!

Watch for announcements of our workshops in Summerland, Vernon, and Keremeos.



Join the “Club”: Become a Wildlife Habitat Steward

When Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship was formed in 2013, we started out with thirteen stewards. Today, we have over eighty Wildlife Stewards caring for over 3550 acres of important wildlife habitats throughout the Okanagan and Similkameen. Being a Wildlife Habitat Steward does not mean that you can't “use” your property. Wildlife Habitat Stewards maintain their agricultural, tourism and other land use practices on their properties while implementing best management practices for wildlife.

Wildlife Habitat Stewards are voluntary caretakers of natural areas on their owned or managed properties. They drive stewardship, conservation and enhancement efforts on their properties and receive recognition, technical support in habitat enhancement projects, management plans and implementation of best management practices for wildlife on their properties.

Becoming a Wildlife Habitat Steward is easy!

If you would like assistance or recognition for managing natural spaces for local wildlife on your property:

1. Contact us by email at info@osstewardship.ca or by phone at 250-809-4195 to arrange an on-site visit to introduce you to the program, answer questions, and do a preliminary assessment of the wildlife habitat values on your property.
2. If interested, we enter into a voluntary Stewardship Agreement. This is a signed written document describing natural areas on your property and your intent to steward them for local wildlife. A sample agreement can be found on our website at www.osstewardship.ca/become-a-steward.
3. We provide you with a gate post sign and if you wish, we can promote our partnership with you publicly on our website and through media articles.

Once you become a Wildlife Habitat Steward, you will be eligible to receive assistance and support with habitat enhancement projects on your property such as native plant revegetation, livestock and trespass exclusion fencing, bat and bird boxes.



Gord Forbes and his brother Steve run their organic farm in Oliver while also



Wildplay Elements Park is an aerial adventure park in the Joe Rich area of Kelowna. The facility operates on an approximately 20-hectare piece of land, over 15 ha of which is stewarded.



Cal and Louise Paley have helped plant nearly 1000 native plants and helped dig a 0.7 acre pond to enhance the riparian area behind their Vernon home.

Goldfish on the loose in Okanagan Wetlands

Goldfish have made the news recently in the Okanagan after turning up in a number of ponds and lakes. Those old timey images of goldfish in bags given out as prizes at the county fair should give you an idea of how hardy the common goldfish really is. If properly housed and cared for, goldfish can reach sizes of over 12 inches and the oldest goldfish on record is 43 years old. That's a pretty long commitment!

Well-intentioned owners who no longer want their fish will sometimes release them in local creeks, ponds, or lakes. This may seem like a kind deed, but it can have disastrous consequences to our environment. A single female goldfish can lay tens of thousands of eggs in one season, so two goldfish can quickly turn into a problematic invasion.

Report **INVASIVE**
Goldfish to:
1-877-952-7277



Volunteers assist with the netting and removal of invasive goldfish from a pond in the Okanagan.

Goldfish uproot vegetation and stir up sediment while feeding, both of which reduce water quality. They eat the eggs and larvae of our native fish and amphibians like endangered Tiger Salamanders and threatened Great Basin Spadefoots. Goldfish can also carry diseases and parasites that can infect native fish. If the entire contents of a fish tank are dumped into a waterway then some of the aquarium plants also have the potential to become invasive.

Occasionally people will release fish into stagnant water bodies as a form of mosquito control, but stagnant, fish-free ponds are very important habitat for many of our native amphibians. These water bodies often are not actually very healthy habitat for fish either as they often get too hot in the summer, freeze solid in the winter, or even dry up completely for part of the year.

Here are some alternate mosquito control strategies:

- Remove standing water from your property. Anything that holds water after a rain can be a breeding ground for mosquitos. Empty any containers with standing water at least once per week.
- Mosquitos have lots of natural enemies, from amphibian larvae to birds and bats. Consider putting up bird houses or bat boxes to try and encourage mosquito predators to move in.
- Our regional districts have ongoing mosquito control programs where pellets containing a bacteria deadly only to mosquitos are dropped into mosquito-filled stagnant water bodies.
- If you have pet fish that you are no longer want, ask the pet store where you bought them if you are able to re turn them. If all else fails, take your fish to a veterinarian and have them humanly euthanized.



While goldfish (also called koi) are very pretty in a garden pond, they can have extremely negative impacts in natural systems.

Spotlight on Stewards: Tantalus Vineyards

Tantalus Vineyards is located on the eastern shores of Okanagan Lake, south of Kelowna. Originally known as Pioneer Vineyards, the property grew table grapes in 1927 and is the oldest continuously producing vineyard in British Columbia. It is also an innovative vineyard as BC's only LEED (Leadership in Energy Design)-certified winery, with a building design and land use that is environmentally friendly and energy efficient.

In 2015, Tantalus Vineyards became Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship's very first Wildlife Habitat Steward outside of the South Okanagan and Similkameen as the organization expanded its boundaries to include the central and north Okanagan. This year, Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship has assisted Tantalus develop an invasive plant management strategy in order to enhance the native habitat in the 10-acre Ponderosa Pine forest the winery stewards on their property.

The Winery celebrated their autumn harvest and donated partial proceeds from their Fall Harvest Party to Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship. The donation further helps OSS to assist landowners and communities of the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys to steward and enhance important wildlife habitats.



Tantalus Vineyards Manager, Stu Reid, tends to bluebird box among vines.

Spotlight on Stewards: Forbidden Fruit Winery



Forbidden Fruit Winery's Steve Venables generously donates tasting fees each year to help OSS support land stewards and communities in habitat stewardship.

On the banks of the Similkameen River near Cawston, Forbidden Fruit Winery has been welcoming guests to its tasting room for ten years. The winery gets its fruit from the family-owned Ven'Amour Organic Farms, which encompasses 142 acres of orchards, vineyards and natural habitat.

Recognising the natural beauty of their property, Steve and Kim are stewards of a large area of old growth cottonwood forest along the river, as well as some rocky outcroppings, and dry sagebrush grassland habitat on the slopes above their orchards.

Steve and Kim generously donate tasting fees each year to help Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship support land stewards and communities carry out important habitat conservation and improvement projects throughout the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. Their commitment to stewardship on their property goes to show their conservation ethic on the ground and is a wonderful example of how agriculture and conservation can coexist.

Seven ways you can help birds this winter

This time of year people are often focused on self-improvement. Your new year's resolution might be to get more exercise or eat fewer doughnuts. Here are some resolutions that are easy to maintain and help out the birds. ?

1. Put out a bird feeder.

Different seeds attract different birds. Black oil sunflower, nyjer seed and suet cakes are popular choices.

Place feeders less than 3 feet or more than 30 feet from windows to reduce bird collisions.

Squirrel proof feeder designs are becoming more common. These feeders will close off access to the seed when an animal heavier than a bird is hanging from the feeder. In areas with rodent problems, you may want to consider buying a waste saucer that hangs below the feeder and catches dropped seeds. These can be emptied nightly to remove the attractant for rodents.

If you live close to a forest or in an area frequented by bears, wait until bears are hibernating before you put out feeders in the fall and take feeders down in early spring.

Any area where lots of animals are in contact is a place where disease can be spread. Make sure you clean your feeders regularly.



2. Give birds a drink

Only certain birds are attracted to bird feeders, but all birds need a drink. Providing water in your yard will bring in species that don't come to feeders, like robins, spotted towhees and migrating warblers in the spring and fall.

A bird bath doesn't need to be fancy or expensive. A large plant saucer or storage container lid can do the trick in a pinch. The best bird baths mimic natural puddles- shallow with sloping sides.

Placing rocks or branches in the bird bath during winter allows birds to drink without getting their feet wet, which is important in winter months.

Access to water can be difficult for birds in the winter when lakes, streams and puddles begin to freeze. Bird baths can be kept from freezing with special heaters which are cheap to run but can be expensive to buy. The Okanagan is usually warm enough that if you put warm water into the bird bath in the morning it will stay free of ice until the following night. Some containers may break if water is allowed to freeze inside them.



3. Put up a bird box

Many different birds use holes in trees for nesting. Some birds, like woodpeckers, will make their own holes, but other birds need to find holes to nest in. These birds include song birds like chickadees, house wrens and bluebirds, but also larger birds like the Western Screech-owl.

Different sizes and locations of boxes will attract different species of birds.

Check out our website for plans for Western Screech-owl boxes (*far right*) and Johnson slot boxes (*right*).

www.osstewardship.ca/birds.



4. Leave dead trees standing where it is safe to do so

Dead trees often have holes where birds can nest.

Even if a dead tree doesn't have holes in it yet, it will often have insect colonies eating the dead wood. Those insects provide food for woodpeckers, and they provide cavities for all sorts of other birds.

Dead trees can make great perches for large birds of prey. They are easy to land in without needing to maneuver around all those pesky leaves, and once a bird is perched there, it has a commanding view of any threats or possible prey around.



5. Don't feed birds bread

Although bread has lots of carbohydrates, it has little protein, vitamins, or minerals and makes birds feel full so they then don't eat other healthier foods. Ducks and geese are the birds most commonly given bread, but it is still very unhealthy for other birds as well. If ducklings eat too much bread while they are young, they can develop 'angel wings' - a deformity that leaves them unable to fly.

Some municipalities ask that residents refrain from feeding ducks and geese as it can lead to larger-than-normal populations, and all that extra duck and goose poop can cause water quality problems.

If you still want to feed ducks and geese, and you are in a place where you are allowed to do so, feed things like peas, corn, oats, bird seed, or torn greens. Other bird species appreciate these foods as well, with the exception of peas and greens.



6. Plan to create spaces for birds

It isn't a good time of year for planting right now, but it is a great time to sit down and make a plan for the spring and fall.

Creating an area with dense shrubs gives birds somewhere to hide – bonus points for using native species that bear fruit. Check out our pollinator guide for some ideas of what to plant: www.osstewardship.ca/grasslands-shrub-steppe

Leaving a messy area with piles of branches, leaves and things that have gone to seed is great for birds. Birds will shelter in the branches, search through the leaves for insects, and eat the seeds. Make sure you don't let invasive plants go to seed!



7. Keep birds safe from pets

Cats are excellent hunters that are great at catching birds (although you wouldn't know it from watching cat videos online). Cats are estimated to kill about 200 million birds in Canada every year. Many of those deaths are from feral cats and feral cat colonies, but most well fed cats will also catch birds for fun and extra food. Keep cats indoors, try a building a "catio", or test out a cat bib.

Dogs aren't generally thought of as being a problem for birds, but they can cause trouble for ground nesting birds during the spring and summer. Some dogs love to chase waterfowl and chasing resting birds in the winter can cause them to use up valuable energy and fat stores. Keep dogs on leashes or under close supervision.



Meet the Stewardship Team

Alyson Skinner—Executive Director



Alyson lives in Penticton and has been working with Stewardship in the Okanagan-Similkameen since 2005. While her experience includes habitat enhancement, nature interpretation, program and grant management, her real passion is engaging local communities and residents in hands-on-projects. She currently is on the Executive Committee for the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program and the Steering Committee for the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program and Leadership Team for the Okanagan Wetland Strategy

Lia McKinnon, Stewardship Biologist



Lia joined the Stewardship Team in 2014. She has an eclectic background working with everything from native pollinators, to rattlesnakes, to burrowing owls. This a background that fits in well with the OSS since we work with a diverse group of species and habitats throughout the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys. Lia is also a biologist with the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society and is a Director on the Board for the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance.

Valerie Blow, Stewardship Technician (Similkameen, South & Central Okanagan)



Valerie started working with OSS in 2015 and became a permanent employee in 2016. She has been in the Okanagan since 2008 when she was at UBC Okanagan obtaining her degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. In addition to working with Stewardship, Valerie also works with the Osoyoos Desert Society and the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance doing educational programs and outreach. She also volunteers with the SORCO Raptor Rehab Centre and the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society.

Michelle Stanley, Stewardship Technician (Central & North Okanagan)



Michelle is the newest employee to OSS. She has called the Okanagan home for most of her life which has fostered her passion for wildlife and preserving local habitats. Michelle has volunteered with the Burrowing Owl Society, SORCO Raptor Rehab and the Kamloops Wildlife Park and currently works for the Osoyoos Desert Society doing habitat conservation, restoration and education work. Now residing in the Joe Rich area of Kelowna, she is excited to work as the Stewardship Technician for the North Okanagan.

Get Involved!

Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship is currently seeking volunteers to join our Board of Directors. We are seeking individuals with diverse backgrounds and experience who are passionate about supporting voluntary conservation, stewardship and enhancement of wildlife habitats in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. For more details, please refer to the posting on our website at www.osstewardship.ca/get-involved-1.

Articles written by Alyson Skinner, Lia McKinnon, and Valerie Blow

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