

# LIGHTS and SHADOWS

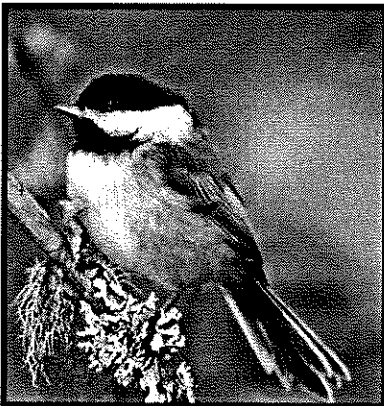
from the  
Dishman Hills

January 2008

## BIRD BUDDIES

There is a very interesting relationship between two bird species in the Natural Area, the red-breasted nuthatch and the black-capped chickadee. These birds, about the same size, occupy many of the same habitats, and exist in mix-species flocks during the winter months when predator problems are at their worse.

Recent research at the U of WA has found that these two bird buddies may be the first observed example of an animal making sophisticated decisions about predator danger from alarm calls of another species (other than canaries in a coal mine). The nuthatch can interpret the foreign language of the chickadee when predators threaten. The Chickadee has two types of alarm call: one when they see a flying raptor, birds of prey such as hawks, owls and falcons, that is a soft, high-pitched "seet" call; the other for a stationary or perched raptor, that is a loud, wide-spectrum "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" call. Analysis of the



black-capped chickadee recorded chickadee calls indicate that the features of the call vary with the size of the predator by adding 5, 10, or 15 "dees". The smaller, agile raptors such as the pygmy owl pose the greater threat than the great horned owl, a larger, less maneuverable raptor.

Both birds respond to the threat by mobbing the attacker as a coordinated effort to drive away the predator. While this behavior seems a bit suicidal, it is effective in thwarting a surprise attack. Anyone who watches birds frequently has probably seen the mix of one big bird being pestered by a number of small, circling birds. The nuthatches will form effective mobbing units based on the alarm information sent by the chickadees. It is not known if the chickadee understands the cries of the nuthatch.

As with any sophisticated relationship, one can expect some interesting twist. Other research suggest that the chickadee will produce false alarm calls, causing other birds to fly away, leaving the cheating chickadee to enjoy a food source by itself. Very Human!

## CHOICES

Responses to the question asked in the last newsletter of what the Association should be doing in the future was, as expected, both varied and overlapping. Generally, people were supportive with the activities and directions taken by the Association in the last ten years, but after the almost mandatory "doing a great job, keep it up" things got more interesting. There were several comments on stewardship including new and better trails, interpretive centers, and controlling deteriorating environmental conditions. Those living next or near the

*Our native land was shaped by the creator as we ourselves with his all-knowing hand. He put us down amidst these mountains, streams, and plants. Generations of ancestors, unnumbered are buried here beneath the ground. So surely there can be no wonder that this land of ours is sacred, to be protected, and handed to generations yet unborn.*

Yakama Nation—River of Memory at MAC Museum

Natural Area were concerned with problems involving wildfires, transients, and trespassers and thought that we should address these urban issues with more resources. We have discussed funding a patrol person during parts of the year. Some lamented that their visits to the Hills were too far and in between and wondered if we could have more organized hikes or classes that would help get them out there. It was commented that we could do a better job of advertising the new conservation area on Tower Mountain, thus building public support and addition resources through donations.

Saving the ecology was important to others and they wanted us to continue land acquisition to help stop loss and fragmentation of important nature areas, especially in the open spaces between the two natural areas on the Dishman Ridge. Several thought that special habitats should be identified and bid for as the land becomes available. Animal migration corridors should be saved where possible. One person thought that we could play a larger role of watchdog of land changes in the Hills and could serve as a information source and rallying point for effected communities and concerned environmental groups.

## ASSOCIATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have questions. We meet every other month on the third Tuesday of the month at 7pm, at Opportunity Elementary School, S. 1109 Wilbur. Our next meeting will be March 18th.

The following are our December donors that have consented to be listed: Jim & Maralyn Bertis, Laurie Byrd, Nancy Cashon, Joe Collins, Jim & Patty Conaty, Anthony & Ida Dolphin, Stanley & Bernice Fahlgren Fund, Stan & Joan Fergin, Helen Fosseen, Don Griffiths, Bart & Lindell Haggin, Esther Lancaster, Carolyn Leon, Charlie Meyers, Leo Middendorf, Dommie Oswald, Elizabeth Parsons, Jill Thomas-Pestrin, Chris & Ellen Pierce, Carol Reardon, Steve & Sharon Reynolds, Bruce & Julie Rosenoff, Elizabeth Ruscio, Jane Schelly, Holly Sonneland, Marilyn Stedman, Megan Stevenson, Helen Stowell, John & Barbara Swan, Patricia Sweeney, Katrina & Irene Vogel, Karen Wilgen, Jeanne Wilson, Elaine Wimpy, Larry & Mary Wright, and three anonymous donors. What a fabulous collection of generous and supportive people! Thank You.

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