



# neighborhood naturalist

Nature you can find in town and the nearby countryside

Corvallis, Oregon

Summer, 2003

## Big Brown Bat

*Eptesicus fuscus*

Wing span: about 9 inches: 0.4 to 0.6 oz.

**Range:** All of Oregon, Southern Canada, continental U.S. and most of Mexico.

**Habitat:** Roosts and hibernates in buildings, hollow trees, wooded areas, crevices, tunnels, caves. Hunts in the city, forests, fields and over water.

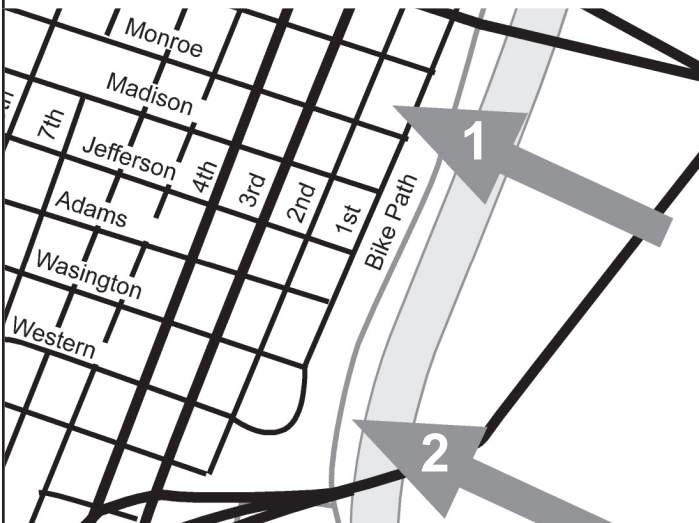
**Diet:** Beetles, moths, mosquitoes, and other flying insects.

### To See Big Brown Bats in Corvallis

In the summer, go downtown to Riverfront Park at dusk. Be patient and you'll see them fly towards the river from these roosting spots:

- 1) Building crevices along the alley west of First Street and between Jackson and Monroe.
- 2) The building behind the wall with the graffiti art murals which is along the bike path by the river (between Washington and Western). Sit at the picnic tables and enjoy the show!

See "Events" on back page



## Big Brown Bats

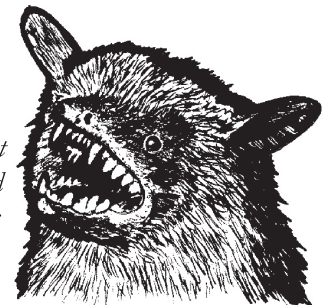
Big Brown Bats are the most familiar bat to people because they like to roost in attics, eaves, barns or other buildings, often hibernating indoors during winter. They also roost beneath loose bark, tree cavities and caves. They are harmless, precious and delicate creatures, and should be left alone. It can be hard to tell if a hibernating bat is alive or dead! During hibernation, the body temperature of a Big Brown Bat is almost the same as its surroundings. Also, its breathing is unnoticeable and its heart rate is dramatically slow.

As mammals, bats give birth, feed their young milk and have hair, just like us! But bats are unique among mammals for their ability of powered flight. But rather than flying mice, bats are more like flying shrews. Like shrews, bats have pointy teeth perfectly suited for eating insects.

Also, like shrews, bats can see just fine but rely more

### Bug Zapper

*With its 32 pointy teeth, a Big Brown Bat can crunch up as many as a few hundred insects in one night, including mosquitoes and agricultural pests.*



heavily on their other senses. Their sophisticated voices and ears are designed for honing in on flying insects while they themselves are flying at full speed. Bats use this *echo-location* (a kind of sonar) for not only for hunting, but for navigating as well.

# What's All That Noise About?

## Birds Can Reveal the Presence of Other Wildlife

Birds keep keen watch on the neighborhood and are quickly alerted to the presence of a hawk, owl or other threat. In downtown Corvallis, I've seen crows harass eagles, ravens, red-tailed hawks, raccoons and even people.



*Crows and Scrub Jays harassing a Red-tailed Hawk*

### Go Investigate, You'll Be Surprised!

Sometimes crows or jays will bicker amongst themselves for social reasons. When you hear *both* crows and jays upset, go find the source of the noise. Instead of being simply annoyed at all the noise, you might make an exciting discovery. If the object of harassment is not immediately visible, watch the harassing birds. They will point their beaks towards the culprit! They'll also make sweeping dives at the intruder. Unseen cats, snakes, bobcats, weasels, coyotes, foxes and others can often be found simply by paying attention to the distress calls of birds. If the focus of harassment is on the ground, look for a ground dwelling predator. If the harassers are pointing toward the crown of a tree, think of a predator who would be perching or sitting there. One spring morning, I awoke to the cries of crows and scrub jays. At 60 feet up in a Douglas Fir tree, I was expecting a hawk, but the culprit was a raccoon sleeping on a branch. Even if an intruder, a hawk for example, is capable of killing its harassers, it usually won't try it because it would be placing itself at risk of being killed or injured by the combined force of the angry mob. Most predators are designed to kill one at a time and prefer to use surprise or ambush to their advantage. Also, the predators are usually after eggs, nestlings or fledglings (during nesting season) and not trying to hunt the full-grown adults. Adult birds may not feel personally

threatened by a predator but they will drive it away if their nest is threatened. Interestingly enough, crows and jays are themselves predators and nest robbers. So, if you hear a collection of *songbirds* signaling distress alarms, there might be a crow or jay near their nest!

### Birds Tell You the Location and Size of the Predator

The perceived threat of the predator determines the distance from which the harassers cry out. A bird hunter like a cooper's hawk will command more distance than a red-tailed hawk. That's because red-tails are hunters of small animals in fields and not as agile and aggressive as a cooper's hawk. On the ground for instance, a weasel will have a corps of harassers perching at a distance higher than the weasel can jump. Likewise, harassers will go even higher for a bobcat. How high, would you imagine, would they have to be for a cougar?

### Distinguish Between Alarms and Other Bird Noise

Male birds will often battle amongst themselves and fledglings will harass parents for food but these noises will not draw the attention of other birds. So, even if there's a lot of noise, other birds may not be alarmed and will go about their business as usual. Now, if you have a situation where birds of different species are participating (and possibly even some squirrels or chipmunks), that's when to take particular notice. Crows and jays are often the first alarm callers you may hear but you can't trust them like songbirds. Crows and jays are tricksters and, as mentioned before, nest robbers and, at times, will act strangely compared to other birds.

### Bird Language

Some of the topics discussed above form the basis of my "Bird Language" lectures and workshops (see "Events" on back page). Other folks are teaching these concepts, such as Tom Brown Jr.'s Tracker School and Jon Young's Wilderness Awareness School (Jon came up with the title "Bird Language"). You can find Tom Brown Jr.'s books at the library. Also see [www.WildernessAwareness.org](http://www.WildernessAwareness.org).

### Tracking Leaves Website

Corvallis resident Khan Gorlewski maintains a website which offers naturalists an opportunity to write, share journals and information from personal observations. Gorlewski set up the site to encourage learning and networking. To read stories from your fellow naturalists, visit: [www.trackersden.com](http://www.trackersden.com).

## Ladybugs

Poetry by Charles Goodrich

Every January they re-emerge,  
anchorites from within our walls,  
and cloister themselves on the upstairs window  
for a few weeks of fasting and travail.  
By day they wander the glass  
like desert mendicants, each bug  
nothing but a robe and a begging bowl.  
By night they huddle  
in a corner of the casement,  
a little heap of rosary beads,  
a handful of prayers incarnate.  
Winter being the season of doom,  
I have my own austerities to attend to.  
But, mornings, when I find  
their eclipsed bodies on the windowsill,  
lovely and empty as little lacquered urns  
I sweep them up with a feather duster  
and return them to the garden.

from "Insects of South Corvallis", a poetry collection by Charles Goodrich. Available at Grass Roots Bookstore and the OSU Bookstore



## Convergent Lady Beetle

*Hippodamia convergens*

"Ladybugs" are beetles and the Convergent Lady Beetle is very common. They are beneficial to people because they eat aphids and some other insects which damage crops. There are many lady beetle species. You can distinguish species by noting the spot pattern on their back and looking it up in an insect field guide.

Lady Beetle larva



## Summer Doldrums

July through September in our region is unlike summers in other parts of our continent. The weather patterns here are very stable, hot and dry. This is good news for those who enjoy outdoor sports but it is a lean time for birds and other wildlife. While native vegetation enjoys abundant rain throughout the rest of the year, it has had to adapt to conserve water through this period, so plant growth slows dramatically. This affects the food supply to insects at the very base of the food chain. This is why there is a noticeable slow down in bird song and activity in July. During this period, some bird species migrate to the mountains to avoid the heat.

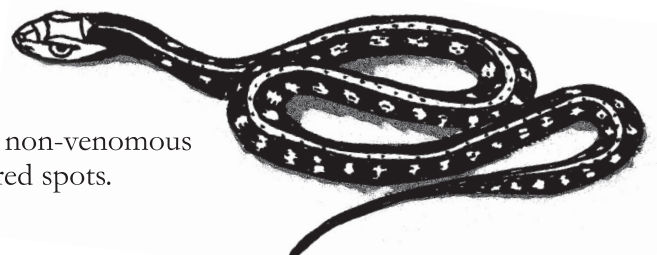
## Goldfinches and Thistle

The interdependent relationship between the American Goldfinch and thistle is ancient. The male Goldfinch pictured here, perched on Canada Thistle, is bright yellow during summer. Goldfinches eat the seeds of the thistle, as well as those of the sunflower, tarweed and other related plants. Goldfinches nest later than most songbirds and use the fluffy down from the plants in their nests. The plants depend on the finches to pull apart the seed heads which disperses their fluffy seed packets into the wind. You can purchase thistle seed and bird feeders designed to hold it to attract American Goldfinches, Lesser Goldfinches and Pine Siskins to your home all year round.



## E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area

Just six miles north of Corvallis, E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area is east of Highway 99W across the road from Coffin Butte Landfill. Take Camp Adair Road east for a quarter mile and park at the lot near the pheasant cages or the angler's parking lot. (You can go fishing there too.) Though perhaps not as scenic as other natural areas, its overgrown thickets and shallow wetlands are loaded with birds, mammals, reptiles, frogs and wild plants. It's easy to walk or ride a bike on the old paved roads but it's not frequented by hikers, mountain bikers or joggers. This is a hunting area so take note of the local hunting season's schedule. You can go there during hunting season, just wear bright orange or red. I like to go there at all times of the year.



## Common Garter Snake

*Thamnophis sirtalis*

Our version of the common garter snake can be colorful. It is a non-venomous snake with an orange head, black body, yellow linear stripe and red spots.



**neighborhood  
naturalist**

Neighborhood Naturalist is an educational organization that conducts workshops, field trips, and shares information about nature in Corvallis and adjacent areas. Neighborhood Naturalist was started by Don Boucher to promote interest about nature in back yards, parks and neighborhoods. Don is an instructor at Linn-Benton Community College for birding and tracking classes and an Audubon Society of Corvallis board member and field trip guide.

## Subscribe

4 issues per year, \$3 per year

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**Visit the Website!**

[www.geocities.com/donatsanda/pages/n-n.htm](http://www.geocities.com/donatsanda/pages/n-n.htm)

## Events

**June 25, Bat Watching Picnic**, Wed. 8 PM - 10 PM, bring picnic food, drink, and place settings. Downtown Riverfront between Washington and Western. There is plenty of nearby parking by the skate park.

**June 28, "Bird Language" Intensive Workshop.** Includes field experiments. \$7, 10 AM - Noon. To register, contact the Avery House at 758-6198

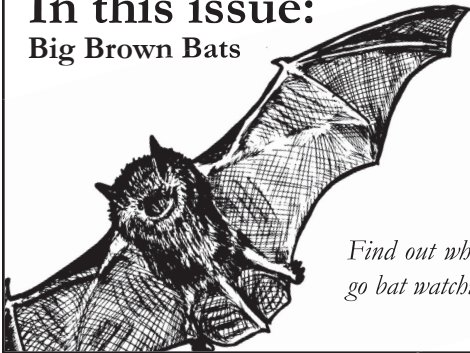
**July 22 Evening bird/bat walk** to meet at 5:45 PM at the Benton Center parking lot (630 NW 7th). Carpool to Albany's Simpson Park to see birds and then downtown Albany to watch Bats. Field Trip by Audubon Society of Corvallis. Leader, Marcia Cutler 752-4313

## TRACKER'S CLUB

Monthly, local tracking outings or other related nature topic. Call or email to get put on a list so you can be notified when events will occur.

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### In this issue: Big Brown Bats



*Find out where to  
go bat watching*

### Ladybug Poetry by Charles Goodrich



### Learn how birds can reveal the presence of other wildlife

### Goldfinches and Thistle



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