



neighborhood naturalist

Nature you can find in town and the nearby countryside

Corvallis, Oregon

Autumn, 2003

Willamette Valley Oak Galls

Oregon White Oak (*Quercus garryana*) may turn disappointingly brown in Autumn, but a closer look can yield fascinating surprises. As leaves are found on the ground, so are the many galls that grow on them. Galls are growth deformities on plants caused by insects but mites may contribute. Oaks have the largest gall variety in our region. A single species of oak may have a dozen types of gall. Each gall variety is distinctive in color and shape, and is caused by a specific insect species. Three wasp species cause the most common galls on Oregon White Oak. These gall wasps are smaller and less colorful than the familiar yellowjackets and paper wasps and they can't sting people. In Spring the wasps lay eggs in sprouting leaves or twigs. Through a seemingly magical process the egg and then the developing larva cause the oak to grow a gall that provides protection and food for the insect. No similar benefit is offered to

the oak. Scientists regard this relationship as parasitic but it does little to harm the oak.

The three prominent gall wasps on Oregon White Oak are in the same family. The Oak Apple Wasp forms large, persistent, apple-like galls on twigs. The Spectacled Gall Wasp forms mottled, spherical galls on leaves. The strangest might be the Jumping Gall Wasp, which forms mustard-seed-like galls on lower leaf surfaces that drop in the fall and jump around like Mexican jumping beans caused by activity of the enclosed larvae. ¹

1) Larew and Capizzi, 1983. Common Insect and Mite Galls of the Pacific Northwest, vol 5. Oregon State University Press.

Gall Wasps Species Highlights

Oak galls are often caused by wasps in the Cynipidae family and are referred to by scientist as Cynipids. Commonly they are also called Gall Wasps. The picture shown here is typical of their size and shape. These tiny wasps are unable to sting people.



Oak Apple Wasp

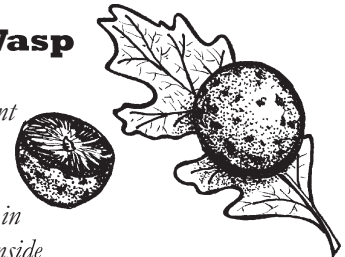
(*Andricus californicus*)
Oak Apples are aptly named for they are the largest of our oak galls. They can be pale brown and may get dark later in fall or winter. They are thick walled and have a pithy core. They are the most dense of the galls and can last well into the next growing season.



Spectacled Gall Wasp

(*Besbicus mirabilis*)

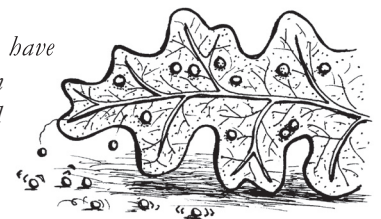
These may be our most abundant oak galls. As large as ping pong balls and almost as hollow. They are tan or yellow with red spots in Autumn but green in summer. Inside are delicate fibers radiating from the center. In summer, you may find the wasp larva at the center. By Autumn, insect has already emerged leaving a pencil point sized hole in the shell of the gall.



Jumping Gall Wasp

(*Neuroterus saltatoriu*)

These crazy little galls still have larva in them after they fall in Autumn. They are yellow and about the size of mustard seeds. They hop or wiggle around by the action of the larva inside. Not widely common, I've found these galls on oaks on the northern hilly parts of Corvallis.



Oregon White Oaks

Where to Find them in Corvallis

Chip Ross Park on the north side of Corvallis has a relatively healthy oak population. The crowns of the trees often come close to the ground, making it possible to see the twigs and leaves. The Benton County Fairgrounds has a grove of tall oaks and a resident colony of Acorn Woodpeckers who feed on them. Bald Hill Park has some good old oaks along the bike path and near the barn. Bald Hill is a good spot to harvest acorns, if you can avoid poison oak (see events on back page about the acorn processing workshop). Avery Park has a grove of tall oaks near the Avery House Nature Center and the Locomotive. Crescent Valley High School has many oaks at the perimeter of its grounds. There are also many groves in the countryside on private land.



Identifying Oregon White Oak

Other oak species are planted in town and residential areas but Oregon White Oak is our only native. In southern Oregon there are other native species, like California Black Oak. Oregon White Oak has medium sized leaves with rounded lobes. Older trees typically have twisted, gnarled branches with a lot of character. Acorns are always a sure sign of the presence of oak trees. Oregon White Oak acorns are oval and the diameter of a dime to a nickel. Red Oak acorns are about the same size but often more round than oval. The inside of the shell is fuzzy brown whereas our native oak has a smooth inner shell. Later in the season they may get fuzzy white or green from mold. Other cultivated oaks have tiny or long, narrow acorns.



Common Oaks in Town

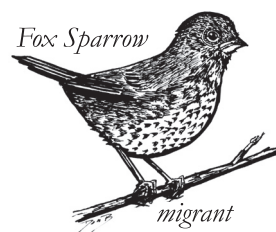
From left to right: The Red Oak is native to Eastern North America; Oregon White Oak is native to Southern British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California; Pin Oak is native to Eastern North America; the Durmask Oak is native to Europe

New Birds for Autumn

We said good-bye to the summer birds at our feeders but we can expect new arrivals this fall. In some cases, year-round residents will come and go to your backyards depending on their seasonal habits. Just because you haven't seen chickadees at your feeder during the summer doesn't mean they have left the Willamette Valley. In Autumn, some feeder birds like Black-headed Grosbeaks and Lazuli Buntings do in fact leave for Mexico.

Autumn Migratory Arrivals

Other birds arrive from the North or from the mountains. Here is an overview of common migrants you can expect in your backyard this season:



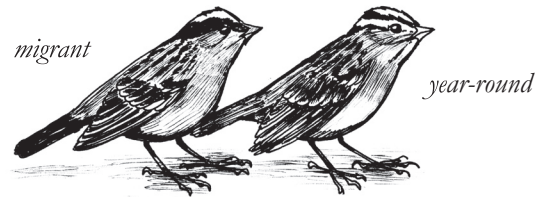
Fox Sparrow

Field Marks: "Chocolaty" colored head without stripes; it has spots on its breast that converge to a central spot; small cone shaped beak with yellow on bottom

Food: Seeds; will come to your seed feeder

Habits: Likes thickets and brush; does not flock

Similar: The Song Sparrow is very similar but has stripes on its head and a beak that is all the same color. It has streaks not spots on breast.



Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow

Field Marks: Plain gray breast; black crown with yellow or light colored crest; mottled brown back and wings; small cone shaped beak that is dark

Food: Seeds; will come to your seed feeder

Habits: Likes thickets and brush; often foraging on ground; usually in flocks of five or more

Similar: The White-crowned Sparrow often flocks with the Golden-crowned Sparrow. They have stripes on the side of the head and a yellow beak.



Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglet

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Field Marks: Olive colored back; two white wing bars; broken white eye ring; male has a tiny ruby crest that may be flashed when he's excited or agitated; thin short beak.

Food: Insects; will come to your suet feeder but will not eat seeds

Habits: Likes thickets and trees; does not flock.

Similar: Very similar to the uncommon Hutton's Vireo. The vireo has a heavier beak.

Golden-crowned Kinglet

Field Marks: Olive colored back; two white wing bars; white and black head stripes; the crest is yellow to bright yellow-orange; thin, short beak

Food: Insects; will come to your suet feeder but will not eat seeds

Habits: Likes the crowns of trees; especially evergreens; usually in flocks of five or more

Similar: May be confused with Red-breasted Nuthatch. It has a blue-gray back and no yellow on crest.

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Field Marks: Variable; always has a yellow rump patch; streaking on sides of breast; whitish wing bars; throat is yellow or white; thin beak.

Food: Insects; will come to your suet feeder but will not eat seeds

Habits: Prefers small trees; usually in flocks of five or more.

Similar: The less common Townsend's Warbler has yellow stripes on the head.

Townsend's Warbler



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Varied Thrush

Field Marks: Dark back with orange breast and throat, orange brow stripe, black bib and orange bars on wings, dark beak.

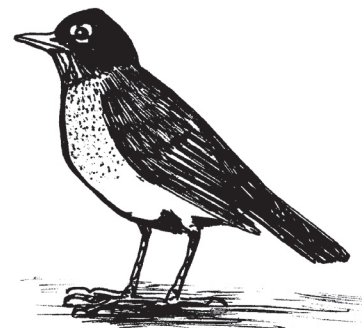
Food: Insects; worms and small invertebrates.

Habits: Forest floor, likes to hunt worms like a Robin.

Similar: The American Robin is the same general size, shape and color. It has no brow stripe or wing bars. It has a yellow bill and white-streaked throat



Varied Thrush migrant



American Robin year-round

Landscapes

Poetry by Beth Russell

A.M.

Above the hills

I watched the morning rise.

Beyond the tangled traffic,

Beyond the power lines,

I saw the earth unfold beneath the sky

Untouched by all the haste and waste

And hurry of our lives.

BARN

old wood rising

over hill's horizon

square strong minding

of god's first tiding:

our purpose is to tend

not ourselves and fellow men

but the creatures and the seed

which soul and body need.

In the Work of heart and hand

we are redeemed.

ROWS

The geometry of fields

excites the eye

Is paradox as order

contains chaotic life.

The mind and hand have shaped them
straight and square.

But the heart is stronger knowing
of the wildness tangled there.

Beth Russell is a native of Puget Sound's Whidbey Island, she is a mother, a homemaker, and an activist for local sustainability. She teaches English at Corvallis High School.



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
or Quarter Hour (HOURS program)

913 NW Tyler Ave.
Corvallis, OR 97330
541-753-7689
bouchdon@juno.com

www.neighborhood-naturalist.com

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Events

Acorns as Food, September 27

Saturday, 2–5 PM. A modern process using kitchen tools but it involves the same principles used before industrial times. \$3.

Register by contacting the Avery House Nature Center: 541-758-6198, ahnc@peak.org

Tracking and Wildlife Observation

2-week class starts October 7. Learn the essentials of tracking local wild animals; practice observation techniques of seeing, hearing and how to move quietly. Free. Linn-Benton Community College.

For class info: Don Boucher 753-7689,
bouchdon@juno.com

Registration required: <http://sis.linnbenton.edu>
541-917-4991

TRACKER'S CLUB

Free, monthly, local tracking outings or other related nature topic. Meet at Avery Park in Corvallis at the Lyons Shelter on Sundays (see below) from 1–3 PM

October 5, Sunday, 1–3 PM, Avery Park
November 9, Sunday, 1–3 PM, Avery Park
December 7, Sunday, 1–3 PM, Avery Park
January 11, Sunday, 1–3 PM, Avery Park

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Our native oak trees

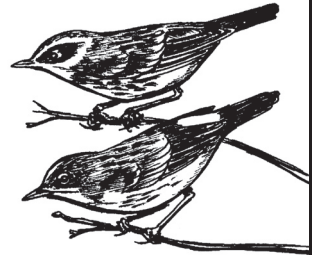
Migratory birds who arrive in Autumn



The mystery of oak galls



Landscape Poetry
by Beth Russell



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