

# Birds for the Brain

By Patty Sorensen

Have you noticed how gorgeous the birds are at this time of the year? I am always in awe of the way the drab winter coats of the male Goldfinches turn bright yellow for mating season or the Common Loon that changes from gray-brown to a black and white checkered back.



Just when I think I have a bird's field marks memorized, I notice that it is trying to fool me.

<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/page.aspx?pid=1058>

First there is a color change of feathers. How does their body re-color feathers so they stand out during mating season? I understand the why....to attract a mate. The change seems pretty complex physiologically to me. It's not like they can go to the hairdresser and add highlights!

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/studying/feathers/color>

And they don't limit their change to feathers either! During mating season some birds even add strange growths. Have you seen the weird "laterally flattened horn" that appears on the beak of a White Pelican in the spring and then drops off after the mating season? Sure would make me cross-eyed trying to look over that thing!



No time for vacation from stretching my brain. There is also a stage when many birds lose their feathers called molting. A good example is the Bald Eagle's white head/tail which takes several years to develop.

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/studying/feathers/molting>

With new feathers growing in and old ones falling out, again the bird's identification marks take on a new pattern. Many of us don't see this stage happen as the birds at this point are not able to fly.

I have enough trouble telling gulls apart to not add molting to the mix. Look at the stages of the Ring-billed Gull. I'll need to rely more on his beak pattern.

[http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/studying/feathers/rb\\_molt](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/studying/feathers/rb_molt)

This year I've been noticing many other birds that confused me with their strange colorings! Thank goodness for great bird books and programs describing the juvenile stages. I've looked at those beautiful male Red-winged Blackbirds for years, but just noticed that there are some males that do not have the correct red and white wing patch. At first I thought it was just a bird with some albino tendencies (leucism), but there were too many identically marked ones for that.

<http://birding.about.com/od/identifyingbirds/a/leucism.htm>



After some research I learned that the first-year male Red-winged Blackbird does not have the red portion of the wing patch, just the white. Great, more to remember. Well, at least my brain cells won't go on vacation as long as I keep trying to identify birds. *Whew!*

# Join "Oregon Wild" in the Klamath Basin over Labor Day Weekend 2013



Oregon Wild and the Klamath Marsh NWR are seeking volunteers for a one-day work party to removed unneeded barbed wire fences (that are a hazard to wildlife) on Saturday August, 31, 2013. Additionally, the refuge is looking for help with other projects such as black tern colony counts, mapping beaver sign, woodpecker surveys, etc.

Arrive at the Klamath Marsh Thursday evening for a pot luck dinner and slide show (just before Labor Day weekend) and to participate on naturalist led hikes to little visited waterfalls in roadless areas of Oregon Wild's proposed greater Crater Lake Wilderness Area. Camping, or indoor sleeping space, with kitchen facilities and showers provided for group participants.

For a full itinerary and to ask to be placed on the "email reminder list" for when you may sign up to participate later this summer, visit Oregon Wild's website after mid-July to register at [www.oregonwild.org](http://www.oregonwild.org) or contact:

Wendell Wood, Wildlands Interpreter  
Oregon Wild  
PO Box 1923  
Brookings, OR 97415

## Beachcombers or Birders Wanted!

Help make a difference for the environment by collecting data for the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST). COASST is a citizen science project dedicated to involving volunteers in the collection of high quality data on the status of coastal beaches, and trends of seabirds. Our goal is to assist government agencies and other organizations in making informed management and conservation decisions, and promote proactive citizen involvement and action. COASST volunteers systematically count and identify bird carcasses that wash ashore along ocean beaches from northern California to Alaska. Volunteers need NO experience with birds, just a commitment to survey a specific beach (about 3/4 mile) each month.



If you are interested in participating, join COASST staff for a full, 6-hour training session. Hear about how COASST started, learn how to use the custom Beached Birds field guide, and try out your new skills with some actual specimens. There is no charge to attend a training, but plan to provide a \$20 refundable deposit if you would like to take home a COASST volunteer kit complete with a COASST Beached Birds field guide. Training activities take place indoors, and include a break for lunch - please pack your own or plan to buy lunch nearby.

To reserve a spot at a training session, please call COASST at 206-221-6893 or write to: [coasst@uw.edu](mailto:coasst@uw.edu). Please check our website at [www.coasst.org](http://www.coasst.org) for additional information on upcoming trainings.



## Photo Gallery

