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November 7, 2016

Cougar-Squak Corridor Park Bird Survey Report for period October 2015-September 2016

Cougar-Squak Corridor Park

Cougar-Squak Corridor Park covers 226 acres in the valley between Cougar and Squak mountains in the Issaquah Alps. The land was held privately for many years and was used as a forest camping area in recent years. Old logging roads exist on the property and old campsites can be seen along them. In 2015 the most recent private owner announced a plan to log the property and members of the community organized a grassroots effort to stop that process. A coalition of groups led by the Issaquah Alps Trail Club, saved the property from logging. The land was purchased by King County with assistance from The Trust for Public Land, and the property is now a park in the King County system.

Eastside Audubon Society (EAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society and has a service area that includes the City of Issaquah and the Cougar-Squak Corridor Park. The chapter has 1,100 members in 11 cities and towns in Northeastern King County from Lake Washington to the Cascade Crest. The chapter supported the efforts to save the corridor forest and shortly after the opening of the new park and trail on June 6, 2015, the chapter decided to explore the bird life of the area.

EAS members researched eBird, the online database for bird record storage and retrieval sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and found there were no checklists posted for the corridor area. Conducting bird surveys is a long tradition with EAS, and the chapter decided to conduct a one year, once a month walking survey of birds of the park.

Survey Methods

The survey was conducted along Margaret's Way Trail, named for Margaret MacLeod, a park planner whose long career resulted in preservation of hundreds of acres of land in the Issaquah area. The new trail constructed by volunteers working with Washington Trails Association, the Student Conservation Association, AmeriCorps NCCC-Gold 7, and a King County Parks backcountry trails crew, is a 2.5 mile long trail in the southwestern part of the park. Margaret's Way connects to trails in the Squak Mountain State Park. The combined trails traverse a total of seven miles beginning at the parking area on SR 900 along some old logging roads before heading through forest of big leaf maple, western red cedar, western hemlock, and Douglas fir, and ending at the overlook Debbie's View.

The survey began in October 2015 and concluded in September 2016. A walk-through survey method was used with team members noting all birds seen or heard as they walked along Margaret's Way Trail.

A total of 15 survey walks were conducted over the twelve month period with a checklist posted to eBird after each walk. The EAS survey team consisted of five members with the monthly surveyors numbering from one to five participants during the survey walks. Survey walks were conducted at least once a month with the exception of December 2015. Ten survey walks were conducted by a group of survey team members with two to five members participating. The distribution of survey team members participating by month is as follows: 5 members - March, four members - April and May, three members – January, February, June, July, August and September, two members - November, one member – October, and one extra walk each in April and July, and two extra walks in June.

The survey team members followed the same route for each survey walk along Margaret's Trail for a distance of about one and a half miles. The team walked far enough to cross two of the streams and gain about 300 feet in elevation. The survey round trip to this point took 3.5 hours. All of the walks covered this basic distance, but five of the walks extended to the full length of the trail to Debbie's View. These longer walks were conducted in November 2015, and in April, June and July 2016. The team decided to include all of the data from the additional walks to account for the difficulty of forest birding and allow for insuring that most, if not all, of the bird species that use the park were accounted for. However, only the highest count on one walk per month is listed for each bird species as the total for each month. This avoids over counting, when multiple walks are conducted during a month.

Results from Eastside Audubon Bird Survey

The survey team found 46 species of birds that use the park as residents (17 species), breeding birds (17 species), migrants (13 species) or vagrants (16 species). An additional 12 species were seen flying over or near the park bringing the total to 58 bird species seen in and around the park.

A spreadsheet of the monthly tally of birds accompanies this report. The number of bird species seen in the park ranges from 11 in winter months to 36 in the summer breeding period.

Breeding birds were confirmed by the presence of breeding pairs, males singing on territory, adults feeding young, the presence of an active nest, and feeding behavior. Breeding birds included both residents which were seen in every month, and migrants which were seen during the summer months. Birds with indisputable evidence of breeding include Hairy Woodpecker (juveniles seen and heard begging in July), Pacific-slope Flycatcher (singing males and female call notes heard in May), Brown Creeper (active nest building in April and a family group seen in July), Pacific Wren (adults feeding young in May), American Robin (bird carrying food in May, juveniles present in July), Black-throated Gray Warbler (male carrying nesting material), and Wilson's Warbler (males defending territory in May, female carrying food in June), Dark-eyed Junco (bird carrying food in May), and Spotted Towhee (a pair in suitable habitat in May).

A number of resident birds were seen in nearly every month or in every season and they are known to breed in Washington. The survey team considers the following species in addition to those listed above as breeding birds in or near the park: Barred Owl (present during the post-breeding period), Pileated

Woodpecker (a pair calling back and forth), Black-capped Chickadee (abundant), Chestnut-backed Chickadee (abundant), and Golden-crowned Kinglet (singing in the breeding season).

Several seasonal migrating birds were seen over several months during the breeding period and are also thought to breed in the park. The habitat is considered appropriate for these additional species that breed in Washington: Rufous Hummingbird, Band-tailed Pigeon, and Townsend's Warbler.

Other migrating birds were seen in the park and may use it as a rest stop during their spring migration. These neo-tropical migrants were seen in spring and early summer: Cassin's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Swainson's Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Western Tanager. Spring migration is condensed over a few weeks in April and May making these sightings more likely than seeing birds in fall migration. Migrating birds in the fall often take a different route south because they must find areas that provide habitat for foraging, which is not as available in forests in the fall.

A number of resident and vagrant species used different parts of the park in breeding and non-breeding seasons. These birds are considered altitudinal migrants which go to higher elevation in summer where it is cooler and to lower elevation in winter where it is warmer. Black-capped Chickadee, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pacific Wren, Varied Thrush, Dark-Eyed Junco, and Spotted Towhee appeared to use the park this way.

King County Regulated Wildlife Species

Four of King County's regulated wildlife species were seen flying near the park. A pair of Vaux's Swift was seen during the survey period in August foraging above the trees in the parking area. There is no knowledge if the birds had a roost in the park or not. Great Blue Herons were seen in March and August. An adult Bald Eagle was observed flying over Debbie's View in April and a juvenile was seen in the same location in June. An Osprey flew over the park in May. Both Bald Eagle and Osprey are known to nest near Lake Sammamish and Great Blue Herons are regularly seen there.

Summary Comments

The EAS survey team is confident that the resident and migrating birds which use the park for breeding and as a rest stop on migration have been successfully counted. At least 17 species of breeding birds have been identified. Birds that make altitudinal migration in spring and fall have been noted. All areas of the park that were surveyed sustained bird life. Ground nesting birds such as Pacific Wren, understory nesters such as Wilson's Warbler, cavity nesters such as Hairy Woodpecker, and upper story nesters such as Black-throated Gray Warbler indicate that habitat from the ground to the canopy is used by birds during the breeding season.

The EAS survey was limited to the Margaret's Way Trail and its extension to Debbie's View. The trail is located in the southwestern corner of the park. The majority of the park was not directly surveyed. Nevertheless, this survey provides the first and most thorough systematic count of birds in the Cougar-Squak Corridor and the survey team is confident it reflects the birdlife of the entire park. The forest is

the same throughout the park and extension of the data over the park area would indicate that the same bird species can be found in other areas of the park. Birds are more confined in their habitat needs and foraging areas during breeding, so the numbers of birds seen during the survey period is likely to reflect the small area surveyed and only a portion of the birds that use the park. Forest birds are routinely undercounted because of the difficulty of seeing them in thick underbrush, full foliage, and high canopies. Therefore, the count of the birds in this survey should be considered a significant undercount of the possible number of birds that use Cougar-Squak Corridor Park.

EAS is grateful for the team members who conducted this survey over the course of a full year. The chapter hopes this report will assist in planning for the future use of the park.

EAS Bird Survey Team Members: Andrew McCormick, Sharon Aagaard, Joanne Cormier, Nancy Hubley, and Carol Ray.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew McCormick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrew McCormick, Bird Survey Leader

Peter Marshall, Conservation Chair

Jan McGruder, President