The Willamette Valley Bird Symposium is a day-long event that brings people together to celebrate birds. Members of the symposium planning team volunteer and collectively donate hundreds of hours to make the symposium possible each year.

January 31, 2026

Long Version of Program
A shorter version will be available in hard copy at the registration desk

Doors open 7:30 am

8:30 **Introduction and welcome to the Willamette Valley Bird Symposium**
W. DOUGLAS ROBINSON
Professor, Dept. of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Sciences, OSU

8:40 **Introduction of our keynote speaker**
TEYA FUKUHARA
President, Willamette University Bird Nerds

8:45 **Keynote: "Ecology and evolution of Slender-billed Nuthatches"**
DAVID CRAIG
Professor, Dept. of Biology, Willamette University

9:35-10:00 **Break**

10:00 **The joy of miscounting: How practice (and a few mistakes) shape how we learn to count birds**
NOLAN CLEMENTS, W. Douglas Robinson
Graduate Student, Dept. of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Sciences, OSU

Abstract

One, two, three, four... uh oh, that's a lot of Cedar Waxwings. We all learned to count in our early years of life, yet as birders, hordes of Cackling Geese and European Starlings often get rounded to the nearest thousand—or worse, entered as simply "present." Counting takes practice (a lot of practice), but those mistakes and miscounts reveal patterns in how we perceive flocks and how practice can make population estimates more accurate.

10:15 Untangling mimicry: Improving acoustic detection of American Goshawks across the Pacific Northwest

KELLAN PARKER, Julianna M.A. Jenkins, Zachary J. Ruff, Natalie M. Rugg, J. David Wiens, Damon B. Lesmeister

Research Fellow, Oak Ridge Institute for Science & Education; Pacific Northwest Research Station USDA Forest Service

Abstract

Using forest sound recordings allows researchers to detect American Goshawk vocalizations across broad landscapes without needing to observe the birds directly. However, several species can imitate their calls and complicate efforts to identify true detections. By separating authentic calls from mimicry, we can more confidently map their distribution and better understand how these elusive raptors use the landscape.

10:30 What is a species? An investigation of reproductive isolation between Allen's (*Selasphorus sasin*) and Rufous (*S. rufus*) Hummingbird

BRIAN MYERS

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Biology, Eastern Oregon University

Abstract

Allen's and Rufous Hummingbirds are relatively young species that form a large hybrid zone in northern California and southern Oregon. In the past, Allen's and Rufous Hummingbirds likely occupied completely separate geographic areas until relatively recently, when during the late Pleistocene, a mosaic of suitable habitat that favored both species formed in northern California and southern Oregon. In this area, Allen's and Rufous now overlap in breeding range and form a hybrid zone. My research aims to leverage data from the Allen's x Rufous hybrid zone to quantify the mechanisms that make Allen's and Rufous hummingbird distinct species.

11:00 Fifty years of extraordinary change in Oregon's birds: 1975-2025

JAY WITHGOTT

Editor, Oregon Birds journal

Abstract

As the journal Oregon Birds celebrates 50 years of publication, contributors have profiled 50 bird species that have shown significant change in status within Oregon over the past 50 years. The project has revealed a remarkable array of diverse and dramatic stories: invasions and extirpations, novel discoveries and leaps in knowledge, depressing declines

but also inspiring conservation successes. From Boobies to Burrowing Owls, Pheasants to Phoebes, and Cuckoos to Cacklers, this talk will deploy a smorgasbord of examples to give a bird's-eye overview of major trends affecting Oregon's avifauna during an era of rapid and profound change.

11:15 Monitoring songbird diversity in managed Ohio forests
CAROLINE SAVAGE
Appalachian Mountains Migratory Bird Joint Venture

Abstract
East of the Mississippi River, most land is managed by private landowners. In an era where federal funding is uncertain, AMJV is developing a pilot program to allow landowners to collect ARU data.

11:23 The bird who cried snake: House finches know their predators
ALICE WELCH, Elena Gasiorowski, David Kikuchi
Graduate Student, Dept. of Integrative Biology, OSU

Abstract
Snakes present a huge threat to birds and their nests in North America, yet we don't know how well birds can recognize snakes. We showed different painted models of snakes and snake-like objects to wild-caught House Finches near their food bowls and measured how long it took for them to eat. The House Finches showed a clear response to Oregon snake species, with color playing a huge role in this recognition.

11:30 Why do I paint birds?
DOMINIQUE BACHELET
Research Scientist, College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences, OSU

Abstract
Birds have always been part of my life, from listening to French thrush concerts on warm summer nights to trying to sleep despite juvenile screech owl calls just over our tent in the Ochocos, from being reminded of filling the feeder by juvenile Steller's Jays to watching Sharp-shinned Hawks also feeding at the feeders in Olympia (WA), from watching the small European Robins hop in the snow to the tiny hummingbirds nesting in Big Bend National Park. Watching birds has been my solace. Painting birds has been my happy place.

11:50-1:00 Lunch

1:00 OSU Bird Nerds
STELLA WALK
President, OSU Bird Nerds

1:05 ALUMNUS TALK: Errant (bird) work: Unexpected projects and what birds reveal about access to nature
TYLER MCFADDEN

Instructor and Interim Director, Environmental Sciences Undergraduate Program, OSU

Abstract
This talk will explore a series of "errant" side projects that emerged alongside my primary research and ultimately led me back to OSU, where I teach environmental sciences and dabble in research on human access to nature. I will give a brief overview of what I did following my undergraduate studies in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences at OSU. Then I will share some recent work by undergraduate advisees quantifying long-term bird diversity change in and around a California protected area and estimating how climate change will impact access to birds across the United States.

1:30 Beauty before function: Does plumage color evolve before it is useful?
RUSSELL CAMPBELL, Katie Everson, David Kikuchi
Graduate Student, Dept. of Integrative Biology, OSU

Abstract
Investigating why birds are a specific color is a complex problem, but it reveals how species change and adapt. I explore this by studying the order in which traits and lifestyles evolve. My work seeks to answer whether birds evolve their color to suit their lifestyle, or whether their lifestyle changes in response to the colors they already have.

1:45 The Bird Board and surprise diversions
Participants TBA

2:30-2:50 Break

2:50 How are our breeding bird populations doing? 200 miles of walking survey results
WILL KIRSCH, Nolan Clements, W. Douglas Robinson
Undergraduate Student, Dept of Fisheries, Wildlife, & Conservation Sciences, OSU

Abstract
North American breeding birds are monitored largely by roadside surveys as part of the national Breeding Bird Survey. Those surveys are effective but are limited to roads. To track how forest birds are doing around Corvallis, we have counted birds twice or more along 100 miles of hiking routes for the last 5 years. We will summarize how the surveys work and what we have learned so far.

3:05 Fall at Marys Peak: A crossbill story
JALYN DEVEREAUX, Jessie Karr, Jamie Cornelius
Instructor, Portland Community College & OSU

Abstract
Many songbirds partition phases of reproduction, migration, molt, and overwintering. Red Crossbills are nomadic songbirds, characterized by flexible migrations and breeding seasons. This talk will follow the work of two OSU graduate students measuring crossbills in

the fall transition from reproduction to molt, then a potential irruptive migration at Marys Peak in the fall of 2023.

3:20 Cambodian bird diversity

JESS HIGHTOWER
Postdoctoral Researcher, Dept. of Forest Ecosystems & Society, OSU

Abstract

TBA

3:30 The fault in our feathers: Why collecting data on fault bars matters

JAYSHAUN TALBERT, Suzanne Austin
Undergraduate Student, Dept. of Fisheries, Wildlife, & Conservation Sciences, OSU

Abstract

Fault or stress bars are weak points in feathers that may occur when a bird is exposed to a stressor during feather growth. These localized weak points reduce the structural integrity of the feather and increase the likelihood of breakage. Broken feathers can have energetic or fitness consequences by increasing the costs of flight. This presentation discusses what fault bars look like, what their presence may indicate, why they're useful for researchers, and best practices for documenting them in the field.

3:40 Closing remarks and Drawing (raffle) Giveaway

WVBS Planning Committee

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