

### **Watch wintering wildlife with care**

Winter can be a great season to watch wildlife, but it's also the time when we can most easily stress those objects of our attention.

All of us, including our feathered and furred friends in the wild, use more energy to move and function in winter's cold and snow. Unnecessary disturbance of animals that exist 24-7 in those conditions just depletes their energy reserves more quickly.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) wildlife biologists say minimizing impact to wild animals at this time can be critical to their survival.

Little things can make a difference, like approaching animals too closely and causing them to flush or flee, often times in cold temperatures or through deep snow. You can avoid disturbing wildlife in that way by using your binoculars or scope and telephoto camera lens.

Teach children to be respectful of wildlife and their need for space, too. And leave the dog at home, in the vehicle, or indoors if you're watching on your own property.

Some wild animals that winter in Washington are very opportunistic in their survival strategies. A well worn trail through the snow to a site where wildlife beds, roosts or dens will be readily used by predators, both wild and domestic. Food sources inadvertently left accessible -- like garbage, compost, pet food, or poorly placed bird feeders - may draw animals that prey upon winter concentrations of other species.

Feeding wildlife in winter may seem like a good idea to offset their energy deficit, but it often causes more problems and can

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become very costly. See WDFW's Winter Wildlife Feeding information for details.

A good way to watch wildlife in winter that is less apt to cause disturbance is to use specific sites that separate viewers from wildlife by motor vehicle routes, trails, boardwalks and blinds. These include:

**Whatcom Wildlife Area's Lake Terrell Unit**, ten miles northwest of Bellingham and five miles west of Ferndale in Whatcom County; wildlife viewing is available year-round on a fishing pier from where you can see trumpeter and tundra swans and bald eagles in winter; black-tailed deer are also viewable year-round.

**Skagit Wildlife Area's Johnson/Debay Swan Reserve**, northeast of Mount Vernon in Skagit County; provides a winter feeding and resting reserve for trumpeter and tundra swans, and other wildlife, with grass and corn planted for swans and ducks; the large numbers of wintering waterfowl also attract bald eagles and other raptors; beaver and river otters inhabit the sloughs year-round; public parking and access is provided as well as two parking/viewing areas for disabled users

**Skagit Land Trust's Hurn Field**, west of Sedro-Woolley in Skagit County; offers wintering area for elk, but also viewable waterfowl and winter birds; viewing area constructed by WDFW.

**Skagit Wildlife Area's Fir Island Farms Snow Goose Reserve**, on Fir Island Road, and adjacent to the Skagit Bay estuary in Skagit County; provides a winter-feeding and resting area for thousands of snow geese with fields of winter wheat grown for the birds; walk along the dike to scan for waterfowl and shorebirds, including wintering dunlin and numerous bald eagles.

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**Central Puget Sound urban areas:** Kent Ponds for waterfowl and raptors, Discovery Park for wintering passerines and bluff overlooks to see wintering seabirds on the sound, Edmonds waterfront/Carkeek Park/Quartermaster Harbor from Vashon or Maury Island/Seahurst Park/Des Moines Beach Park for beach/shoreline wintering seabird watching; Union Bay Natural Area (Center for Urban Horticulture) for winter waterfowl and passerines.

**Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge**, northeast of Olympia in Pierce County; thousands of ducks and geese through the winter, plus raptors and songbirds year-round; black-tailed deer, mink and coyotes are at the forest edge; one-mile trail provides access to many habitats and numerous observation decks and some new elevated walkways will be open in January.

**Olympic Peninsula areas:** Ocean Shores North Jetty and Damon Point shoreline trails in Grays Harbor County, and Willapa Bay, Long Beach Peninsula, and Leadbetter Point shoreline lines in Pacific County to view wintering seabirds

**Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge**, in Columbia River floodplain north of Vancouver in Clark County; hosts thousands of wintering waterfowl including tundra swans, Canada geese, cackling geese and many duck species; year-round see raptors, coyotes, river otter and herons; a 4.2-mile auto tour route is open daylight hours through winter; wintering tundra swans also viewable at Franz Lake on Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge and Mirror Pond at the foot of Crown Point in Oregon.

**Oak Creek Wildlife Area**, northwest of Yakima in Yakima County; winter elk feeding program (to keep animals off of adjacent private lands where they cause damage) has side benefit of easy and close viewing from high-fenced visitor parking lot off Hwy. 12; bighorn sheep also fed in some units;

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check recorded message at (509) 653-2390 for updates on feeding start-up and volunteer-led, elk-viewing tours (by reservation only through (509) 698-5106).

**Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge**, south of Toppenish in Yakima County; wintering waterfowl and raptors; wildlife observation and hiking are allowed year-round in the southeast portion of the main refuge from Highway 97 to refuge headquarters.

**Pineside Sno-Park Loop on Gifford Pinchot National Forest** in Klickitat County; dying trees from budworm outbreak in the 1990s are loaded with insects and attract Williamson's sapsucker; hairy, white-headed, three-toed, black-backed, and pileated woodpeckers; brown creepers, and other birds; birdwatch while cross-country skiing and snowshoeing the area.

**Conboy Lake National Wildlife Refuge** in northwest Klickitat County; wintering rough-legged hawks, northern shrikes, common redpolls; other winter viewable species include tundra and trumpeter swans; greater white-fronted goose; cinnamon teal; northern pintail; northern harrier.

**McNary National Wildlife Refuge**, near the confluence of the Snake and Columbia rivers southeast of Tri-Cities in Walla Walla County; some 100,000 Canada geese and mallards winter here, plus tundra swans and a variety of duck species; one-mile loop Burbank Slough Wildlife Trail and viewing blind available.

**Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge** in Spokane County, just southwest of Spokane, is a year-round home to many species of birds and mammals, including woodpeckers, nuthatches, crossbills, hawks, owls, coyotes, white-tailed and mule deer, elk, and moose; auto-tour route and some trails available.

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**Echo Ridge Nordic Ski Area** in Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, north of Chelan in Chelan County; snow buntings and other wintering birds; watch for cougar and bobcat tracks from 25-mile cross-country skiing trail loop around ridge tops with vistas of Lake Chelan and surrounding mountains. Sinlahekin Wildlife Area's Sinlahekin Unit south of Loomis in Okanogan County; year-round hawks, eagles, white-tailed deer and diversity of other wildlife species; watch wildlife from viewing blinds or via 11-mile nature trail traversible in winter when snow conditions exist on cross-county skis or snowshoes.

More details on some of these and other sites for winter wildlife viewing are available in the Audubon Great Washington State Birding Trail series of maps [http://wa.audubon.org/birds\\_GreatWABirdingTrail.html](http://wa.audubon.org/birds_GreatWABirdingTrail.html) and at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/viewing/> .