

PAWS Campus Update: April 5, 2011

Despite the prolonged rainy, chilly period we have been experiencing lately, the behavior of wildlife here on the CAS/WL campus has been a constant reminder that spring has arrived. Birds and mammals all over our little patch of habitat have been preparing to welcome the next generation.

I have encountered at least two pairs of American Robins onsite that were collecting nesting materials. The male in the photos below had a mate nearby that was collecting dried grass. She flew off to an unknown location with the nest-building materials while the male continued to forage. Female robins do all the work when it comes to building the nest, but the male will be chipping in to help with feedings as soon as the hatchlings arrive.



A pair of Northern Flickers are busy taking turns excavating a nest cavity in a snag behind the wildlife raptor cages. The images below show the male pausing to make sure the coast is clear before returning to his work.

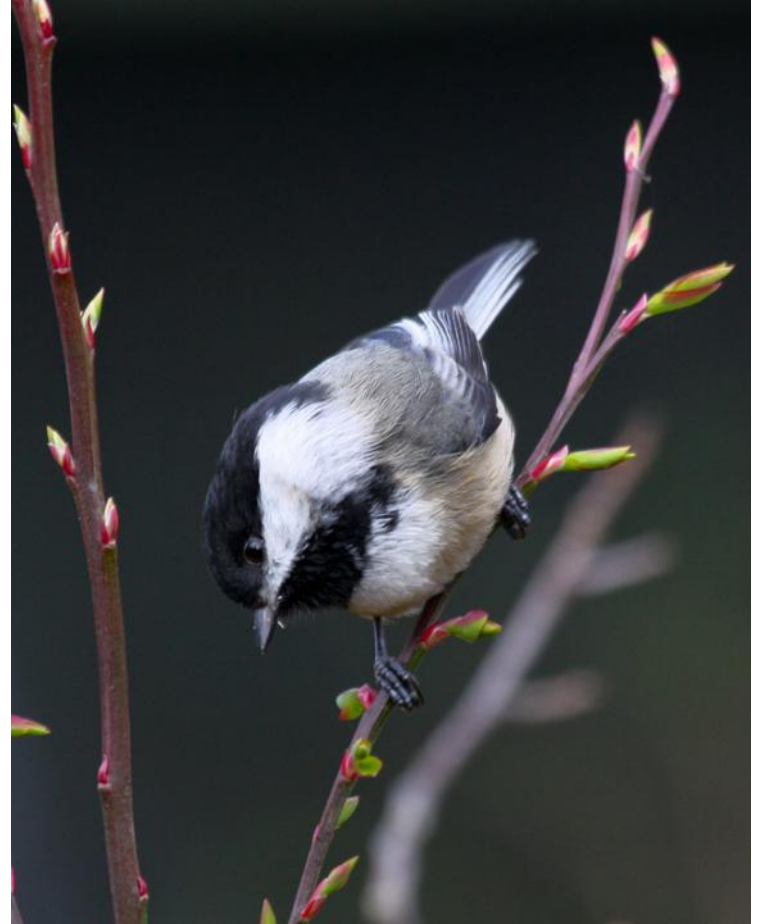


Another nest that is currently underway belongs to a group of Bushtits. I say “group” because in addition to the mated pair, Bushtit nests often include so called “helper birds.” The majority of these helpers are adult males that have failed to find a mate. They assist with nest building and feeding of the young. The Bushtit nest is coming together nicely not too far from the dog walking trail. The photo below is pretty bad, but you can see the outline of the pouch-like nest and a Bushtit near the right edge of the frame with nesting material in his beak.



← That's a Bushtit right there.

There are still a few birds in winter flocks flittering around campus, but you can tell they are switching into breeding mode. They seem a bit preoccupied and pay less attention to a person standing nearby pointing a camera at them. The Black-capped Chickadee in the following photos is a good example. He moved through with a flock on Saturday.



The chickadee was very busy looking high and low for any food he could find. He also became agitated when other chickadees came too close, a sign that he's starting to feel the breeding season shift toward territorial behavior.



I stayed very still when the chickadee was foraging nearby, but it was clear that he knew I was watching him. Every so often he would pause to take a closer look at me.



At one point, the chickadee perched in a very wren-like position on a vertical twig. It appears that he was looking at the camera in this shot, but he was actually inspecting the crooked twig in front of him.



When I took the photo of him inspecting the twig, the chickadee turned to look at me (below left) and then repositioned to a horizontal perch before taking an even closer look at me (below right).



Apparently unconcerned by my presence, the chickadee resumed foraging (below left). I took a few more shots and left him to his work.



As I walked past the wildlife center's deer pen last week, I spotted a Dark-eyed Junco standing on the top of the fence. He didn't see me at first (below left), but the sound of the camera shutter caught his attention (below right). After he looked at me, he disappeared into the deer pen.



Ruby-crowned Kinglets are still abundant on campus, but that will change in the weeks to come. Many of them will migrate north into Canada for the summer, while some will simply fly out to the Cascades to breed at higher elevations. None are known to nest in the Puget Sound lowlands. Still, many of them are starting to sing their mating songs in anticipation of the coming nesting season even while they continue feeding in winter flocks here on campus.



I usually only get one or two quick photos of a kinglet before the bird moves on but, much like the chickadee earlier in this update, The kinglet in the photos below seemed too preoccupied to pay much attention to me. It's a hectic time of year for these little birds.



Last but not least, I encountered the squirrel in the photo below as I was walking next to the wildlife Ekker cage complex. You can't tell very well in the photo, but she had an extremely large belly. I don't think this was from eating the abundant hazelnuts on the property either. I think that by the time you read this, there will be a dray (squirrel nest) on campus with a newborn litter of squirrel kits. :o)

