

March 2010



# Heron Habitat Helpers' HERALD

P.O. Box 99815, Seattle, WA 98139-0815

## Find Out What is Happening in Kiwanis Ravine

**Annual Meeting • Saturday, March 6**  
**Discovery Park Visitor's Center • 10:00 a.m.**



PHOTO BY MIKE MARSH

**J**oin Heron Habitat Helpers at our annual meeting on March 6th to find out how Kiwanis Ravine is being helped by your Pro Parks Levy vote. We have some really exciting news to report!

We will discuss HHH 2009 accomplishments and goals for 2010 as well as vote our new board into office. And, of course, we will discuss the herons and what they have been up to this past year.

After our discussion and eating home made goodies, we will take a walking tour of the ravine at 11:30 and hope to catch a glimpse of a Great Blue Heron or two returning to build this year's nest. Please join us, no RSVP necessary.

Questions? Call Kathy Smith  
at 206 282-3429

# 'Wildlife Sanctuary' Status Inches Forward

By Donna Kostka

**O**n December 31, 2009, HHH was notified that staffer Barb DeCaro of the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation (SDPR) was recommending approval of HHH's nomination of Kiwanis Ravine for "wildlife sanctuary" status. Her recommendation was sent to Superintendent Tim Gallagher. HHH is still waiting for his action.

Why? For some time, the HHH board has been trying to get more recognition of and protection for the Kiwanis Ravine Great Blue Heron colony. So, the board participated in the development of a new policy by SDPR that would allow a park or a part of a park to be nominated and approved for wildlife sanctuary status.

The new policy, approved in 2008, says that wildlife sanctuary status can be given if there is an endangered or threatened species there as identified by the federal Endangered Species Act or a "local population of native species whose continued existence in the state and their sensitivity to habitat alteration is of concern to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife."

The Kiwanis Ravine Great Blue Heron colony meets the state requirement under its "Criterion 2, Vulnerable Aggregations." The state's regulations state: "Vulnerable aggregations include species or groups of animals susceptible to significant population declines, within a specific area or statewide, by virtue of their inclination to aggregate." The Kiwanis colony had more than 80 nests last summer.

Currently, the chief protection for the colony is the inaccessibility of ravine lands. Kiwanis Ravine is classified like any other Seattle park, with access generally allowed during daylight hours. So, if someone wanted to go into the ravine

during nesting season, officially there is no way Parks could stop that person. Unexpected noises under the trees could frighten away parent birds, leaving eggs or chicks vulnerable to predation. Parent birds are accustomed to sounds of trains going by and lawn mowers being run, but unexpected noises from people under their trees (or unexpected noises nearby) could cause the loss of eggs or chicks.

Wildlife Sanctuary status could mean SDPR could put up temporary barriers to ravine access in the park or conduct educational activities about the herons. SDPR would be responsible for developing a management plan for the herons, and the plan would be expected to be subject to public review. Even though the HHH board doesn't know for sure what will be in the plan, it generally expects SDPR will be more active in protecting the Kiwanis Ravine Great Blue Herons.

So, stay tuned. Subsequent editions will keep you up to date with what's happening. And if you would like to volunteer to assist with this effort, please send your name and contact information to: [info@heronhelpers.org](mailto:info@heronhelpers.org)

## heroncams

Thanks to the folks from Olympia Systems, Canopy Conservation, and WDFW, the heroncams were cleaned and slightly readjusted. Looks like we're in good shape for the 2010 heron season and looking forward to continued good views and sound from a sampling of the nests.

To see the herons on your computer, go to [www.heronhelpers.org](http://www.heronhelpers.org) and follow the prompts.

By Pam Cahn, Heron Monitor

## In The Shade Of The Ravine

By Duff Badgley

The pileated woodpecker looked right at me while I ate breakfast inside our apartment. It perched on the rail of our deck overlooking Kiwanis Ravine. Its flame red crest outlined boldly against the grey winter trees just a few feet beyond it. It looked enormous and improbable, a gaudy visitor from another world.



It shifted gaze to our suet feeder directly over its head. The pileated hunkered low to the rail. It thrust its head toward the feeder. It flared its wings in false flight. It looked back to me as if asking for the courage to fly vertically up to the feeder.

I stopped eating my morning oatmeal. The big bird nervously swiped its bill on the deck rail. It looked up at the suet feeder again. With a sudden flash of black and white wings, it flew to the nearest tree in the ravine — a big-leafed maple about ten feet away. It clung there for a moment near a crotch of the trunk and a branch. It slammed its bill into the tree. I'm profoundly hard of hearing so I could hear no noise. But I saw wood bits fly. More slamming, more wood bits. The red crest slashed the air, then stopped.

The pileated eyed the suet feeder. A crowd — maybe eight or ten — of bushtits swarmed its metal frame. A bushtit flew off. Its place on the suet feeder was immediately occupied by a new bushtit. The small brown birds resembled a writhing ball, moving and pecking the food. The pileated flew. Its harsh cry filled the ravine. It sounded annoyed. The big woodpecker lit on the branch of an 80-foot alder. The black and white and red bird looked like a comical apparition on the smooth gray bark. Its shrill calling continued. The sound seemed to bounce off our apartment building, bound into the trees, and come back to me. It was hugely loud, much louder than passing buses and trucks on West Government Way. The call kept up. It was primitive and vital and,

maybe, angry. I felt privileged to be able to hear it — both because my hearing loss keeps me from hearing most bird sounds and because the pileated woodpecker sounded like the deep forest, a sound I fancied most humans don't get to hear.

I watched the pileated through my field glasses. It made no movement as it called, unlike the crows who throw their bodies into their caws, thrusting their heads, elongating their bodies in a display of what seems like warning and dominance. More big sounds from the pileated whose body remained motionless. Its red crest looked utterly impossible through my binoculars, as if it had been stitched on at the last minute.

The pileated flew again, this time to the ravine tree nearest the suet feeder. Its calling stopped. The ravine quieted as much as it can with midday traffic noise so close on West Government Way.

Then the pileated suddenly was flapping and landing awkwardly on the suet feeder. The metal feeder spun on its chain like a top. The pileated turned fast with it, riding the feeder like an oversized kid crowding onto a small child's hobby-horse. It cocked its great tail against the bottom. It craned its long neck around the top. How in the world would it feed?

The feeder stopped spinning. The pileated nimbly worked its way down. It hung from its toes. Its black and white body suspended clear from the bottom of the feeder. The pileated looked at me in our living room. Its red crest flashed. Its enormous bill slammed into the suet again and again. Suet bits flew. The pileated tilted its head back and swallowed a big suet chunk.

As suddenly as it came, the pileated was gone in a flash of black and white topped by the gaudy red crest. It disappeared down the length of the ravine, following the course of Wolfe Creek toward the northern end of the ravine where our true bird giants nest — our great blue herons. The dark forest hid our largest woodpecker until next feeding time.

# What is the 2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy and what does it mean for Kiwanis Ravine?

Community groups and citizens helped pass the new 2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy with the support of 59% of Seattle voters. This is an exciting time for Seattle Parks and Recreation and good news for Kiwanis Ravine. The levy lifts a lid on property taxes that was submitted to Seattle voters on November 4, 2008. The levy will take in \$146 million. It will last for six years, from 2009 through 2014. The levy will support Green spaces (open spaces and greenbelts, and other open areas); neighborhood parks (existing parks, new parks identified in neighborhood plans, new parks identified in the Seattle's Parks and Recreation 2006 Development Plan, boulevards, and other properties purchased by the City for open-space and recreational purposes); and play-fields (existing or new athletic fields, open play spaces, and similar areas, including spectator enhancements such as seating). A 16-member Citizen Oversight Committee is actively reviewing expenditures, advising on allocations for upcoming budget years, making recommendations on Opportunity Fund expenditures, and performing other duties. Members have staggered terms, and have been appointed by the Mayor (eight members) and City Council (eight members) and are representing the community at large geographically. You can see a map of all the supported projects in the city by following the web link, <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/levy/default.htm>

Kiwanis Ravine has been allocated \$600,000 from levy funds to continue the ecosystem restoration that HHH has led for the last eight years. The HHH Restoration Committee met early in 2009 with Parks, EarthCorps and Green Seattle Partnership representatives to outline a restoration plan. Brad Wakeman, Restoration Chair, led a series of planning sessions which resulted in a prioritized list of areas to be restored. Most of the early restoration work will be focused on linking

the patchwork of restored areas. Although HHH will continue to work with Parks on this effort we will no longer be leading the restoration efforts. This responsibility has been handed off to Parks who started work in November of 2009. HHH will be participating in the volunteer work parties, educating and giving tours to show off the heronry in the ravine. We will also continue to maintain and monitor restoration sites along the shoulders of the ravine.

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You may have noticed some large work parties in the past few months, at the north end of the ravine, along Gilman Ave West, in the area we call the "Kiwanis Wildlife Corridor". We began restoration about five years ago in the corridor, clearing



invasive plant species, such as blackberry and knotweed, followed by planting of native species to better support

urban wildlife. An access path was created to aid with the restoration and has been used by many neighbors as a walking trail between the neighborhood accessed by 36th Ave West and the Ballard Locks. EarthCorps, who has done much of the restoration in the central part of the ravine, has been leading these work parties. Park contractors have also begun planting more trees in the central part of the ravine. You will see more activity over the next six years. HHH is always looking for new volunteers. For more information on how you can help: <http://www.heronhelpers.org>

*By KC Dietz*

# Martin Luther King Day of Service Work Party at Kiwanis Wildlife Corridor – hosted by Earthcorps and HHH

By KC Dietz

Over 55 volunteers, primarily from the University of Washington, gathered at the Kiwanis Wildlife Corridor to continue the work of removing invasive blackberry, planting trees and setting the stage for future native plantings. Earthcorps (EC) provided the much appreciated on site leadership & management to organize the work for the many volunteers. HHH's membership committee provided treats, information about our organization and Seattle's official bird, the Great Blue Heron.

Thanks to Mary Beth Dols and Kathy Smith for leading volunteers on a short tour to the heronry, behind the Atkin's home. From that vantage point they could see, up close and personal, the large colony of nests. This gift of nature, is one of the reasons we are so dedicated to restoring the ravine ecosystem. Thanks to Christine and Perry Atkins for allowing the public to view the heronry from their back yard. Their generosity and support is overwhelming.

The MLK work party was one of many scheduled 'large' work parties for 2010. Upcoming work parties fall during Earth Week, April 17, and one on June 5th. We hope that you can take the time to attend a work party or pass the word along.

Get more details and sign up online by following the link:  
<http://www.earthcorps.org/volunteer.php>



## MISSION

To help Seattle enjoy, learn about, and protect its largest nesting colony of Great Blue Herons in Magnolia's Kiwanis Ravine Park.

## WEB

[www.heronhelpers.org](http://www.heronhelpers.org)

## EMAIL

[info@heronhelpers.org](mailto:info@heronhelpers.org)

## PHONE

(206) 284-6489

## TO VOLUNTEER

[volunteer@heronhelpers.org](mailto:volunteer@heronhelpers.org)

## TO BECOME A MEMBER

Send your check for \$10/year (January-December) along with your name, e-mail, phone number, postal mailing address, and how you'd like to help to:

Heron Habitat Helpers  
PO Box 99815  
Seattle, WA 98139-0815

Donations are welcome!