

September 2013

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



Heron Habitat Helpers' HERALD

Herons Move from Kiwanis Ravine

Pam Cahn, Heron Monitor

The 2013 Great Blue Heron season began like it has for the past several years, with the first herons returning to the nests in Commodore Park by mid-February and to the main colony in Kiwanis Ravine by the end of February. In early May, there were 6 active nests in Commodore Park and over 90 active nests in Kiwanis Ravine. By May 8th, the main colony in Kiwanis Ravine was empty of all herons. By the end of May, the Commodore Park group had grown from 6 to over 60 nests. What happened and why?

I heard the first hatched young on April 28. Eagle disturbances continued and by May 4 the herons completely left at least 50 nests. Young were still heard in some of the remaining nests. By May 8, all the nests in Kiwanis Ravine were empty.

Meanwhile at Commodore Park, the first young hatched the third week in April. There was an influx of herons in early May, increasing from 6 to around 38 nests by May 8 and over 60 nests by the end of May. The intensely busy nest-building activity in the alders on the south side of the ship canal got the attention of the media and many Ballard Locks visitors. Commodore Park was mostly left undisturbed by eagles. The newly arrived herons quickly laid eggs and began incubating while still working on their nests. Young from the first group of nests at Commodore Park began to fledge in late June. The first young from the late arrivals hatched the second week in June and began fledging two months later in August.

We don't know where the rest of the herons from Kiwanis Ravine went. What I know is that both an adult and immature Bald Eagle had been observed in the Kiwanis Ravine heron colony at various times from March into May. (Note: Bald Eagles reach maturity with white head and tail at 4-6 years.) All visual observations of an eagle depredating a nest were of an immature eagle. I was only able to confirm one eagle during each disturbance. An immature eagle was seen for a couple days after May 8th over Commodore Park, but not thereafter. Perhaps the immature eagle moved on, as the disturbances stopped by mid-May.

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What follows is a brief overview of what I observed, from the heroncam and from ground observation points. An immature eagle ate eggs on several nests beginning in late March. More eggs were laid on those nests. The colony continued to grow as more herons arrived and occupied old nests or built new ones. Unlike past years when eagle incursions abated during incubation, this year the disturbances continued throughout most of April.

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Herons Move from Kiwanis Ravine

Will the herons return next year? We don't know. There are examples of herons returning the following year and examples where they don't. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Management Guidelines recommend protecting heron colonies for 10 years after herons have ceased using a colony site since they have been known to reoccupy sites that many years later.

Eagle attacks on heron colonies are increasing as the number of eagles rebound from the devastating effects of past use of DDT. The eagle-heron relationship is dynamic and herons may respond by changing nest locations – sometimes moving to larger colonies and sometimes forming new, smaller groups. Finding these new locations in order to monitor their status can be a challenge,



Ingrid Taylor

especially when they choose conifers or dense deciduous locations. Please report sightings of heron nests to info@heronhelpers.org. Stay tuned for the continuing heron dynamic in Magnolia.

Project HeronWatch Update

By Barbara Selemon

Due to the eagle predation of the heron colony in Kiwanis Ravine, Project HeronWatch was placed on hold by the Department of Neighborhoods for several weeks. The contract has been reworked and HHH is awaiting the final agreement from DON for a 3-month extension on the project to December 31, 2013.

A public survey to gather input from the community was distributed mid-August and will be live on the website until September 15th. We invite you to take the survey if you have not already done so.

To take the survey, go to:
http://www.heronhelpers.org/heronwatch_survey.html

The interpretive team of Partners in Design will be working on design planning and schematic design to accompany viewing stations at the

Locks and Discovery Park this fall, leading up to a public meeting to be scheduled in December. HHH is seeking to hire a new webcam contractor for the project, which will focus on the colony residing in Commodore Park. Webcam transmission to the visitor's centers at the Locks and Discovery Park will be studied to determine the feasibility, the needs and the costs involved in making this happen.

A stakeholders' meeting consisting of members from HHH, Seattle Parks, Army Corps of Engineers, NFS, WDFW and DON along with invited members from Magnolia and Ballard will take place later this fall but is yet TBD.

I look forward to seeing Project HeronWatch back on track and helping to improve viewing of the Great Blue Heron.

Great Blue Heron Photo Walk

By Deborah Andrews Jacobsen

Heron Habitat Helpers (HHH) sponsored a successful Great Blue Heron Photo Walk at Lake Washington's Union Bay Natural Area (UBNA) on Saturday morning, August 17.

With cameras and binoculars ready, the group meandered along UBNA's quiet trails in search of herons that use the expansive area to forage for food.

Prabhu Kannan, HHH board member and photographer, shared tips and techniques to enhance bird and nature photography skills. Pam Cahn, HHH heron monitor and member, shared her vast knowledge of herons and other birds. Other viewing and photo opportunities included several species of birds as well as ponds, meadows, cattails, and views of Lake Washington.

We're looking forward to hosting other events in the future. If there are events you would enjoy as a participant (or an organizer), we're open to your suggestions. Email info@heronhelpers.org



Jim Hanson



Prabhu Kannan



Kathleen Atkins



Kathleen Atkins



Prabhu Kannan

Volunteers Work to Restore Kiwanis Ravine

By Mike Marsh

Heron Habitat Helpers has been working to restore Kiwanis Ravine since 2002, when a vigorous group of local residents got together and began turning a former electrical substation at 36th Avenue and Ohman Place into a forest, which we call the Overlook.

The work that first year involved clearing a thick blackberry tangle, removing other invasives such as English Ivy and holly, laying cardboard and covering it with wood chip mulch, and laying out a loop trail with small logs for borders. It was fun and the results looked good. The winter rains helped to soften and break down the mulch so that participants in work parties were able to plant trees and shrubs into it the next spring. Again, the results were clearly visible: the start of a native forest, and people were satisfied with what they had done.

We ordered and planted different varieties of native ground covers, wildflowers, salal, and sword ferns. The work force was still composed largely of local residents who would return to pull weeds. Among these were amazing members who would work to attract volunteers, who would organize refreshments, and set up an attractive venue, canopy, etc., to make volunteers feel especially welcome. We kept track of volunteers and invited them back.

In the next two or three years we began work in two other relatively level areas of the Ravine that were suitable for volunteers to work in: the Wildlife Corridor and the Stevens property. These were larger areas, and perhaps we did not muster enough workers to completely eliminate invasive vegetation at first. However, plantings of native shrubs and trees were successful. In time, most of the original site preparation and planting of natives was accomplished, but this urban environment is full of the seeds of invasive plants, and they continued to return.

Monthly work parties are still held, but our most active organizing members have found other interests, and the core cadre of volunteers has

dwindled. Consequently, the monthly Second Saturday Work Parties which HHH has led in Kiwanis Ravine for the past two years have not been well attended. One result is that invasives return in numbers that inhibit the establishment and growth of native forest plants that we have installed. All committee members recognize the necessity of continuing to control invasives in the Ravine.



Restoration Committee members are now considering how they would like to schedule work parties. Several options are available. The Committee members who have been leading Second Saturday work parties are willing to continue doing that, and two or three large annual events sponsored by United Way of King County and Seattle Works will continue to be held in fall, winter and spring. However, more workers are needed in the summer months of peak weed growth.

Restoration Committee members are in agreement that one or more members are needed who will willingly adopt the task of recruiting volunteers and taking needed steps to make a work party be a real party, with refreshments and informative talks about why we are doing this. Many possibly one-time volunteers would be recruited for large events, but we believe it's also essential to have a number of key returning volunteers who will "adopt" a smaller segment of the Memorial Preserve for their own.

Are you Guilty?

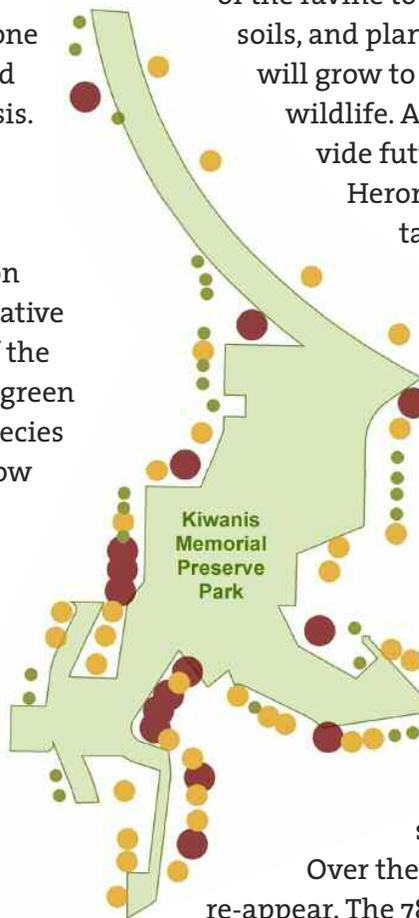
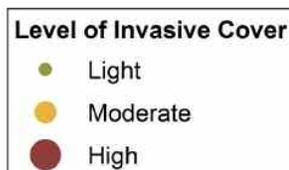
By Donna Kostka, HHH Co-Founder

Are you guilty? Are you one of the culprits? Is your property one of those around Kiwanis Ravine sending aliens into the park?

The EarthCorps publication, “State of Kiwanis Ravine,” March 2012 includes an analysis of 78 parcels around the ravine. A trained EarthCorps technician walked the boundary of Kiwanis Memorial Preserve Park and looked into those 78 parcels in the Fall of 2011. He found 75 of the 78 parcels (96%) had at least one species of non-native plants considered to be invasive in the EarthCorps analysis. The 78 properties were 75 private residences and 3 public rights of way.

Where are these invasives? The map on page 30 of the report shows the cumulative coverage around the ravine for nine of the 29 invasive species found there. Small green dots show a “light” level of invasive species present. Medium sized orange dots show a “moderate” level of invasive species. Large red dots show a “high” level of invasive species. The map is published here with the approval of EarthCorps.

The nine invasive species found around the ravine include: English ivy, blackberry, bindweed, cherry laurel, English holly, knotweed, nightshade, garlic mustard, and yellow archangel. These are listed in order of percent cover. The largest percent cover was English ivy at 67% and the smallest was yellow archangel at 5%.



Why are invasive species in private yards outside the park a threat inside the park? They are a threat because their roots, seeds, or branches easily get transferred inside the park where they can proliferate. The 1998 Parks and Green Spaces Levy passed by the voters of Seattle included a \$600,000 line item for restoration of Kiwanis Ravine. Those monies have provided six years of work by trained contractors on the steep slopes of the ravine to remove invasives, stabilize loose soils, and plant native plants. The native plants will grow to provide food and shelter for wildlife. And some trees may grow to provide future nest sites for the Great Blue Heron. I feel that \$600,000 of public tax money is somewhat “wasted” if invasives are allowed to crawl back into the ravine.

What can you do? Take a look around your property and see if invasive species are present. If you don’t know what they look like, go to: www.kingcounty.gov/environment/animalsAnd-Plants/noxious-weeds.aspx.

Then if you have invasive species, go to work. Dig them up. Over the coming years, don’t let them re-appear. The 78 properties around the ravine are the last bastions of protection to land within the park. Because the park is such a narrow corridor following a creek, it has many feet of boundary that are subject to invasion. Do your part. Fight those invasive species. You’ll be part of our movement in spirit – a true heron helper.

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Seattle Audubon Inventories Street Trees

By Donna Kostka, HHH Co-Founder

Seattle Audubon has a new project underway. It has signed a partnership with the Seattle Department of Transportation to update SDOT's old street tree map. The old map showed the location and species and size of every street tree in Seattle. However, SDOT's old map is very, very old.

So, Seattle Audubon has organized a new "Canopy Connections" project to recruit volunteers. This new mapping project will enable volunteers to take as little as one block at a time or as many blocks as they want. Then they'll get the training and the materials to complete the inventory of the selected block or blocks.

What is a street tree? This is a tree growing in the public right-of-way, between the public sidewalk and the public street.

HHH thinks this is a very cool project and encourages our members and friends to take part. HHH especially would like to see the blocks around Kiwanis Ravine, Commodore Park, and Discovery Park inventoried.

Interested? Contact: Marina Skumanich
marinas@seattleaudubon.org 206.523.8243, x15

September will be the beta test of the huge database for the project.

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Are you Guilty?

What if you don't live next to Kiwanis Ravine?

If you don't live next door to Kiwanis Memorial Preserve Park, then you can still do your part. Fight those invasive species. Keep them out of your yard. If they are in your yard, then birds can eat the fruit and/or berries. When the birds defecate, the seeds get spread over a wide section of land along with fertilizer to help those seeds grow. Or maybe you live in an apartment or a condo. You can join work parties to help Kiwanis and/or other parks keep out invasive species.

Seattle has a unique group called the Green Seattle Partnership (GSP) that is a partnership of Seattle Parks with non-profits and Friends of Parks groups like HHH. It works to remove invasives from Seattle Parks. A few years ago you might have noticed ivy draped from the highest trees. GSP is making progress. But it needs a lot of help. Add your shoulder to this important task.

Do you want to read the whole Earthcorps report?

Then, go to HHH's website
www.heronhelpers.org/OtherDocs/StateOfKiwanisRavine2012.pdf



Is your group looking for a fun way to give back the community and the environment?

HHH organizes and hosts work parties at the Kiwanis Ravine in the Magnolia neighborhood.

Your work will help restore Seattle's first Wildlife Sanctuary.

If interested, or for more information, please contact
Volunteer@heronhelpers.org

FROM THE PRESIDENT

HHH Priority: the Great Blue Heron

By Sue Gillespie

Summer 2013 was a tumultuous time for HHH and the herons in Kiwanis ravine. As reported by heron monitor Pam Cahn, eagle incursions repeatedly disrupted the nesting birds. We watched with growing concern along with full acceptance that nature's ways don't always deliver the outcomes we want. Everyone at HHH was thrilled to see many of the displaced Kiwanis herons re-nest in Commodore Park. It was inspiring to observe first-hand the resilience of this beautiful bird.

Abandonment of Kiwanis ravine was a watershed moment for HHH. It raised a question we've not had to address in our 12-year history: without herons, what is our *raison d'être* – our reason for existence? What if herons don't return to the ravine or Commodore in 2014? The board has grappled with this issue over the last few months.

Ultimately, we have agreed that our top priority is protecting and advocating for the great blue heron – in Kiwanis ravine or elsewhere across the Puget Sound region. Along with Seattle,

there are viable heron colonies in Redmond, Kenmore, Kent, Bellevue and other areas. Our experience and knowledge can be put to good use supporting the ongoing health of the heronries and of the GBH.



Photo of Sue by Deborah Jacobsen

We're hopeful the herons will return to Kiwanis ravine in 2014. Our restoration efforts will continue regardless. There has been a significant investment in supporting habitat in Kiwanis ravine, and we're committed to maintaining the ravine's status as a Seattle wildlife sanctuary.

Please share your thoughts and opinions regarding how HHH might continue to support the great blue heron by emailing me at president@heronhelpers.org

Thank you!

ADDITIONAL IMAGES FROM OUR GREAT BLUE HERON PHOTO WALK



Prabhu Kannan



Jim Hanson

Join a community that shares your passion for herons!

As a member of HHH you're helping to support habitat restoration, education and acting as an advocate for the herons at Kiwanis Ravine.



Prabhu Kannan

Join, renew or donate today!

HHH is an all-volunteer group. By joining and supporting Heron Habitat Helpers, you enable us to directly support conservation initiatives, educational programs and outreach efforts. Every membership and donation – regardless of size – truly makes a difference!

Donate online (under membership) at www.heronhelpers.org or by mail:
Heron Habitat Helpers, PO Box 99815, Seattle, WA 98139-0815

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP \$15

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NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

\$15 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP PER FAMILY _____

Donation \$10 \$25 \$50 \$75 _____

TOTAL _____

E-MAIL _____

WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER? YES check field of interest(s) NO

conservation programs fundraising strategic planning public relations habitat restoration

HHH is an IRS 501(c)(3) organization under the umbrella of the Associated Recreational Council (ARC). Membership and donations are 100% tax deductible.