

Birds of Ken Lake

Olympia, Washington



Female Hooded Merganser with Hooded Merganser and Wood Duck chicks minutes after fledging from a duck box on Ken Lake. Photograph by Doug Osborn, May 2020.

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Contents

Introduction	3
About Ken Lake	3
Habitats	4
Help Our Birds	5
Terms Used in the Guide	5
Bird List in Taxonomical Order	6
Resources.....	17
Bird List in Alphabetical Order	18

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Introduction

In recent years, bird watching has become a popular activity across the county. Whether you feed and watch birds in your backyard, or seek out birds as a more in-depth endeavor; there is no doubt birds and bird watching can be fun, amusing at times, and addictive!

Our Ken Lake neighborhood is not only a great place for people but many birds also find it an attractive place to live, spend the summer or winter, or pass through on fall and spring migrations. With the lake, many trees, bird friendly yards, and diverse surrounding forests, it is no wonder that the Ken Lake neighborhood is appealing to people and birds alike.

Birds of Ken Lake updates and expands on *Ken Lake Birdlife* a pamphlet produced in 1983 by Bob Morse and Marcheta Bean. The purpose of this new guide is to list the 123 bird species that have been documented in the area, the times of year they can be seen, and the habitat in which they can be found. A brief narrative for some of the common and resident birds is also included. We hope this guide is useful for those wanting to know more about the birds in our neighborhood.

The guide is not intended as a field guide; there are many field guides and on-line resources that can help with identification. The local Wild Birds Unlimited store has a great collection of bird guides. For a checklist of birds seen in Washington State or birds of the Thurston County area contact Black Hills Audubon Society. Seattle Audubon Society's Birdweb.org is also a very helpful resource for identifying local birds. A list of these, and other great resources, is provided at the end of this guide.

About Ken Lake

Ken Lake is a 25-acre lake located in the western part of Olympia, Washington. The Lake was originally named Simmons Lake and is listed as such on some maps. Today, the Ken Lake community controls access points to the private lake and only non-motorized boats are allowed.

The lake is situated at 140 feet above sea level. Natural rainfall and stormwater from surrounding hills recharge it. The main outlet on the south end flows into Percival Creek and subsequently into Capital Lake and Budd Inlet. The lake is shallow with an abundance of plants growing beneath the surface.

The lake has several marshy patches along the shoreline, some with small stands of cattails. These areas provide important cover and nesting places for birds. There are two community beaches with associated parks. Most of the lakeside lots have been developed; many have pea gravel beaches and some have docks.

The Ken Lake Neighborhood or Lakemoor Community includes 160 acres and 291 privately owned lots located within Olympia City limits. The topography of the community is relatively flat except some lots southwest of the lake are elevated as the land rises to meet the Black Hills.

Many of the second growth evergreen trees have been left standing. However, climate change is having a dramatic effect on Northwest forests including native trees in our community. Root rot, high summer temperatures, and drought are stressing and killing

trees at a rapid rate. The community owns 22 acres of Urban Forest that borders Highway 101 to the north. The Black Hills border the community to the southwest and the City of Olympia's Kaiser Woods is a 70 acre park directly to the west of our community. These forested areas are a mix of mature conifer and deciduous trees with an understory of native plants and shrubs.

The climate for the community is cool, temperate, and rainy in winter with warm, dry summers. Annual precipitation varies between 38 and 67 inches with most of the rainfall during October through April.

Habitats

For the purpose of this guide, habitats of the Ken Lake are defined as follows:

Fresh Water Habitat (FW) – Ken Lake itself, adjacent beaches, shoreline, and marshy areas are included in this habitat. Birds use all areas of the lake including deep and shallow water and the air above the lake.

Mixed Forest Habitat (MF) – This complex and important area for birds encompasses the forest in and surrounding our community. The dominant conifer trees include Douglas fir, Grand fir, Western red cedar, and Western hemlock. The deciduous trees include big leaf maple, Pacific dogwood, red alder, and cascara. The mixed forest also has a mid-story of shrubs including beaked hazelnut, serviceberry, oso berry, evergreen huckleberry, salmonberry, and red elderberry. There are numerous ground level plants such as sword and bracken ferns, salal, and Oregon grape. Mosses, lichens, liverworts, and licorice ferns are abundant throughout the forest often growing on tree and shrub trunks. There are also seasonal or ephemeral wetland areas in the forest that support more water tolerant plants. All of these forest elements provide food resources, shelter, and nesting areas for birds. Birds use all levels in the forest from the ground to the canopy.

Residential Landscape (RL) – All of the areas around the houses are included in residential landscape. Many houses have large conifer and deciduous trees on the property, a variety of shrubs both native and ornamental, flowering plants of all kinds, pollinator plants, vegetable gardens, and open space such as lawns. Many residents plant and garden in a manner friendly to birds. They have bird feeders and water sources that attract birds.

Park Landscape (PL) – The Ken Lake community has four parks, two with lake access and two off the lake. Each is designated for certain types of recreation such as “the ball park”. As a habitat type in the community, the Park Landscapes are important. They provide large open spaces that are surrounded by an edge of ferns, shrubs and trees. Birds frequent edge areas and use them for cover, food, and nesting. Some birds forage in the open spaces.

Help Our Birds!

Everyone can do their part to help protect birds and the habitats they depend on. Keep cats indoors if you can. But if you can't, attach a bell to its collar. Additionally, there are ways to design outdoor spaces for your cat that minimizes bird predation. Plant bird friendly plants that flower and produce fruit and minimize the use of chemicals. Provide water sources attractive to birds such as water drips, birdbaths, and flowing water. Put deterrents on windows to prevent birds from flying into windows. Prevent and clean up any oil spills. Share your interest and enthusiasm for birds and our natural world with neighbors and others.

Terms Used in the Guide

The following terms are used to describe the relative abundance of each species and the likelihood of finding it in a particular season.

Common – found in appropriate habitat at the right time of year.

Uncommon – can sometimes be found in appropriate habitat at the right time of the year.

Rare – a bird that will not be seen each year but has been seen at least once in the area.

Resident – a bird that resides in the area during part or all of the year.

Migrant – a bird that is seen during the spring or fall migration.

Visitor – a bird that is seen for relatively short periods of time.

In addition, the following indicate habitat types where birds are most likely found.

Flyover – most likely seen flying over the neighborhood

FW – Found in freshwater habitat

MF – Found in mixed forest habitat

RL – Found in residential landscape

PL – Found in park landscape

Bird List in Taxonomical Order

Snow Goose (Flyover)

Rare. An immature Snow Goose was seen with a flock of Canada Geese in April 1982. Another was sighted in August 1982.

Greater White-fronted Goose (Flyover)

Rare. One White-fronted Goose was sighted in the winter of 1979. A flock of 200 flew over on April 15, 2020.

Cackling Goose (Flyover)

Uncommon winter to spring migrant. Flock of 112 flew over neighborhood April 15, 2020.

Canada Goose (FW, RL, PL)

Common visitor and some years, a winter resident on the lake. This large brown goose has a white chin strap. They are very loud and can be aggressive. Most Canada Geese are migratory and leave our area in the spring and summer. But a few geese decide not to migrate and end up nesting and raising young in our area during the summer. If too many geese do this, then it becomes a problem for both humans and the parks and lakes where they are living. An overpopulation of geese on Ken Lake in the early 1990s led to their removal with the help of State officials. For this reason, feeding geese is discouraged.

Wood Duck (FW, RL)

Common winter resident with some breeding in nest boxes. Both males and females are very easy to identify with the male being one of the most ornate of all the ducks. The female has a lovely white teardrop shaped eye ring. Like all ducks, the males and females look completely different. Wood ducks are dabbling ducks which means they don't dive. They get their food by "dabbling," that is they tip the tail up and extend their head down to reach food below the surface of the water. Wood Ducks also come into yards and find food in the grass and around bird feeders.

Upwards of 40 Wood Ducks can be seen during the winter and in 2022, 59 Wood Ducks took refuge on the partly frozen lake during a winter storm. Wood Ducks are cavity nesters and many wood duck boxes have been put up around the lake by Ken Lake residents. Each year, there is at least one successful nest box which produces 12-15 chicks. The increase in the number of Wood Ducks in Ken Lake is a good example of what we can do to help the birds. In 2007, there were only 1 or 2 Wood Ducks that frequented the lake. Thanks to the active feeding of these ducks and the placement of nest boxes by our neighbors, we now have 30 to 40 Wood Ducks that regularly come from Black Lake Meadows to feed each day.

Northern Shoveler (FW)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Gadwall (FW)

Rare winter visitor. One seen March 21, 1999.

American Wigeon (FW)

Uncommon fall and winter visitor.

Mallard (FW, RL)

Common resident that nests along the shores of Ken Lake. Two broods a year for a hen is not uncommon. In the fall, the number of Mallards increases significantly as migrants head south. In winter it is common to see 20-50 on the lake. Mallards are dabbling ducks and eat plants, fish, and other things on or near the surface of the water. Ken Laker's have seen females and their chicks walking through yards to get to the lake. It is not uncommon to see a brood or two on the lake during spring and summer. They will also come into yards to find things to eat.

Northern Pintail (FW)

Rare fall and winter visitor.

Green-winged Teal (FW)

Rare fall visitor. One seen on October 19, 1981.

Canvasback (FW)

Rare winter visitor. Four seen on March 14, 2020.

Redhead (FW)

Rare winter visitor.

Ring-necked Duck (FW)

Common fall and winter visitor. Flocks of 80 to 100 forage in the lake mostly from November through April. In spite of their name it is very hard to see the reddish ring around its neck. What is more obvious is the white ring around its bill. These ducks are divers. They find food such as snails on the lake bottom. They are obviously finding plenty to eat! Sometimes they are spread out all over the lake in pairs or small groups. Sometimes they all swim together in tight group, moving and diving around the lake. They are entertaining to watch!

Greater Scaup (FW)

Rare winter visitor.

Lesser Scaup (FW)

Uncommon winter visitor. Often associated with the Ring-necked Duck flock.

Bufflehead (FW)

Uncommon fall and winter visitor.

Common Goldeneye (FW)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Barrow's Goldeneye (FW)

Rare winter visitor. Two seen on February 1, 2021.

Hooded Merganser (FW)

A common winter resident that's known to breed on Ken Lake. Female Hooded Mergansers will sometimes lay eggs in a Wood Duck box. A mixed brood of Wood Ducks and Hooded Merganser chicks dropped out of a nest box and were led away by a hen Hooded Merganser on May 15, 2020. Like all ducks, the male and female Hooded Mergansers look very different with the males being more colorful and the females

brown. The male is a distinguished looking bird with a large white patch on its crested head. These little ducks are divers and like all mergansers, eat fish, insects, and small crustaceans. We don't see them in large numbers or every day; they are more of an occasional visitor during the winter months.

Common Merganser (FW)

Uncommon winter and spring visitor from November through April.

Red-breasted Merganser (FW)

Rare winter visitor.

Ruddy Duck (FW)

Rare winter visitor. One Ruddy Duck was seen February 5, 2018

California Quail (PL)

Rare. This species has all but disappeared with the development of the community.

Ruffed Grouse (MF)

Rare. Possible in dense woods. This species has all but disappeared with the development of the community.

Sooty Grouse (MF)

Rare. Possible in dense woods. A Sooty Grouse was heard in spring 1983 in the trees behind lot 132.

Pied-billed Grebe (FW)

Common resident mostly from October through April. Grebes are waterbirds (vs. ducks) with lobed toes that make them strong swimmers. The Pied-billed Grebe is stocky with a short neck and big head. In the winter, they are mostly dark with little other markings. They are not gregarious, so although there may be four or five at time on the lake, they swim and dive apart from others.

Red-necked Grebe (FW)

Rare. One seen on lake on February 27, 1999.

Band-tailed Pigeon (MF, RL, PL)

Common spring to fall visitor. The Band-tailed Pigeon has plump body and a purplish head and breast. Look for it perched in or flying loudly about high up in the conifer trees, sometimes in large numbers. This pigeon is increasingly common in more suburban areas and parks. They eat grain, fruits, and seeds. They will come to feeders.

Rock Pigeon (RL, PL)

Rare visitor. One seen July 16, 2009. Many Rock Pigeons can be found nearby at the Highway 101 overpass.

Mourning Dove (RL, PL)

Common resident. Will look for food on the ground around feeders. The mourning dove is one the most common and widespread of the doves. It has a trim body and a long tail that tapers to a point. It has a pinkish wash to its under parts. This dove is seen in small numbers or alone feeding on the ground. It will come to backyard feeders and prefers millet. Like all pigeons and doves, it is a strong, fast flyer.

Common Nighthawk (flyover)

Rare summer visitor. One seen July 15, 1999.

Vaux's Swift (flyover, RL, PL)

Uncommon summer visitor. They are seen in the spring looking to nest under eaves and in chimneys. They have been known to successfully nest in a chimney on Lakemoor Loop.

Anna's Hummingbird (RL, PL)

Common year round resident. There are two species of hummingbirds in our area. The Anna's stays around all year with the help of humans providing hummingbird feeders. The males have a bright deep rose head and throat and a green back.

Rufous Hummingbird (RL, PL)

Uncommon early spring through mid-summer visitor. Rufous hummingbirds winter in Mexico and the southeast US. They time their arrival here with the flowering of the red currant and salmon berry plants. The male is a rich brownish red all over and it has a colorful throat (called a "gorget") that is iridescent red-orange.

American Coot (FW)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Killdeer (FW)

Rare visitor. One seen on May 3, 2000, and another on lake ice February 11, 2019.

Spotted Sandpiper (FW)

Uncommon spring visitor. Up to three at one time have been seen on beaches and docks.

Solitary Sandpiper (FW)

Rare. One rested for a few hours on the tiny log island at the north end of the lake on May 10, 2020.

California Gull (Flyover, FW)

Rare. One visitor on September 2, 2020.

Glaucous-winged Gull (Flyover, FW)

Uncommon visitor.

Caspian Tern (Flyover)

Uncommon in summer.

Common Loon (FW)

Rare winter visitor.

Yellow-billed Loon (FW)

Rare winter visitor. One was seen on the lake January 6 and 7, 1981. It spent the better part of both days fishing at the north end of the lake.

Double-crested Cormorant (FW)

Common winter and spring visitor. This is a large, mostly dark fish-eating bird. It swims riding low in the water with its neck and yellow bill upturned. It dives

underwater to pursue fish. These cormorants like to hang out on the floating docks around the lake. They will often hold their wings out open to dry as they do not have oil glands.

Great Blue Heron (FW)

Common resident. Herons have long legs and long necks to catch fish, frogs, or small mammals. They will land on the docks and shorelines around the Ken Lake, just hanging out or stealthily hunting for food. It is quite a sight to see a heron posed perfectly still, then with great speed, strike at their prey with their large beak. Herons nest in large groups in trees, called rookeries or heronries.

Green Heron (FW)

Rare visitor. Past records indicate possible nesting along lake edge.

Turkey Vulture (Flyover)

Uncommon spring to fall visitor. Soars high above the neighborhood rocking back and forth on long translucent gray wings.

Osprey (FW)

Common summer resident seen circling the lake spring through summer. Osprey arrive in early April and leave our area in October to winter in the southern US, Central and South America. Osprey are fish eaters. They are white underneath, brown on top, bend in the wing with a black elbow patch. They can be seen circling the lake and making dramatic plunges into the water. If they catch a fish, they often fly to a nearby tree to eat it or take it to their nest.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon visitor. Hunts prey at bird feeders.

Cooper's Hawk (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon visitor. Hunts prey at bird feeders.

Northern Goshawk (Flyover)

Rare. One riding updrafts west of Lakemoor Place on May 23, 2004.

Bald Eagle (FW, RL, PL)

Common resident more so in winter, but can be seen circling the lake and bathing any time of year. They are least common in the fall. Bald Eagles, with a six-foot wing span, are the largest bird to visit Ken Lake. It takes 4-6 years for them to reach maturity when they get their white head and tail. Immature bald eagles have varying degrees of white and dark splotches. On Ken Lake, eagles catch fish, steal from Osprey, and try to catch ducks but the ducks usually out maneuver the eagle.

Red-tailed Hawk (Flyover, RL, PL)

Uncommon year round resident seen circling the area or perched in a tall tree.

Western Screech Owl (MF)

Rare visitor. One heard at night December 3, 1999.

Great Horned Owl (MF)

Uncommon year-round resident.

Northern Saw-whet Owl (MF)

Rare visitor. Heard at night in early spring.

Barred Owl (MF)

Uncommon visitor in the Kaiser Woods to the west of Ken Lake.

Belted Kingfisher (FW)

Common resident most often seen perched in trees and flying over the lake. There are over 100 species of kingfishers in the world and we are lucky to have one of them. Both sexes have a bluish head, back and tail, with a blue band across its white breast. The female kingfisher also has a rust colored band that the males do not have. This is one case where the female is more brightly colored than the male. The belted kingfisher cannot be confused with any other local bird. It can be seen throughout the year perched on trees hanging out over the water. Its loud rattling sound makes its presence known often before you see it. It flies over the water looking for fish, hovers, then, dramatically plunges into the water with a splash, often coming up with the fish.

Red-breasted Sapsucker (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon year-round resident. It leaves evenly spaced nail-size holes around trees. Possibly breeds.

Downy Woodpecker (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. Can be seen at suet feeders.

Hairy Woodpecker (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon resident. Can be seen at suet feeders.

Pileated Woodpecker (MF, PL)

Rare visitor to dead trees in area. Their presence is noticeable by their loud call and elongated foraging holes in dead trees. The Pileated Woodpecker is not often seen but it does live in the forests around us. It is unmistakable because of its large size, and red 'woody woodpecker style' cap. At 16 inches in length it is the largest woodpecker in North America. It's a wonderful thought to know it's living right here in our backyards.

Northern Flicker (MF, RL, PL)

Common year-round resident seen in snags, dead trees, or on the ground looking for insects. It is commonly seen and heard and comes to suet feeders. It has a brown barred back with spotted underparts and a white rump patch can be seen in flight. They are noisy and in the spring can be heard rapping on pipes, gutters, and roofs causing quite a racket. Red-shafted sub-species of the Northern Flicker is most common, but yellow-shafted is possible as are hybrids between the two.

Merlin (Flyover)

Rare visitor. One seen December 14, 2020.

Peregrine Falcon (Flyover)

Rare visitor any time of year.

Olive-sided Flycatcher (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon migrant most likely in mixed forest habitat.

Western Wood-Pewee (MF, RL, PL)

Rare spring migrant. One seen/heard May 15, 1999.

Pacific-slope Flycatcher (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon summer resident. This flycatcher is hard to see but commonly heard in the mix forest. It most likely nests in the area.

Hutton's Vireo (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. This is a hard to see, secretive bird that can be heard in the conifers. Identified by its song. Likely breeds in conifers.

Cassin's Vireo (MF, RL, PL)

Rare migrant. Seen May 15, 1999 and June 5, 2020.

Warbling Vireo (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon migrant.

Canada Jay (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon and sporadic visitor, but occasionally winters in the Black Hills. Mostly seen at feeders. Formerly known as Gray Jays.

Steller's Jay (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. This is one of our more colorful and loud birds, as are most jays. The Steller's Jay, with its stunning overall blue color and crested dark head, cannot be mistaken for any other bird. It can be seen on the ground, at feeders, in bushes, or flying noisily around the treetops.

American Crow (RL, PL)

Common resident. The crow is probably known to most. It can be seen and heard in small or large numbers in the area. In early evening large numbers of crows can be seen all flying in the same direction. They are headed to a night roost. In flight, crows have a flat (or square ended) tail that distinguishes it from the wedge-shaped tail of a Raven.

Common Raven (Flyover, RL, PL)

Common year-round visitor. Likely breeding in the Black Hills. Ravens have a distinct deep call, different from a crow. Ravens are bigger than crows, with a much larger bill, and a wedge tail can be seen in flight.

Black-capped Chickadee (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. This little bird is probably familiar to most by both sight and sound. The black-capped chickadee is a common bird at feeders where it flies in, quickly grabs a bite of food and then flies away. Back and forth it can go again and again. It is also easily identified when you hear it says its name, Chick-a-dee-dee-dee.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. Not to be confused with the Black-capped Chickadee, this chickadee's back, rump, sides, and flanks are chestnut color. Both chickadees live in the forested areas around us and readily come to feeders.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (RL, PL)

Uncommon among flocks of migrating swallows.

Purple Martin (Flyover)

Rare summer visitor. One seen June 17, 2000.

Tree Swallow (FW, RL, PL)

Common summer resident nesting in area. The tree swallow has iridescent blue feathering on its head, back, and tail. Under parts are white. It flies over the lake and treetops catching insects. It will nest in bird houses preferably near water.

Violet-green Swallow (FW, RL, PL)

Common spring and summer resident nesting in the area. There are five species of swallows that are here during the spring and summer. The Violet-green Swallow, or VG for short, is the most common swallow we see. It has an iridescent greenish cast to feathers on head and back, and when flying shows a broken white rump patch behind the wings. They are bug eaters and can be seen, especially in early evening, flying low over the lake and treetops. They will nest in boxes or other nooks and crannies on human structures.

Barn Swallow (FW, RL, PL)

Common spring and summer resident nesting in the area. This swallow is the only one with a deeply forked tail. Its blue on top and deep reddish on the underside. Barn swallows build single mud nests attached to structures.

Cliff Swallow (Flyover, FW)

Uncommon migrant. Look for it among swallow flocks over lake.

Bushtit (MF, RL, PL)

Common year-round resident. These tiny (4 inch) plump birds are gray with long tails making up half of the four inches. They travel in flocks of up to 30 birds. They are constantly moving through bushes and trees hanging every which way. They will come to feeders and take over. Then off they go!

Golden-crowned Kinglet (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon winter resident preferring the taller evergreen trees.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon winter resident.

Red-breasted Nuthatch (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. This tiny forest bird comes to feeders. Its call is easy to learn as it sounds like no other bird. The call is a rather loud enk, enk, enk, or nya-nya-nya... that can be heard at quite a distance. It searches for insects along tree trunks and branches.

Pygmy Nuthatch (MF, RL, PL)

Rare. Three seen on August 18, 2007.

Brown Creeper (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon resident. This small, rather secretive bird climbs up tree trunks in a circling pattern gathering insects along the way. Creepers creep from the bottom to the top of a large tree and then fly down to the base of a nearby tree to start up again.

Pacific Wren (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon resident. The Pacific Wren is a small, secretive bird that lives in the understory of the forest. It has a beautifully melodious song that rings throughout the forest. It lives mostly in the low understory of the forest. Formerly called a Winter Wren.

Bewick's Wren (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon resident in shrubby thickets.

Starling (RL, PL)

Uncommon resident.

Varied Thrush (MF, RL, PL)

Common winter resident. Can also be seen in fall and early spring. The Varied Thrush is related to the Robin and the two species look and act similarly. But, the Varied Thrush has a black necklace. If you see this, you know it's not a Robin. Varied Thrushes migrate to higher elevations in the early spring and summer.

Swainson's Thrush (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon summer resident.

Hermit Thrush (MF, RL, PL)

Rare winter visitor. One seen January 3, 2004.

American Robin (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. Probably one of the most known and recognizable birds around. Robins live in our area all year, but move around a lot. Sometimes you see them and sometimes you don't. Males are brighter in color with a dark head that females lack. Robins build cup shaped nests out of sticks and moss and can use a variety of human structures or trees. Juvenile robins are often seen in our yards in late spring. Young robins have speckled breasts when they leave the nest.

Cedar Waxwing (RL, PL)

Uncommon visitor.

House Sparrow (RL, PL)

Uncommon visitor to feeders.

Evening Grosbeak (RL, PL)

Uncommon visitor. Flocks in the tens can be found in maple trees and at feeders in the late spring and early summer.

House Finch (RL, PL)

Common resident. House Finches are often seen at the top of tall evergreen trees, feeders and birdbaths. Their song is a lively, jumbled, jazzy song from treetops in spring.

Purple Finch (RL, PL)

Common resident. The Purple Finch can be confused with a House Finch. The male Purple Finch has a wine color wash through the head, breast and rump. It sings a warbling melodic song. Purple Finches do come to feeders.

Red Crossbill (Flyover, RL, PL)

Common, but nomadic, visitor any time of year. Often seen in flocks of 20 or more. This bird actually has a crossed bill used to pry open fir, cedar and pine cones. They can be seen flying overhead or in the tops of trees.

Pine Siskin (RL, PL)

Common visitor. Wanders in search of conifers with a good seed crop. Often appears in large flocks of 50 or more. One hundred sixty-six siskins were counted around Ken Lake on the December 20, 2020 Christmas Bird Count.

American Goldfinch (RL, PL)

Common spring through late summer. The brightly colored yellow male goldfinch is easily recognizable and has the distinction of being our state bird. The female goldfinch has a soft yellow color overall and lacks the black cap of the male. In winter the male loses its very bright color. These birds are gregarious and will visit backyard feeders, preferring more open areas. They have a distinctive flight pattern and call during flight that sounds like they are saying "potato chip, potato chip".

Fox Sparrow (MF, RL, PL)

Rare winter visitor.

Dark-eyed Junco (MF, RL, PL)

Common year-round resident. Dark-eyed Juncos are sparrows. They vary widely in coloration, but most of our juncos have a darkish head and reddish brown back. In flight, look for their white outer tail feathers. Males, females, and juveniles differ in coloration. Juncos can be seen zipping around in bushes, trees, feeding on the ground and at feeders. They nest on or close to the ground. They also may choose hanging flower baskets or planters to nest in. Keeping cats indoors is important to ensure ground nesters like juncos survive.

White-crowned Sparrow (RL, PL)

Uncommon visitor.

Golden-crowned Sparrow (RL, PL)

Uncommon visitor.

White-throated Sparrow (RL)

Rare. One seen at feeder on December 19, 2021.

Song Sparrow (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. Nests in shrubby thickets.

Spotted Towhee (MF, RL, PL)

Common resident. The Spotted Towhee is a member of the sparrow family. They have a pretty spectacular coloration that distinguishes them from other birds. They have a dark hood, white spots on a black back, rusty sides, white belly, and red eye. Males and females differ in degree of coloration. Towhees live and nest in the understory of our forests and yards. They forage for food by scratching backward with both feet making enough noise to resemble a small mammal. They also visit feeders. Keeping cats indoors is important to ensure ground nesters like towhees survive.

Red-winged Blackbird (FW)

Uncommon spring visitor. Prefers cattails and marshy areas around the Lake.

Brown-headed Cowbird (RL, PL)

Common summer resident. The cowbird is a brood parasite depositing its eggs in the other resident birds' nests.

Orange-crowned Warbler (MF, RL, PL)

Common spring migrant. Prefers brushy thickets.

Common Yellowthroat (FW)

Rare spring migrant. One recorded April 28, 2020 in sparse cattails on north end of lake.

Yellow Warbler (MF, RL, PL)

Rare migrant. One seen on September 6, 2019. Seems to prefer vegetation near water.

Yellow-rumped Warbler (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon spring and summer migrant.

Black-throated Gray Warbler (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon spring and summer. Prefers deciduous trees.

Townsend's Warbler (MF, RL, PL)

Common fall and winter visitor. Prefers suet feeders but will also come to seed feeders.

Wilson's Warbler (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon summer visitor.

Western Tanager (MF, RL, PL)

Uncommon summer resident. Will come to suet feeders.

Black-headed Grosbeak (RL, PL)

Common summer resident. Black-headed Grosbeaks arrive in late spring. They have a large, conical shaped bill used for eating seeds. The male has an all black head and cinnamon under parts. The female is less colorful with a more buff color overall. They are commonly seen at backyard feeders and like suet.

Resources

Previous Guides to Ken Lake Birds

Ken Lake Birdlife. 1983. Authors: Bob Morse and Marcheta Bean. Out of print. A few copies are still in private libraries.

Commercial Outlet for Ken Lake Bird Enthusiasts

Wild Birds Unlimited. A great local store for bird feeding supplies and bird watching resources. Located at 1200 Cooper Point Road SW Suite 204. Olympia. (360) 352-5456. Olympia.wbu.com

Local and Regional Organizations for Bird Enthusiasts

Black Hills Audubon Society <https://blackhills-audubon.org/>. BHAS offers guided field trips, walks, monthly programs, a newsletter, and people knowledgeable about our local birds. Mailing address: PO Box 2524, Olympia, WA, 98507. Message phone: (360) 352-7299. Email for general questions: 4info@blackhills-audubon.org; Birding questions: questionsforBHAS@gmail.org

Washington Ornithological Society www.wos.org. Provides a variety of resources about birds and birding. Located in Seattle with members statewide.

Printed Bird Identification Guides

Birds of Puget Sound Region - Coast to Cascades by Dennis Paulson, Bob Morse, Tom Aversa, and Hal Opperman. Co-authored by Ken Lake resident Bob Morse, this is the best guide to local birds available. You can purchase it at Wildlife Birds Unlimited on Cooper Point Road.

Bird Identification Apps

Merlin is a free app developed by Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology. It makes instant identification simple, not only based on birds' visual features but even their sounds. Download the app at <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org>

Additional Websites

History of Ken Lake

<https://www.thurstontalk.com/olympia-ken-lake-is-a-woodland-gem-with-ties-to-the-olympia-brewing-company/#>

Bird Watching Ethics

<https://www.aba.org/aba-code-of-birding-ethics/>

Bird List in Alphabetical Order with Page Numbers

- Anna's Hummingbird, 9
American Coot, 9
American Crow, 12
American Goldfinch, 15
American Robin, 14
American Wigeon, 6
- Bald Eagle, 10
Band-tailed Pigeon, 8
Barn Swallow, 13
Barred Owl, 11
Barrow's Goldeneye, 7
Belted Kingfisher, 11
Bewick's Wren, 14
Black-capped Chickadee, 12
Black-headed Grosbeak, 16
Black-throated Gray Warbler, 16
Brown-headed Cowbird, 16
Brown Creeper, 13
Bufflehead, 7
Bushtit, 13
- Cackling Goose, 6
California Gull, 9
California Quail, 8
Canada Goose, 6
Canada Jay, 12
Canvasback, 7
Caspian Tern, 9
Cassin's Vireo, 12
Cedar Waxwing, 14
Chestnut-backed Chickadee, 12
Cliff Swallow, 13
Common Goldeneye, 7
Common Loon, 9
Common Merganser, 8
Common Nighthawk, 9
Common Raven, 12
Common Yellowthroat, 16
Cooper's Hawk, 10
- Dark-eyed Junco, 15
Double-crested Cormorant, 9
Downy Woodpecker, 11
- Evening Grosbeak, 14
- Fox Sparrow, 15
- Gadwall, 6
Glaucous-winged Gull, 9
Golden-crowned Kinglet, 13
Golden-crowned Sparrow, 15
Great Blue Heron, 10
Great Horned Owl, 10
Greater Scaup, 7
Greater White-fronted Goose, 6
Green Heron, 10
Green-winged Teal, 7
- Hairy Woodpecker, 11
Hermit Thrush, 14
Hooded Merganser, 7
Hutton's Vireo, 12
House Finch, 14
House Sparrow, 14
- Killdeer, 9
- Lesser Scaup, 7
- Mallard, 7
Merlin, 11
Mourning Dove, 8
- Northern Flicker, 11
Northern Goshawk, 10
Northern Pintail, 7
Northern Rough-winged Swallow, 12
Northern Saw-whet Owl, 11
Northern Shoveler, 6

Olive-sided Flycatcher, 11
Orange-crowned Warbler, 16
Osprey, 10

Pacific-slope Flycatcher, 12
Pacific Wren, 14
Peregrine Falcon, 11
Pied-billed Grebe, 8
Pileated Woodpecker, 11
Pine Siskin, 15
Purple Finch, 14
Purple Martin, 13
Pygmy Nuthatch, 13

Redhead, 7
Red-breasted Merganser, 8
Red-breasted Nuthatch, 13
Red-breasted Sapsucker, 11
Red-necked Grebe, 8
Red-tailed Hawk, 10
Red-winged Blackbird, 16
Red Crossbill, 15
Ring-necked Duck, 7
Rock Pigeon, 8
Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 13
Ruddy Duck, 8
Ruffed Grouse, 8
Rufous Hummingbird, 9

Sharp-shinned Hawk, 10
Snow Goose, 6
Solitary Sandpiper, 9
Song Sparrow, 15
Sooty Grouse, 8
Spotted Sandpiper, 9
Spotted Towhee, 15
Starling, 14
Steller's Jay, 12
Swainson's Thrush, 14

Townsend's Warbler, 16
Tree Swallow, 13
Turkey Vulture, 10

Varied Thrush, 14
Vaux's Swift, 9
Violet-green Swallow, 13

Warbling Vireo, 12
Western Wood-Pewee, 12
Western Screech Owl, 10
Western Tanager, 16
White-crowned Sparrow, 15
White-throated Sparrow, 15
Wilson's Warbler, 16
Wood Duck, 6

Yellow-billed Loon, 9
Yellow-rumped Warbler, 16
Yellow Warbler, 16