



LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

FROM THE DISHMAN HILLS

JANUARY 1994

Contributions for December came to a big \$1,640.44. \$55.00 were memorials and recycling brought in \$17.44. Expenses were \$197.48 for bulletin printing, and mailing (two months) and \$40.00 for office expense.

Our thanks to the following who contributed money or services during December and have given permission to be listed here: James T. Bertis, R.C. Bohlen, Janet R. Davis, Bernice Fahlgren, Joan G. Fergin, Dr. W.A. Fernau, Harriet J. Fix, Mary L. Flick, Wiblert Fritz, Fred Gage, George W. Girvin, Don Griffiths, Mrs. K. Gudgel, Charline A. Hagen, Mrs. Donald Hagan, Kent J. Hoffman, Glen W. Kivett, Marion E. Krauss, Patrick S. Lettenmaier, Bettie Maron, Leo J. Middendorf, Carl Milton, H.A. Peyton, Ruth S. Roberts, Jule Rosenoff, Luella T. Rowberg, Harold E. Skinner, Lois Smith, Spokane Retired Teachers Association, Marilyn H. Stedman, Helen Stowell, Patricia Sweeney, Richard D. Taylor, Agnes M. Thornock, James Troshi, Sylvia K. Wilson and Mrs. Harold Wimpy.

Since we didn't have a buttetin in December, we're behind on listing donors, we hope to catch up.

SPOKANE VALLEY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Both the number of species and of individual birds counted on the Valley Christmas Bird Count (includes part of Dishman Hills) January 1 were down markedly from last year. This seems to prove that last winter's deep snow wasn't the obstacle that this year's steady rain was. (The birds were smarter than we were--they kept out of the rain!) Duck numbers on the river were, expectedly, not much affected, except there were fewer species. The river did produce two bald eagles, however. California quail showed up in good numbers (188) and the 107 mourning doves beat last year's number. Chickadee numbers were down and only one red-breasted nuthatch showed up. (This matches this winter's Dishman Hills counts. These little birds' numbers are cyclic, rising and falling every few years for no known reason). A good sighting was of a brown creeper, an elusive little fellow that starts at the bottom of a pine tree and works its way up as it looks for insects, then flies to the base of the next tree and does it all again. Must be an uphill struggle. Robins didn't mind the rain for 212 were counted. Conversely, junco, house finch and sparrow numbers were away down. The mere five red crossbills no doubt reflected the poor cone crop. As the athletic coaches say after a bad season, "Wait until next year!"

Our annual meesteing to elect officers and directors will be Monday, January 24 at 7 p.m. at Opportunity Elementary, S. 1109 Wilbur. You are cordially invited.

A possibility of acquiring additional land for Dishman Hills Natural Area is in the offing. We will surely let you know if anything materializes. Nature seems in retreat in so many places. We need to act aggressively to keep her from being overwhelmed.

HILLS ENJOYABLE-WHERE IS WINTER?

A recent hike into the Dishman Hills was a pleasant one. Quiet with clean air and green things everywhere. Lack of snow revealed little plants just waiting for spring: new buttercup leaves, green strawberry and alumroot leaves, stonecrop that will sport bright yellow flowers come summer, and carpets of emerald moss. Little tan and cream mushrooms were scattered here and there. Lichens freshened by rain spread their colors, varying from yellow to several shades of green, on tree branches, rocks and the ground. Of course the pines and firs looked refreshed also, as did Oregon grape.

Animal life was hard to find. Two or three ravens conversed melodiously overhead as they searched for lunch, which must be scarce this time of year. The only other bird was a lone red-breasted nuthatch probing cracks in pine bark for insects. Unless you are a nuthatch or a chickadee, you would find little to eat in the Hills. (The pine cone crop is almost nonexistent, hence no crossbills or pine siskins; there are no berries to attract the fruit eaters.) Shimmering, dew-laden webs of spiders spread around the bases of pines--spiders in January!

Without snow no telltale tracks told what mammals prowled the area. A red squirrel did perch motionless on a dead branch of a Douglas fir, hoping to escape notice. Coyotes did leave little piles of scat along the trails. Probably about the only thing they can find is a mouse or grass to satiate their hunger.

Littering has decreased a bit. "Only" one bag of it was found: two drink cans, assorted plastic including a bag, cigarette butts, wads of gum and a fragmented "No Trespassing" sign of uncertain origin. Most people respect the Hills and we hope the litterbugs will learn. (So far we haven't found any insect-eating bird to take care of these kinds of bugs!)

Mountain bikes continue to grove the trails.

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