

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 5-24-06) Attracting Wildlife to Your Garden © 2006

Kathryn Owen from the Austerbruin neighborhood in Poulsbo sent me an email about one reason why there are more rats munching at our bird feeding stations. Kathryn works at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle. She says, “owls help control the rat populations and with more and more development the owls are decreasing in numbers. Many Northwest owls – including great horned owls, barn owls and Western screech owls – include rats in their diet.” She recommends one of my favorite resources Russell Link’s book “Living with Wildlife.” An excerpt on owls from the book is found at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife website: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/owl.htm>. The website has excellent color photos and abundant information about the owls that share space with us humans.

Owen says, “Research at Woodland Park Zoo found that rats at feeders is the most frequently cited reason why people take down their bird feeders.” She adds, “This is another reason why it’s great to encourage people to provide food for seed-eating birds by using plants.”

If you haven’t met Kathryn and her neighbors, you’ll want to wander through Austerbruin off of Caldart Street in Poulsbo. This neighborhood group takes their environment very seriously. They’re dedicated to creating earth friendly habitat for humans and other living creatures. The neighborhood has a community garden area, a rain garden, bioswale and they’ve planted trees in every space possible. They’ve hosted “Bio Blast” (a summertime environmental fair) in their neighborhood and invite the public in to view their community. Their most recent project is helping their North Kitsap neighbors learn about how to create a “Community Wildlife Habitat.” Readers can contact Chris Carlson at 360-598-5904, Kathryn Own at 360-697-6784 or Erin Herndon at 360-697-4518 for more information on this project in North Kitsap.

Each Kitsap gardener can create a backyard wildlife community. Visit www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/community.cfm to learn more. Gardeners can register their backyards for \$15 (for the cost of a sign to post in your garden) by filling out the form provided on the website.

Wild creatures need: food, water, shelter and a place to rear their young. Native plants provide nearly all these needs. Our native birds, frogs, snakes, raccoons, squirrels, deer, bear and other wild creatures have evolved along with the native plants which supply all their needs. Local nurseries are carrying more and more native plants and the nursery staff can also introduce you to other plants that we often call “cousins” or “relatives” of native plants. These plants were developed from the native plants or have the same cultural requirements. If you have a space in your garden that’s calling out for a new plant, consider one of the many native plants or near-native plants.

Butterflies and birds are the easiest creatures to attract to our gardens. For information and photos on the birds and butterflies (moths too) in our area visit these websites: www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/distr/lepid/bflyusa/bflyusa.htm and

www.birds.cornell.edu. The USGS site has information about the most common butterflies and moths in Kitsap County. The Cornell website may be the most comprehensive site for information on all birds throughout the United States. Our local Audubon Chapter's website is www.kitsap.audubon.org. The site has abundant information about the birds in Kitsap and you can download the pamphlet listing all the birds in our county and where you can best find them. Audubon won't be meeting again until the fall, but the website also has past newsletters and much information. The public is welcome to attend their monthly meetings held in the evening at the Poulsbo Library.

Contact Peg in care of this newspaper or email ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us or gardenmentor@yahoo.com