

Red-wing blackbirds are real showmen

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

I was taking photos at a marsh in Bozeman, Montana a few years ago when a family approached to ask a question.

The father said hello and asked if I knew the name of the blackbird with the red patches on the wings. I smiled and told him "Red-winged Blackbird."

We all got a good chuckle out of it.

We are relative newcomers to north central Washington.

As we explore the area we watch for wetlands and marshes hoping that we'd find areas to see these birds.

The Horan Natural Area shows potential but the marshes are drying out and the blackbird use is present but low. Extensive marshes in the Quincy area and on the Waterville Plateau and along the Columbia River



Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.



support good numbers of these great birds. Scan the tops of cattails as you hike, bike or drive by marshy areas and you're likely to see them.

The male Red-winged Blackbird is a real showman during the spring mating season. They will cling to cattails or shrub branches, rear back as they fill up with air, flare their tails a bit, expand their bright red

epaulets and call at the top of their voices. They put on a grand show to attract a mate.

The call is very distinctive. Once you hear it, you'll never forget it. You can sample the call here: <https://www.xeno-canto.org/species/Agelaius-phoeniceus>.

Spring marks the arrival of these birds as they begin to nest in marsh and wetland areas.

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The Red-winged Blackbird is a good indicator of a wetland or marsh that is functioning and capable of providing the needed nesting habitat.

Wetlands host a wide variety of birds and are critical to the survival of some species. The Red-winged Blackbird is a good indicator of a wetland or marsh that is functioning and capable of providing the needed nesting habitat. Even small areas of functioning wetlands can host a few of these birds.

Protecting our existing marshes and wetlands is one of the best conservation measures we can pursue. Recovering wetlands will help sustain the beautiful, vocal Red-winged Blackbird and many other bird species.

Where is your nearest wetland or marsh? If you get out soon you can still see these birds before they leave.

Don't forget your binoculars and camera.