



Killdeer: Conspicuous, and yes, quite loud

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

Killdeer are tall, slender birds that are about the size of an American Robin.

They are a white and brown bird with a distinct double breast band.

They are commonly seen in many locations within north central Washington.

In fact, they can be found in many open habitats, including tundra, short-grass prairies, plowed fields, interior lake and coastal shorelines, coastal estuaries and mudflats.

I've photographed them along roadsides on the Waterville Plateau, on the small railroad tracks in Wenatchee's Riverfront Park, in New Mexico, Colorado and New Jersey as well as many other locations in the United States.

Yet, I never get tired of seeing them or studying their behavior.



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



Killdeer have a loud, easily heard call that sounds like “kill-dee” or “kill-deeeear.” Their exuberant call even plays a role in the bird’s scientific name, *Charadrius vociferous*. *Vociferous* means “conspicuous and usually offensively loud.”

You can hear a variety of Killdeer songs and calls here: <https://www.xeno-canto.org/species/Charadrius-vociferus>.

Killdeer are monogamous and

nest on open, rocky ground. Their nests may be described as “scrapes” in rocky areas that may be lined with a few sticks and grass. They can be found in parking lots, roadsides, between seldom-used railroad ties, and urban flower beds.

Killdeer rely on camouflage to keep themselves and their nests hidden. When they sense a danger near the nest, one of the adult birds will begin a broken

wing display as it moves away from the nest. This behavior is meant to draw predators away from the eggs by appearing to be injured and easily subdued.

As the predator closes in, the Killdeer simply flies away to safety.

Killdeer do not form large flocks but it is common to see several individuals or pairs in a relatively small area.

If you are near the shoreline of a pond or stream you may see them running short distances as they forage for worms, beetles or snails. They will allow you to slowly approach them so you can study them through your binoculars.

They are a wonderful bird to introduce to children since their call is so easily heard and remembered.

Since they are here all year, Killdeer make a wonderful start to any day of birding.

Good luck!