This is not a Blue Jay — it's a *Steller's* Jay

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

Often mistaken for a Blue Jay, the Steller's Jay is a common bird in north central Washington.

It is understandable that people mistake this bird for a Blue Jay since it is a Jay and it is blue.

The Steller's Jay is native to western North America and the Blue Jay resides in the rest of the continent. Geographic ranges may be changing due to climate change but if you see a blue jay around here, you're safe saying it is a Steller's Jay.

Information about the Steller's Jay is here: www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/stellers-jay. For comparison, you can find a description of the Blue Jay here: www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/blue-jay.

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

The Steller's Jay is a bird you can't ignore. First, it is a medium size bird that is slightly larger than an American Robin. Next, the bright blue body and dark head with its distinctive crest create a dramatic presence.

Last, there's the call of the Steller's Jay. The loud call can be grating to many people but there is no confusion about the bird that creates such a loud, coarse call.

Many people would prefer that the Steller's Jay is seen and not heard. Personally, I appreciate a bird call that I can't confuse with other birds.

Steller's Jays are smart. If you put out unshelled peanuts they will find them and haul them off to a cache for later use. They may eat some on the spot but most will be cached elsewhere.

I have trouble remembering where I put my car keys but these birds can remember multiple locations over an extended time.

I enjoy playing with the jays that visit my yard. I vary the location of where I put peanuts out just to see how long it takes them to find the supply. It never takes long.

Try your best to ignore the Steller's Jay call if it is irritating to you. Concentrate on their brilliant plumage and enjoy their antics.

Make sure to spell the name correctly if you record your sightings. They are *stellar* birds in that they are beautiful and striking but they are named *Steller's* Jay. Another subtle characteristic for one of our wonderful birds.