



Can You Hear Me Now?

Photos and story by Peter Bauer



Charadrius vociferus, or killdeer, pictured above in full cry. Names given to them, as far back as the 18th century, were 'chattering plover' and 'noisy plover.' *Vociferus*, broken down further, comes from the Latin words *vox*, meaning "cry," and *ferre*, "to bear." No wonder these birds are so loud.

One of the effects of warm spring weather can be appreciated by your ears. The arrival of birdsong each spring, warbling and chatter, fills the air in tandem with the increasing numbers of arriving migratory birds.

Some of the calls are readily identifiable for novices, like the

Black-capped chickadee. Others make a clicking, non-descript Morse-code-esque sound like that of the dark-eyed junco. There's one call I won't need hearing aids to hear, ever, I hope. It's the loud, keening call of a **Killdeer**.

Unlike most birds, their call is intended to draw OUR atten-

tion, at least when they're trying to distract us from their nesting site. However, their volume stays stuck on "loud" when calling for other purposes as well. No wonder their species' Latin name is *C. vociferus* (*vociferus*, especially of a person or speech, means vehement or clamorous). Although some imaginative soul

named the birds "killdeer" after their call, I only ever hear a one syllable call: "KEEER!"

Killdeers are a shorebird that don't need a shore to thrive. A large plover (a family of plump shorebirds that scurry along the ground when feeding and often run, rather than fly, when fleeing), killdeer have adapted well

to living in human-disturbed habitats. The undeveloped fields in Olds Station by Wenatchee have a regular collection of killdeer in the late spring. They feed on insects and other invertebrates, running and then pausing to look (listen perhaps) for food, somewhat reminiscent of robins — only the running is much faster.

Although they are not obligated to be near water, I have found that many like to feed on mudflats adjacent to lakes. In that setting, they are easiest to photograph from a kayak, paddled a yard or two from land. Due to their striking banded plumage and red-rimmed eye, they make a great subject for pictures. I especially like to get their reflection in the water in good light.

Killdeers are perhaps most famous for their "broken wing" display, feigning injury to draw a predator away from their nest. I have frequently tried the strategy of looking in the opposite direction from their display to see if I can find the nest. I never have, even though the nest is just a shallow scrape made in a field without much framework around the clutch of four to six eggs. The eggs are light brown and speckled, devilishly well camouflaged in the disturbed rocky fields the birds are oft to choose.

The chicks are born with a single breast band unlike the double band on the parents. I guess they have to earn their (second) stripes! I was delighted to see the little fluffy chicks this past spring after so many years of only seeing the adults. For an observer of nature, Killdeer are especially great fun to watch.

When he retired in 2013, Peter Bauer moved from Wenatchee to Winthrop for the snowy winters and closeness to nature. His blog, "American Safari," celebrating the beauty of the animal world (mostly birds), can be found at pbauwa.wordpress.com.



A chick sporting its single breast band. The killdeer is the only plover in North America with two breast bands, at least as an adult.

Time for reflecting...

The killdeer almost exclusively uses beach habitats, coastal wetlands and fields during the non-breeding season, allowing for a wonderful shot in shallow water.

Poor killdeer has a broken wing... not!

The "broken wing display," also known as "injury feigning," is a defense technique for the birds' nest and/or offspring. Another behavior of note is known as the "ungulate display," where an adult will raise its wings, exposes its rump and charges. This is often fatal for the bird.