

Nature Notes

Steller's Jay... **(*Cyanocitta stelleri*)**



How can you miss the Steller's Jay? With its black crest and head, deep blue plumage and its loud harsh 'shack, shack, shack' call, it was picked as the Nature Park's logo before it became our provincial bird in 1987.

In 1741 Georg Wilhelm Steller, an Arctic explorer, was one of the first to describe this jay. It's family members include the Clark's Nutcracker, raven and crow.

Dense conifer forests like the nature park are where these birds nest but they use a wide variety of forested habitat the rest of the year. They are well known at bird feeders and picnic areas. These intelligent and opportunistic birds are quick to take advantage of new food sources and will hoard food in caches around their territory. They are omnivores and their diet includes seeds, berries, small rodents and even other birds' eggs.

Having a complex social hierarchy and dominance pattern, the Stellers form monogamous long term pair bonds and remain together year-round. Both build the nest and feed the young. The male feeds the female for the 16 to 18 days it takes to incubate the 4 to 5 eggs.



The female Steller's is slightly smaller than the male. Unusual in the bird world, both male and female are identical in colour. An accomplished mimic, this jay will often give the call of a Red-Tailed hawk which must distress their neighbors.

Photo courtesy of www.britishcolumbia.com/wildlife/?id

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