

# The Pygmy Owl

The Newsletter of the  
Spokane Audubon Society



## Floods, Flowers & Feathers 2015:

### A Bird's-eye View of Turnbull NWR's Spring Festival

by Carmen Yount

**6:30 a.m.** I pulled up to the West Valley Outdoor Learning Center, turned off the alarm and started getting ready to head out to the Refuge for the spring festival. The weather forecast earlier in the week predicted heat, so one of our first challenges was to choose birds that tolerate warmer temperatures. We settled on Stan, the Harris's Hawk, and Sadie, our American Kestrel. Though not local to this region, Stan is a desert bird with a surprisingly mellow temperament. We were going to be in prime habitat for Sadie, who, despite her modest stature, has a giant personality (and a strong voice to match).

**7:00 a.m.** Ashley Karsh, the OLC's Americorps staffer, and I packed the car with the crated birds and our equipment and headed to the Refuge.

**7:45 a.m.** We pulled into Turnbull. A rainstorm moments before kept the dust at bay for our drive to HQ, which was lucky because we found ourselves behind several cars of volunteers!

**8:10 a.m.** Ready! Thanks to Refuge staff we had a great spot, kind of off the beaten path, right next to Spokane Audubon's bird scavenger hunt. This was good for us because a) we were shaded, and b) there was vegetation behind us so we didn't have to worry about being approached from behind. Ashley had the foresight to plan a touch table with spread wings, feathers, some raptor feet and the legs of a moose, an elk and a deer. We can't allow people to touch the birds, but getting to see different wing shapes, touch feathers and see how big an owl's foot is (and how sharp those talons are) seems to be a reasonable trade-off.

**Set up until 3 p.m.** Visitors! The OLC's birds are a nice complement to Audubon's activity, because people can pick up their scavenger hunt binders and then wander over to see some live birds. In a perfect world, we would have talked about field marks and habitat, but much of the time we end up answering questions about what the birds eat or how they ended up with us. (The answers: mouse/quail/rat, wing injuries.)



*Stan the Harris's Hawk in front of the touch table.*

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### We Can't Drive There. Northeast Washington Wolf Issues - Range Riding

by Mary Jokela

Northeast Washington holds some spectacular lands--unique, rugged and sometimes impassable except on foot or horseback. Our backyard contains millions of acres of public lands including National Forest as well as private grasslands in grazing allotments with domestic livestock producers. The grazing season: June through October.

Some of these Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) grazing allotments are active (75% in Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille Counties) while others rotate and/or are inactive depending upon forage health and growth stage; allotment provisions and size vary. Many are large, open and remote. For example, Washington DFW Smackout Meadows allotments in NE Stevens County are 15-60,000 acres. Private allotments are usually smaller. Many NE Washington allotments are uniquely impassable except on foot or horseback. We can't drive there.

However, while some producers monitor grass sustainability and grazing domestic livestock on allotments by vehicle and ATV, others observe on horseback and on foot to deter predation. Each of these range riding methods appears to facilitate visual checking to assess general health and consistent weight gain (pounds on the hoof equal dollars). Predators also keep watch: cougars, wolves, bears, coyotes,

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## Range Riding, continued from page 1

eagles. And although wild ungulates constitute primary prey for cougars and wolves, young calves, lambs and injured livestock are relatively infrequent prey. Horses are rarely targeted. (Also note that it is inadvisable to take dogs into known wolf territory, even on lead.)

Overlapping grazing allotments and wolf territories sometimes result in conflict; 2007 the first known in Washington as gray wolves began migrating into our state. One wolf pack regularly utilizes an average 291 square miles, and DFW and the Tribes have radio-collared some individuals since 2009.

Cattle and sheep act uncharacteristically nervous when grazing in wolf territory, are sometimes injured, fail to nurse their young and fail to gain weight. Pro-active and increased range riding activity is the only NE Washington effective method of increasing human presence to somewhat affect wolf behavior and travel patterns. It disrupts wolf comfort. It provides critical observation of signs of wolf presence and activity—early detection, monitoring livestock for injury, for carcass disposal and/or degrading its palatability. It can be done without costly telemetry.

Conservation Northwest and Washington DFW presented a comprehensive workshop for range riding at K Diamond K Ranch near Republic in late May. Specific cost-share arrangements are available for producers to implement this valuable management tool. And although it is difficult and not always fool proof, a shared goal is wildlife conservation, avoiding lethal destruction of wolves while supporting local producers. Range riding works in NE Washington.

*Clarification (added 6/19/2015): Madonna Luers, Eastern Washington public information officer for WDFW, brought it to our attention that the grazing allotments mentioned here are on the Colville National Forest, managed by the U.S. Forest Service. WDFW consults with USFS about wildlife issues regarding grazing allotments, and works the range riding program as a tool to try to prevent wildlife conflicts, but WDFW does not manage those public lands.*

*The Pygmy Owl* will be on hiatus for July and August.

The deadline for the September issue is

**Thursday, August 19th**

Please send any materials for the newsletter to

***carmen@floreo.com***

Thank you, and have a great summer!

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## After the Spark: Trashbird Miracles



By Kenn Kaufman

*Thank you to Jan Reynolds for bringing this article to my attention. It originally appeared in the September/October 2014 edition of Bird Watcher's Digest. ~ ed.*

Seven blocks. That was my world. Seven blocks of mostly treeless suburbs that I saw every day as I walked to school and back. But for me that small world glowed with wonder, because wild birds lived there.

I was seven years old and had no binoculars, no bird book, no contact with anyone who could teach me about birdlife. But a spark of fascination had come to me out of nowhere in earliest childhood, and had built to a burning obsession. I prowled my small world of my South Bend, Indiana, suburbs, from the backyard to the schoolyard, looking for birds, watching their behavior, puzzling over what they were.

Visits to the library had given me names of some of my finds. I was pretty confident about house sparrows. I knew robins. I had worked out the differences between starlings and common grackles. Oh, those grackles!

Creeping across the lawn to get close studies of grackles, I had been stunned and awed by their striking colors. Their feathers shone blue and purple and bronze and green, like beautiful dark rainbows, as the grackles turned in the sunlight. To my wonder-filled eyes, they might as well have been birds of paradise.

When I look back now, it's hard to describe my early birding experience. People act sorry for me because I got off to such a slow start. I talk to some who ran up life lists of a hundred species or more within their first few months. By comparison, when I was seven years old, after two years of active but independent bird watching, I had identified maybe 15 species. I felt rewarded, blessed, thrilled at everything I was seeing.

My nemesis then was the cardinal. I had glimpsed cardinals around the neighborhood but had never gotten a close look; we didn't have a bird feeder and cardinals didn't come to the bread crumbs I put out for the starlings and sparrows. Halfway to school I sometimes would see a male cardinal, unbelievably red, up on a wire a block away, but then it would drop into a fenced-in backyard. I wondered if people simply were not meant to get close views of birds that wore such brilliant colors.

And then I almost had a close look at a cardinal, in a most unexpected way. On a rare family trip, we stopped to visit friends of my parents in a college town. Somehow it came up in conversation that little seven-year-old Kenn was interested in birds. We were stopping by the campus for some other reason, and my parents' friends ran into someone they knew from the biology department. Moments later we were detouring down a hallway to be shown an interesting bird.

Most of the details are vague in my memory but I still recall a few clear images. In a large room, the biology guy was looking into a series of closed cabinets where stuffed and mounted specimens of animals were stored. Behind one door I glimpsed chipmunks and squirrels, frozen in lifelike poses on dead sticks. Then he opened another cabinet door, revealing a number of mounted birds.

I have no idea now what the other birds were—they must have been common species—but right at the front was a male cardinal. Even in the dimly lit room it was a glowing red. It was mounted at a stiff angle but I could see the thick beak, the wispy feathers of the crest, the little black mask on the face. All of these things struck me in just a couple of seconds, and then the man muttered "Trash birds!" And shut the cabinet door.

The specimen he sought was a couple of doors over, and he held it up proudly. It was some colorful bird with a colorful backstory: Someone from the department had traded something to get it from a native in a jungle somewhere. Yes, I should remember more than that; it was very kind of the man to take time to show it to me. But all I really remember is that glimpse of the cardinal, and the way it was so readily dismissed. Trash bird.

A dozen years later, my obsession undiminished, I was an avid teenager bumming around North America in pursuit of birds. By now I had seen vast numbers of cardinals, and more than 600 other species, but still I was in hot pursuit of birds I hadn't seen yet. On a trip east I wound up at a bird club meeting, in conversation with a group that included a

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*Trashbird Miracles, cont.*

very famous birder. Awed, I was mostly listening, not talking. But someone asked me if I were looking for particular birds on my trip. “Cory’s shearwater,” I blurted out. “I’m really hoping to see a Cory’s shearwater.” It was a seabird, found regularly off our Atlantic Coast, but not an everyday bird for a kid from the Midwest.

The very famous birder looked at me and waved his hand dismissively. “Trash bird,” he said.

What an awful phrase. Over the years I’ve heard it far too many times, but as a matter of principle, I refuse to call any bird a trash bird.

Looking back now, I think I understand those first two episodes. The guy at the college was probably busy, in a hurry to find that particular specimen so he could get back to work. The very famous birder probably felt peer pressure to prove how thoroughly he knew Cory’s shearwater: Oh, yeah, easy bird. I see it all the time. Trash bird. Was that really how he felt? I’d like to believe that in private conversation he would have shown more enthusiasm about the shearwater. But with other birders hanging on his every word, I suppose he felt he had to play it cool.

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***Birding is fundamentally different. The mountain doesn’t need skiers, the water doesn’t need swimmers, but birds need all the friends they can get.***

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In bird watching, peer pressure isn’t always a bad thing. It can lead people to act more responsibly toward birds, their habitats, and other birders. But too often, in birding circles, there’s a subtle pressure to conform to a certain approach. New birders may think they won’t be respected if they can’t claim a life list of more than *X* species. Or if they can’t identify shorebirds, bulls, flycatchers. Too often, the pure enjoyment of bird watching is marred by a sense of pressure to get beyond “beginner” status.

Who could get excited about a common bird like a cardinal? A beginner, that’s who. So we pretend not to be excited, so that people will think we’re more experienced than we are. “Oh, yeah, just another cedar waxwing. Yawn. Seen a million of ‘em. Are there any GOOD birds around?”

Once you’re in that pattern, pretending to be bored with all the common (and beautiful) birds, it’s only a short step to where you might call something a “trash bird” and mean it.

Do experienced birders push newcomers into this attitude? I don’t think so—at least, not intentionally. Most experts consciously try to be generous and helpful with beginners. But birding has a tendency to throw people of all skill levels in contact, so the influence can happen all too easily, even unconsciously.

It doesn’t work that way in other pastimes. In skiing, for example, beginners slide cautiously down gentle slopes, while experts zoom down the steepest runs. In swimming, beginners splash about in the kiddie pool, while experts seek larger waters where they can set speed and distance records. But at popular birding spots, brand-new beginners and seasoned experts may wind up standing side by side, even discussing the same bird.

Those encounters are becoming much more frequent, and much more public, in cyberspace. Vast numbers of birders are now bumping into each other online. On Listserves, on forum groups, and now especially in Facebook groups, people who have just started to notice backyard birds are running up against seasoned field ornithologists. The results are not always good.

I see this played out on the Birding Ohio Facebook group, which now has more than 3,800 members. Someone will join the group and post a photo of a common bird—a male house sparrow, for example—and ask, “What’s this?” Depending on who sees the post first, the comments could go several different ways. Some will just type “house sparrow” with no elaboration. Some will say it’s a male house sparrow, and mention field marks visible in the photo. And a few commenters, unfortunately, will make snide or sarcastic remarks.

Birding Ohio has four active administrators who work to keep the group friendly and helpful, so nasty comments are deleted and those who make them risk being blocked. But in some other groups, negative comments go unchecked. In some states, beginners may be criticized for making “stupid” mistakes, or told not to ask questions until they can prove that they’ve already tried multiple other sources. The message seems to be, “Do it our way, or don’t go birding at all.”

An expert birder from another state recently told me she was doing the right thing for beginners: setting rigorous standards so that they would quickly develop into experts themselves. I suggested that this was like teaching people to

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*Trashbird Miracles, cont.*

ski by pushing them down the steepest hill, or teaching them to swim by throwing them into the deep end of the pool. But her attitude was, if they're not going to become experts, why not just discourage them from birding right away?

I can't agree with that. Birding is fundamentally different. The mountain doesn't need skiers, the water doesn't need swimmers, but birds need all the friends they can get. There are tremendous threats to bird habitats and bird populations, and we need broad public support for conservation. As I have written elsewhere, we don't really need more people who can argue about the tertiaries of Thayer's gulls. We DO need millions of people who care about birds and who believe that bird habitats are worth protecting.

And we need, sometimes, to be reminded of this. No matter how good our intentions, it takes effort for experienced birders to remember what it was like to get started.

This was brought home to me a few years ago, on a visit to New York City, when I was assigned to take a couple of people out birding in Central Park, their first time. One was a corporate executive, and I had just an hour to show her some birds. As we began I was in the typical birding mindset, thinking about warblers and other exciting migrants that might appear in the park: but we had gone only a few paces when the woman gasped audibly and asked, "What's THIS?"

I turned around and was about to say, "Oh, it's just a..." But then I stopped.

It's just a what? Just a bird that glows like dark fire. Turning in the sun, flashing electric blue and purple, ripples of green playing among the feathers of velvety bronze. Staring yellow eyes giving it an alert, alarmed expression, as if shocked at its won stunning hues. Just a glorious, shining paragon of the brilliance of iridescent color.

Yes, it was a common grackle. We watched it for fifteen minutes until the executive could tear herself away. Then we went on and looked at house sparrows, a mourning dove, a downy woodpecker, and wonder of wonders, a cardinal. The woman thanked me profusely when she had to leave: "I had no idea there were such beautiful birds in New York!"

Yes, there are. And as long as we fully understand that "trash birds" don't exist, we will see beautiful birds everywhere.

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## Sagebrush Songbird Survey 2015

On the morning of Saturday, April 4th, 30 birders converged on Spokane Falls Community College. Our mission? To learn how to be a part of Audubon Washington's Sagebrush Songbird Survey.

As we know, the sage steppe is shrinking, resulting in habitat loss and fragmentation. In order to assess current conditions, Audubon Washington is relying on citizen scientists to do point counts on public lands. Audubon has partnered with WDFW to design the study, oversee it and provide quality assurance. This multi-year project began last year in the Tri-Cities, and Audubon is surveying areas around Spokane this year.

Spokane Audubon's Lindell Haggin is our area coordinator and she did an amazing job planning the training. Audubon Washington's Christi Norman gave a presentation about the project. Ivar Husa, from Lower Columbia Audubon Society shared a video of the survey protocols, and our own Gary Blevins gave a fantastic presentation about the birds we would be looking for in the field.

After lunch, we carpooled to a hypothetical survey point to try out our new skills. Using GPS units, "stick birds" and smart phones for bird songs, we attempted to identify the species we would be looking for in the field: Sagebrush Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Lark Sparrow and Horned Lark.



*Learning the ropes at the survey site. Photo by Bea Harrison.*

One of the most useful things we learned about that day is *LarkWire*. It's an online educational game that teaches birders to associate songs with species. You can use it on the internet ([www.larkwire.com](http://www.larkwire.com)), or if you use Apple products it's available as an app at the iTunes store.

We surveyed in April, and May, and the first week of June marks the last dates of the 2015 survey.

Turnbull, cont. from page 1

Stan was the life of the party. Because Harris's Hawks are hardwired to be social and Stan has been around people his whole life, he spent big chunks of time demonstrating comfort behaviors: preening, rousing and tail wagging. When he wasn't making himself pretty, he scanned the horizon for interesting birds and spread his wings and tail to catch a breeze or some sun. Even Sadie, one of our most high strung birds, preened a little bit and seemed to enjoy watching the occasional bumblebee or dragonfly. A spritz from the spray bottle for both of them insured that they didn't get stressed

out because they were too warm.



*Sadie, the American Kestrel, and Ashley Karsh, the Outdoor Learning Center's Americorps staffer.*

At one point during the afternoon, Sadie attracted the unwanted attention of a Robin. The Robin chattered at us for a while before figuring out that protest was pointless. That didn't stop it from strafing the tent as it went about its business.

We were there as presenters, but our visitors added a lot to our experience.

One gentleman came by to tell us about the success of Red Kite conservation in the UK. Another woman shared her experiences in Scotland at a raptor center; she has a soft spot in her heart for Harris's Hawks because of it. A mother and son, originally from California, relayed their appreciation for California Condors and the success of conservation efforts there. Members of a girl scout troop asked some great questions about how the birds live in the wild and how they live with us. We explained many times that it's not a good idea to touch wild birds, especially raptors... they bite!

Many people said, "I could sit and watch them all day." We nodded in agreement, as we always do when we hear that statement. Even after spending a lot of time with these birds, it's impossible not to be charmed by them. (That could be said of just about ANY bird, I think.)

The staff and volunteers of Turnbull NWR did a fantastic job staging the festival (attended by 630 people!). We were grateful to have been able to be a part of it!

## Spokane Audubon Field Trips

**June 6, 2015, Saturday**

**Liberty Lake Trip**

**Leader: Joyce Alonso and Brian Miller**

This is a mostly easy walking half-day trip. Liberty Lake hosts some of the best habitat diversity in Spokane County, with breeding grebes on the lake, extensive wetlands and prairie, old second-growth Ponderosa Pine, and some of the best wetbelt mixed conifer forest in the area. Contact Joyce Alonso (448-2447) by May 31 if you plan to attend.

**June 7, 2015, Sunday**

**Douglas Creek/Waterville Plateau Trip**

**Leader: Kim Thorburn**

All levels of birders are welcome to join this all-day trip to Waterville Plateau birding hotspots. We will bird Douglas Creek (rough road access), the Waterville STP, and Badger Mtn. Contact Kim Thorburn at 465-3025 or [kthorburn@msn.com](mailto:kthorburn@msn.com) by June 1.

**June 13, 2015, Saturday**

**Iller Creek Trip**

**Leader: Gary Lee**

This trip is for birders of all levels as well as local citizens who want to learn more about protecting our precious Dishman Hills ecosystem. On this trip, we will slowly walk some of the trails and see what is there. The Iller Creek Natural Area is famed for its abundance of breeding flycatchers, vireos, and warblers. Occasionally a moose makes a cameo appearance! Meet at the Iller Creek entrance in the cul-de-sac at the end of Holman Road. Contact Gary Lee at [bird\\_fan@aol.com](mailto:bird_fan@aol.com) or 389-5474 to sign up and for meeting time.

**June 14, 2015, Sunday**

**Palisades/Indian Canyon Trip**

**Leader: Lindell Haggin**

All levels of birders are invited to explore the Indian Canyon area immediately west of town. We will be walking one or two miles. We will meet at 6:30 a.m. at the Rosauer's at 1808 W. 3rd Ave. The field trip will end at approximately 11:00 a.m. Contact Lindell Haggin (446-4118 or [lindell4118@comcast.net](mailto:lindell4118@comcast.net)) by June 7 if you plan to attend.

**June 19-June 21, 2015**

**Friday-Sunday**

**Little Pend Oreille NWR Camping Trip**

**Leaders: Fran and Brad Haywood**

Enjoy a great time camping and birding at Little Pend Oreille NWR in Stevens County, WA. To reserve a place or for more information, contact Fran Haywood (290-1814 or



birders13@gmail.com) or Joyce Alonso (448-2447) by June 13. Camping fees may apply.

**June 27, 2015, Saturday**  
**Mount Spokane Subalpine Birds Trip**  
**Leader: Jim Hudlow**

This is a half-day hiking trip for all levels of birders. The grade is very gentle but we will walk four to six miles. Be prepared, with plenty of snacks and water. You may retreat at any point. Mt. Spokane is the primary (and only publicly accessible) site for subalpine breeding birds in Spokane County, making this a popular and exciting annual event. Meet 7:00 a.m. **SHARP** at Foothills Community Church, 11100 N. Peck Road. Contact Jim Hudlow (*flyz4free@yahoo.com* or 509-926-2186) by June 21 if you plan to attend.

Note: Discover Passes required for all vehicles in Mt. Spokane State Park. Purchase online or at REI.

**August 29th, Saturday**  
**Trail of Coeur D'Alene's Bike Birding**  
**Leader: Alan McCoy and**  
**Sandy Sollie**

We are changing the trip this year. Instead of starting in Harrison, we will start at the Plummer Creek Boardwalk at 7:00 a.m. This is a short boardwalk through the marsh where Plummer Creek comes into the lake at Heyburn State Park near the Chatcolet Campground. (The two trip leaders with spouses will be camping that weekend and others are welcome to camp there too, but your campground reservations should be made early in the year, if you plan to spend the night.) From the boardwalk we will bike north on the CDA trail. We might make it to Harrison and beyond, or might not, depending on the birding. It is an easy ride on a paved, flat trail for all level of birders. Bring your bicycle/helmet, lunch, water, snacks, and optics. If we make it to Harrison, we can sit at the marina and have an ice cream

**Spokane Audubon Society**  
**Membership Form**

Local Membership Dues:

Individual: \$20/year \_\_\_\_\_

Couple & Family: \$25/year \_\_\_\_\_

Student: \$10/year \_\_\_\_\_

Lifetime: \$300 \_\_\_\_\_

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Individual + National Dues: \$55/year \_\_\_\_\_

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**Your local membership provides you with *The Pygmy Owl* and supports your local chapter's many conservation and education activities. You will also be eligible for website privileges.**

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**Visit our website: <http://spokaneaudubon.org>**

cone as a reward! The trip will end up back at the boardwalk. Contact Alan at 509-448-3123 or [ahm2352@gmail.com](mailto:ahm2352@gmail.com) by August 22 to reserve your space and to get directions and other information.

**September 12, 2015 Saturday  
Sprague Lake Migrant Trip  
Leader: Norma Trefry**

This is a half day trip to the Sprague Lake area to look for migrating birds, and birds that often stray here in September. Meet at Coeur d'Alene Park at 7am. Please call Norma Trefry by Sept 9 if you plan to attend. Phone: 926-2533. Email: [firstrefry@gmail.com](mailto:firstrefry@gmail.com).

**October 24, 2015, Saturday  
Grant County Late Fall Migrant Trip  
Leader: Gary Blevins**

This is a beginning, intermediate and advanced birder-oriented trip to look for specialty birds, such as Arctic Gulls, Lapland Longspurs, and other hard to find and see northern visitors. There may be some down time with little action in between bird sightings but potential for rarities is high. It is a full-day trip from sunrise to sunset. Contact Gary Blevins (533-3661 or [GaryB@spokanefalls.edu](mailto:GaryB@spokanefalls.edu)) by October 18 if you plan to attend.

**November 21, 2015, Saturday  
Douglas Plateau Northern Visitors Trip  
Leader: Kim Thorburn**

The Waterville Plateau is a challenging but high-quality destination for rarities during the late fall and winter months. We will spend the night of November 20 in Brewster for an earlier start with the birds during this short daylight season. Contact Kim Thorburn (465-3025 or [kthorburn@msn.com](mailto:kthorburn@msn.com)) by November 15 if you plan to attend.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.

**December 12, 2015, Saturday  
Winter Lake and Wetbelt Trip  
Leader: Joyce Alonso**

This trip takes us around Beauty Bay on Lake Coeur d'Alene where the Bald Eagles feeding on spawned out Kokanee are always a sight to behold. Probable particulars: 8:00 a.m. start at Liberty Lake Albertson's parking lot. Contact Joyce Alonso (448-2447) by December 6 if you plan to attend.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.