



Columbia Flyway

VANCOUVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Staying Vigilant for Vancouver Lake

By Susan Saul

Vancouver Lake and its associated lowlands are a vital regional asset for migratory birds and other wildlife. It is a major wintering area for waterfowl, with as many as 200,000 birds recorded here at one time. The area hosts the largest number of Sandhill Cranes west of the Cascade Mountains at Cranes Landing. The National Audubon Society has recognized the Vancouver Lake Lowlands as one of 75 Important Bird Areas in Washington, with Vancouver Audubon Society assigned as the steward to monitor its conservation.

Vancouver Lake Degraded By Human Actions

Historically, Vancouver Lake was connected to the Columbia River and handled overflow during the “spring freshet” when melting snow in the headwaters would cause river levels to rise. The annual flooding would refresh the lake and flush out sediments down Lake River. Historical accounts from the late 19th century describe Vancouver Lake as clear, up to 20 feet deep and containing sturgeon. Lewis and Clark complained in their journals that they could not sleep at night due to the noise of the masses of birds when they camped nearby in 1805.

When Bonneville Dam was completed in 1938, it was the first of more than 60 dams in the Columbia River watershed in the United States and Canada that now regulate river levels. Without annual flooding, water quality in Vancouver Lake began to degrade, leading to turbidity, increasingly shallow depths and a lack of aquatic plants such as wapato, which have diminished the variety of fish and wildlife using the lake.

Suburbanization of the lake’s watershed area also led to an increase in water pollution. Burnt Bridge Creek carried increased sediment and nutrient loading that caused eutrophication. Algal blooms have become a regular summer problem for recreational use of the lake.

In 1983, the flushing channel was built on the lake’s west side to bring cooler, cleaner Columbia River water into the

lake to mimic the annual flooding that used to happen. The project included dredging to deepen the lake, which resulted in a dredge spoil island (Turtle Island) in the north end of the lake. Nutrient concentrations in the lake declined, but high sediment loads are still a problem and the lake still experiences water-quality problems.

Friends of Vancouver Lake Formed To Address Problems

In 2017, people noticed expanding Eurasian watermilfoil in the lake. This invasive species forms thick mats in shallow areas of a lake, quickly growing and spreading to block sunlight, killing off native aquatic plants that fish and other underwater species rely on for food and shelter. It adversely affected rowing and sailing.

The Friends of Vancouver Lake formed to advocate for local and state agencies to assess the Eurasian watermilfoil infestation and obtain permits to treat the invasive species with herbicides. Vancouver Lake and the flushing channel were treated in 2020. Post-treatment surveys several weeks later showed no trace of Eurasian watermilfoil.

This year, the Friends of Vancouver Lake have hired contractors to remove carp from the lake. Carp, an introduced fish species from Asia, feed on the lake bottom, keeping the water turbid. The Friends hope removal of a large portion of the carp population at the lake will cut down on regular toxic algae blooms. The Friends plan to have the contractors return intermittently over the next three to five years to continue carp removal.

They also convinced the Legislature to appropriate funding in the state’s operating budget for a hydrology study to form the basis for a long-term plan to improve Vancouver Lake’s water quality.

These actions benefit birds and we support them.

(Continued on page 4)



From the VAS Board

While out in the community during this migration season, I have noticed a lot of multi-story residential construction along the shores of the Columbia River and many large homes being built on the high cliffs overlooking the river. It makes me think about the millions of bird casualties from building collisions, especially due to transparent and reflective glass windows and disorienting lighting. A minimum estimate of 365 million birds are killed every year in building collisions. I read in *The Columbian* that a new 14-story glass-encased hotel is planned in north Clark County that will have sky-colored glass. I'm scared for our birds!

I believe our board needs to continue to educate our members, the community, both city and county planning and building code departments, and our legislators to help minimize these hazards to birds and promote bird-safe construction. We also need to increase awareness of and promote the "Lights Out" campaign during the spring and fall migration. Cindy McCormack had a detailed article in April's newsletter on how to alter or retrofit the problem windows in our own homes to help reduce bird strikes. Another Board member, Susan Saul, has convinced the City of Vancouver to issue a proclamation to promote a bird-friendly community. She also contacted the owners of the planned glass-encased hotel regarding

the potential hazards of their building to birds, especially to migrating birds. These are excellent first steps in education, but we need to do more. There is new legislation proposed that Susan discussed in an excellent article in April's newsletter called the Bird-Safe Buildings Act. Unfortunately this bill only applies to federal buildings. It would require design features to reduce bird collisions and to use bird-safe construction materials. I have contacted my U.S. Senators and Representative to ask them to support this bill, I hope you will too. In the meantime, we all should look to our own windows and make adjustments to reduce collisions and bird fatalities and try to turn off our lights during migratory periods.

When I am out birding and hiking, I often meet people that are not members of Vancouver Audubon. I do suggest they should become a member for many reasons, but more importantly, I always encourage them to at least visit our website and read the newsletters. I brag to them about this publication, with good information on recent bird sightings, education about birds, information about our speaker programs, great photos of birds and even a bird identification quiz, plus the whole newsletter is a joy to read. Thank you Cindy McCormack, editor, and other board members with your important contributions each month.

By Joan Durgin



Vancouver Audubon Society

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Program meetings are usually held at the [West Park Community Room at 610 Esther St.](#) (just across the street from the west end of Esther Short Park, or kitty-corner from City Hall). Parking lot can be accessed from Esther Street. There is an entrance at either side of the building.

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Vancouver Audubon believes in the wisdom of nature's design and promotes this through education, involvement, stewardship, enjoyment and advocacy.

VAS is a non-profit organization under US IRS Code Section 501(c)(3).



Programs

Programs are currently scheduled as virtual events through Zoom, all start at 7:00 pm (social time at 6:30pm). All are welcome, we hope you will join us!

Contact Don Rose for more information or to get a Zoom invitation:


meetings@vancouveraudubon.org

We take a break for the summer months from monthly programs. Our next program following June's program will be:

September 7 - California Condor Recovery Program at the Oregon Zoo.

Kelli Walker, Senior condor keeper at the Oregon Zoo.

Kelli has over 20 years of experience and knowledge to share about the California Condor Recovery Program at the Oregon Zoo, in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. She will give an overview of the Condor breeding program at the Oregon Zoo, where the birds have been released, how they are doing in the wild, and perhaps future plans for release into the Pacific Northwest.



June 1 – WINTER RAPTOR SURVEY PROGRAM

Jeff Fleischer, Coordinator for the Raptor Survey Program.

Jeff has been coordinating the Raptor Survey Program for 17 years and has high quality slides and data for 31 different raptors in the west. He will discuss the density and distribution of the primary species in the project, including where different species “hang out” in the project area each winter.

American Kestrel. Photo by Mick Thompson

Field Trips

It's time! Randy has started to put together some ideas for field trips as we prepare to start offering trips and walks as COVID-19 restrictions have decreased and vaccination compliance has increased. Thanks to all that have helped become part of the solution!

We have newly updated drafts of field trip waivers and guidelines and an outline of possible trips for the rest of the year. Once we have dates set and field trip leaders, they will be announced on the website and associated blog, on Vancouver Audubon's Facebook page, and via an email announcement.

Please be aware that some or all trips may have different requirements for gathering together based on VAS's guidelines, field trip leaders' preferences, and current status of CDC and/or the state's recommendations. VAS's guidelines and waiver will be posted on the [website](#).

Interested in leading a trip or have a suggestion for a trip type or location? Contact Randy Hill at fieldtrips@vancouveraudubon.org

June 1st—Bird Walk Salmon Creek Greenway Trail, 7:30am

Want to practice your eBird mobile? We can also use this walk to have participants try out their eBird app, if desired. We can bird, discuss eBird shortcuts and best practices while enjoying the beautiful trail.

Meet at Kline Pond parking lot.

Please, only fully vaccinated participants at this time.

Contact Cindy at vas@vancouveraudubon.org to register.

(Continued from page 1)

Economic Development Plans Would Harm Bird Habitats

Unfortunately, the Friends have not stopped with improving Vancouver Lake's water quality. They also commissioned studies of the current economic impacts of sailing, rowing, and paddling events at the lake.

The outcome is a "concept vision plan" with improvements to enhance the lake's recreational appeal and economic development to turn Vancouver Lake into a major destination for competitive rowing and sailing in the Pacific Northwest.

"A broader vision for Vancouver Lake area development could involve not only enhancement of existing and new public recreation/sport opportunities, but also address the potential for other complementary private development – as with marina, dining, lodging, high wage tech-campus, service-retail, residential and mixed use development." ~E. D. Hovee & Company, LLC

That economic development would include 300 acres of residential mixed-use single and multi-family residences and light commercial development on the southeast shore where LaFrambois Road currently accesses the lake. The development would include high end homes with lakeside views, marinas and viewing areas to watch competitive rowing and sailing events. An additional 85 acres would have high tech offices and commercial development such as restaurants and hotels. That area currently is covered with riparian forest, wetlands and farm lands.

The plan

would widen the flushing channel to 1,000 feet across and line it with 65 acres of offices and commercial developments and a marina on the south bank.

The plan would convert habitat on the south shore of the lake into an arboretum of non-native plants, lawns and manicured gardens. The south shore also would have a hotel, recreation center, aquatic center and a campground.

Dredge spoils would create a peninsula in front of the Vancouver Lake Regional Park blocking the view of the lake and covered with trails. Turtle Island, which is used as a night roost by Sandhill Cranes, would be reduced in size by 50 percent and turned into a boat-in campground. The plan also would create eight miles of additional beach on the lake shore and 30 miles of trails, including around and across wetlands and through riparian forests.

None of these developments would benefit birds. Indeed, all the development and human activity would drive birds away. If this plan was implemented, Vancouver Lake would no longer be an Important Bird Area.

Remaining Vigilant

As the Friends of Vancouver Lake seek local political support for their vision of economic development, we must remain vigilant to speak up and protect the wildlife values of Vancouver Lake.



Abundance Codes used in this column:

(1) Common, (2) Uncommon, (3) Harder to find, usually seen annually, (4) Rare, 5+ records, (5) Fewer than 5 records

These codes vary for each county, to see all 39 WA county checklists go to wabirder.com and click on Checklists.

April 22, Carol Kohler reported that **VAUX'S SWIFTS** were back in her Camas neighborhood.

April 22, Jim Danzenbaker visited Frenchman's Bar Regional Park where he saw a **SWAINSON'S HAWK** (4) and an early **BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** in the trees across from entrance to Frenchman's Bar that was chattering repeatedly.

April 22, Cindy McCormack, Les Carlson and I started a day of birding at our home where we had 55 **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS** and 35 **RED CROSSBILLS**. We found another 85 Red Crossbills at the Franz Lake NWR overlook on Highway 14, we saw and heard this species at multiple places, there must be a huge number of them around this Spring. In the afternoon we walked the Whistle Punk Trail, a fairly level two-mile-long loop through some very interesting habitat adjacent to the old Wind River Nursey at Hemlock, north of Carson. There we enjoyed finding **RUFFED GROUSE**, **VIRGINIA RAIL**, **CANADA JAY**, and six species of warblers, **ORANGE-CROWNED**, **COMMON YELLOWTHROAT**, **YELLOW**, **YELLOW-RUMPED**, **TOWNSEND'S** and **BLACK-THROATED GRAY**. This was the best migration day I have had so far this year.

April 24, near the Vancouver Lake Bridge Trail access, April and Erik Brown observed the same or another **SWAINSON'S HAWK** (4) as it flew above tree level over the lake. Swainson's Hawk are identifiable by their lighter under-wing linings with darker primaries, the reverse of the pattern seen on most other hawks.

April 25, Jared Strawderman was on the Pierce NWR in Skamania County when 3 **AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS** flew overhead, he was able to get photos showing their huge white bodies with black wingtips and large orange bills with knobs. These pelicans were first seen in Skamania County about 20 years ago and are still rare

there, earning them a Code 5.

April 26, Matt Pope saw a **BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** in a tree near the Columbia River shoreline from the Steigerwald Lake NWR dike before it was closed until the Spring 2022, when the new trail will open.

April 27, Matt Pope had 4 **AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS** (5) fly over while he was hiking the Cape Horn Trail, Skamania County.

April 28, a pair of **BLACK-NECKED STILTS** (4) were found at the Ridgefield NWR River 'S' Unit by Gregory and Tina Johnson. Other birders including Randy Hill, Jim Danzenbaker, Byron Palmer, Roger Windemuth also got to see this visitor from the east side of the Cascades. Until less than fifty years ago they were not even a breeding species in Washington.

April 29, the continuing **CLARK'S GREBE** (3) on Vancouver Lake was reported by Ken Vanderkamp.

April 29, Jim Danzenbaker heard what he described as the distinctive buzz chip overhead of a **LAZULI BUNTING** while exploring the Ridgefield NWR Carty Unit.

May 1, Jim Danzenbaker spent a quiet afternoon in his Battle Ground yard with his eyes to the sky and was rewarded for the effort with 11 **AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS** in one flock heading east, 5 **TURKEY VULTURES** also in one flock, 1 **OSPREY**, 1 **NORTHERN HARRIER**, 1 **COOPER'S HAWK**, 2 **BALD EAGLES**, 6 **RED-TAILED HAWKS** and an astonishing 5 **SWAINSON'S HAWKS** (4) all of them dark birds. He described them as buteos with long pronounced pointed wings held in a slight dihedral (V-shaped). Greg Johnson and Tim Shelmerdine also got to see a couple of these hawks.

May 1, Les Carlson got a couple of new yard birds with at



Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)
Photo: Jeff Wind/Audubon Photography Awards

least four **RED CROSSBILLS** seen out of his Hazel Dell living room window and a flyover **GREATER YELLOWLEGS**.

May 2, 2 more **SWAINSON'S HAWKS** (4) were seen by Jim Danzenbaker flying over his Battle Ground yard, where he also heard the "fitz-bew" call of an early **WILLOW FLYCATCHER**.

May 2, an unusual visitor to our feeders was a **WHITE-THROATED SPARROW** (4) that only stayed around for about an hour.

May 4, our first of the year **SWAINSON'S THRUSH** showed up while Susan and I were having our morning coffee on our deck. We had been out there for about a half of an hour when we suddenly started hearing their emphatic "whit" call from the woods around us.

May 6, a breeding plumage **RED-NECKED GREBE** (3) with its black cap, large white cheek patch, red neck and large bill angled slightly downward was located at Marine Park by Robert Vanderkamp. These large grebes nest in mountain lakes in eastern Washington.

May 6, **CLARK'S GREBE** (3), is another species that nests east of the Cascades but unlike the red-necked grebe they nest in reeds and cattail areas in larger bodies of water like Moses Lake, Mike Clarke spotted two continuing birds on Vancouver Lake where they were associating with a more common **WESTERN GREBE** which nest in the same type of habitat as the Clark's Grebe.

May 6, we had a nice morning watching for migrant birds from our deck. About 40 **BAND-TAILED PIGEONS**, 8 **EVENING GROSBEAKS** and a female **LAZULI BUNTING** were at our feeding area, but the bunting was mainly eating the seed heads of a small grass in the lawn. We don't get these lovely birds at our place every year and they seldom stay for more time than it takes to refuel before they leave.

May 7, an adult male **BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD** (3)



Female Lazuli Bunting
Photo by Wilson Cady



Female and Male Evening Grosbeak
Photo by Wilson Cady

visited one of our feeders, this was the last of the four species of hummingbirds that nest in the state to visit our feeders this year. I was really happy to see this bird as two days earlier Susan saw one that showed up and left during the few minutes when I went into the house to get more coffee, after sitting on the deck birding for over an hour.

May 8, the continuing Vancouver Lake **CLARK'S GREBE** (3) was seen from the Shillapoo WA LaFrambois Rd access by Robert Vanderkamp.

May 9, Andreas Anderson was on Strawberry Island, below Bonneville Dam when he had a slow flyover of 27 **AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS** (4) in a V-formation flying from east to west. This is the largest number of these birds ever reported from Skamania County.

May 9, a **DUSKY FLYCATCHER** (4) was seen and heard by Cindy McCormack at Clark College. She described it in eBird as: Calling occasionally. Empidonax foraging from dead lower branches of evergreen. Eye-ring evident, but not as much as Pacific-slope Flycatcher, short primary extension, long tail with notch, subtle thin white outer edge to outer rectrices, narrow bill, more rounded head with slight peak at rear crown, pale grayish vest, pale yellow wash on lower abdomen, thin but obvious wing bars. Lifting tail consistently when returning to perch (unlike downward phoebe-like pump of the Gray Flycatcher).

May 11, between several ponds east of the dike trail going northeast from the end of Lower River Road in the Vancouver Lowlands the following shorebirds were seen by Jim Danzenbaker and Shawneen Finnegan: 1 **SEMIPALMATED PLOVER**, 10 **KILLDEER**, 7 **DUNLIN**, 20 **LEAST SANDPIPER**, 1 **SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER**, the first he had ever seen in Spring in western Washington, 22 **WESTERN SANDPIPER**, 9 **LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER**, 1

WILSON'S SNIPE, 1 **WILSON'S PHALAROPE**, 4 **SPOTTED SANDPIPER**, 5 **GREATER YELLOWLEGS** and 1 **LESSER YELLOWLEGS**.

Finding 12 species of shorebirds in Clark County in one location in the Spring does not

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

happen very often. The **SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** was also seen by Cindy McCormack and Randy Hill.

May 11, a single **SNOW GOOSE** was seen by Cindy McCormack and Randy Hill hanging out near Canada Geese at the end of Lower River Road. The large flocks of these geese that wintered here headed to their Arctic breeding grounds several weeks ago and this may an ill or wounded bird unable to make the migration.

May 11, the Vancouver Lake **CLARK'S GREBE** (3) was seen by Randy Hill from the Rowing Club Access, this bird should be on its breeding grounds by this time of the year.

May 11, we had a very short visit by a male **BULLOCK'S ORIOLE**, a species we have only had there a handful of times over the last 45 years.

May 12, a **WHITE-FACED IBIS** (4) was found by John Bishop in the Vancouver Lowlands at the end of Lower River Road. These large wading birds with their dark greenish-brown glossy plumage and a long decurved bill are another denizen of the marshlands east of the Cascades with the nearest breeding population being in southeast Oregon.

May 12, a migrant **WILLOW FLYCATCHER** was seen by Jim Danzenbaker on lower Larch Mountain. These birds nest there and locally at lower elevations, often near water, and are one of the easiest flycatchers to identify by ear with their distinctive "fitz-bew" song.

May 12, while walking the Whistle Punk Trail near

Hemlock on the Wind River, John Davis picked out 2 **CASSIN'S FINCHES** (3) feeding with a group of purple finches and warblers in willow and ash trees. They were females with markings on white belly more sharply delineated than other finches, bill more pointed and conical, cheek had a little more color than the other finches. This is a species of the Ponderosa Pine forests but do wander and occasionally are reported in Clark County too.

May 13, Cindy McCormack, Les Carlson and I did some more birding in Skamania County, a stop at Strawberry Island produced a cooperative **SPOTTED SANDPIPER**, 4 **PURPLE MARTINS** and 4 **WESTERN MEADOWLARKS**. Spotted Sandpipers, Killdeer and Wilson's Snipe are the only shorebirds regularly seen in Skamania County.



*Purple Martins on Strawberry Island
Photo by Wilson Cady*

Strawberry Island is one of the few grassland areas in the county and the only spot that I consistently see meadowlarks but it was the Purple Martins at a new colony there that proved to be most interesting as Cindy was able to read the numbers on a leg band on one of the males and it had been banded as a chick from the colony at Steigerwald Lake. We ended the afternoon with a pair of **HARLEQUIN DUCKS** (3) and a recently fledged **AMERICAN DIPPER** at the Little White Salmon Fish Hatchery.

May 14, Michael Hurben reported another **WILLOW FLYCATCHER** from the Ridgefield NWR Kiwa Trail, where they will soon become common.

May 14, Skamania County's first **WILLOW FLYCATCHER** of 2021 was found by John Davis on the Whistle Punk Trail.

May 15, Luke Hanes found an **AMERICAN AVOCET** (5) in the Vancouver Lake Lowlands at the end of Lower River

Road. These large shorebirds with a long, thin, upturned bill and a buffy-orange wash on the head and neck are a bird of the east side of the Cascades that nest in shallow ponds and marshes where they feed on freshwater shrimp and insects. With the continuing drought in the west, their nesting and feeding areas are disappearing, forcing them to wander in search of suitable habitat.

*Harlequin Ducks on Little White Salmon River
Photo by Wilson Cady*



(Continued on page 8)

May 15, Katie Warner was at the Ridgefield NWR River 'S' Unit when she heard and saw a **WILLOW FLYCATCHER**.

May 15, George Mason found and photographed Skamania County's first **NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (5) at the St. Cloud Wayside.

May 16, after being notified about the **NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (5), John Davis was able to find and photograph it.

May 16, A **BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** (5) was found and photographed on the Cape Horn Trail by Dan Nelson, this is only the second record of this bird from the southwestern deserts for Skamania County. There is a very small breeding population in Washington near the Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park at Vantage, Kittitas Co., with the next closest breeding area being in the southeast corner of Oregon.

May 18, Jim Danzenbaker heard four or five notes from an **AMERICAN REDSTART** (5) flying over his Battle Ground yard. This is the third year out of the last four for this species from his home.

The Kiwa Trail on the Ridgefield NWR was closed this Spring when a pair of **SANDHILL CRANES** nested there for the second year in a row.

Bob Flores shared a report that had been posted on Nextdoor Neighbor of a **GREAT GRAY OWL** (5) photographed in Woodland on March 4. This is the first

local sighting of this largest North American owl in the 45 years that I have been writing this column.

Compiling this column highlighted a couple of things, the first being the continuing drought across the west that is dispersing pelicans, ibis, avocets and stilts as their marshland breeding grounds dry up. The second observation is on how disappointing Spring migration has been this year. We usually start our days having coffee on our deck watching migrating birds, but this year we have

seen far fewer numbers of birds returning than any time in my fifty years of birding. At our place, six miles east of Washougal, we have only seen a couple of flycatchers and very few vireos or warblers and only have half of our swallow nest boxes occupied this year. We will not know if the birds just flew over us to their breeding grounds or the extent of the issue until after the breeding bird surveys are completed this year and the data analyzed. I have heard no

reasonable explanations for this year's silent spring.

Since April 20th, 31 species of birds have been added to the Clark County list for the 2021 County Cumulative Year List Project raising it to 208 for the year and in Skamania County 29 birds were added to that year list bringing that list to 165. This list of birds seen in a county by anyone is updated every two months and can be seen at:

[Washington Birder \(wabirder.com\)](http://WashingtonBirder.com)

Please continue to send me your sightings for this column or post them to Tweepers.com or on eBird.

By Wilson Cady



*Western Meadowlark
Photo by Wilson Cady*

PURPLE MARTIN SIGHTINGS AND BAND NUMBERS NEEDED!

It's that time of year again! Purple Martins have arrived for the season and we are looking for reports of banded birds.

We have several banded birds returning every year and need your help in getting the numbers recorded. **Even if you cannot read the band, a reported location is helpful!**

Every banded martin will have an aluminum band on one leg and a color band on another. The color band (green if banded in Washington) will have a single letter followed by three numbers. The aluminum band will have 9 digits; 4 on the top row, 5 on the bottom row.

Any information on the banded birds would be appreciated!

Information needed:

- Location of bird
- Which leg has the color band
- Band numbers
- Sex/age of bird if possible

Any questions? Birds to report?

Please contact Cindy at nwbirder@gmail.com



Purple Martins, photo by Randy Hill

Bird ID Challenge

By Cindy McCormack

May's Bird ID Challenge Answer

So, why did I throw in a photo on the quiz this month with a complete view of the bird? There isn't anything particularly tricky about this photo, I just happened to have several questions from a few different people in the last month about differentiating between the red finches. Specifically, what to look (or listen) for to separate House, Purple, and Cassin's Finches.

For most people, the House Finch is easiest to recognize. It is the most frequent feeder visitor, allowing closer study.

This gives you the opportunity to learn their plumage variations, patterns, shape, and sounds for comparison. Separating Cassin's and Purple Finches tends to be more challenging for most. In Clark County, House Finches are the most common, Purple Finches relatively common, but Cassin's Finches are very rare. (They are more common in pine forests of eastern Washington).

Let's start with some general species descriptions:

House Finches: More slender appearance with round head. Bill culmen has deep down curve (decurved). Generally dull brown with heavy streaking on breast and abdomen, back appears very plain. Males have varying shades of red (although sometimes orange or yellow!) on eyebrow stripe, crown, cheek, shoulder patch, rump, and upper breast. (*The male's supercilium and crown patch remind me of the 80's aerobics instructor sweatband look*).

Females are usually mostly dull brown, although some may show faint color on the rump, crown, and breast. The face of a female appears very plain, no obvious pattern. The underpart streaking is heavy and blurry on a slightly grayish background.

Purple Finches: Chunky finch. Bill culmen has a relatively gentle downcurve. Relatively short tail with deep notch. Males have raspberry-red relatively uniformly across upperparts, head, neck, and sides (*think of a finch dipped head-first into raspberry juice*). The abdomen and under-



May's quiz bird
Photo by Cindy McCormack

tail coverts are bright white and usually unmarked.

Females generally have little or no red. They have a light eyebrow stripe contrasting with solid auriculars. The back is streaked across back with dark brown, the breast and abdomen streaking is dense and blurry on a background of bright white.

Cassin's Finches: Chunky finch. Bill culmen mostly straight (slight downcurve at tip) with a pointed appearance. Relatively short-looking

tail with deep notch. Longer wings than similar Purple Finch. Adult male's red is brightest on cap, while the back, breast, and flanks are much paler and pinkish. The undertail coverts, and often lower flanks are finely streaked.

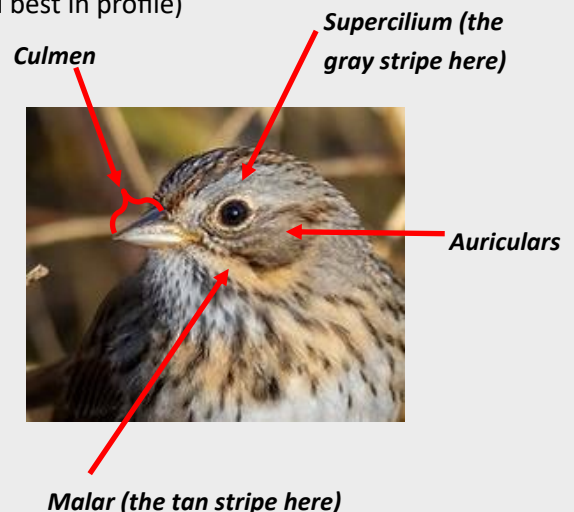
Terms to know:

Auriculars: the "cheek," the patch of feather that cover and surround the ear openings.

Malar: feathering along the side of the lower jaw

Supercilium: eyebrow stripe, the stripe above the eye

Culmen: the top edge of the upper mandible of the bill (viewed best in profile)



Females have breast and flanks with more sparse and crisp dark brown streaks on bright, clean white. The back and rump streaked deep brown-black over pale grayish-brown. There is an obvious face pattern, but not as defined as most Purple Finches—the auricular patch contrasts less distinctly with the pale lines above and below eye.

So, with those in mind (that was a lot of information!), let's look at the quick basic features to check for visual identification:

- **Bill:** the shape of the bill can be very helpful. How curved is the culmen?
 - ◇ House has the deepest curve
 - ◇ Purple more shallowly curved
 - ◇ Cassin's almost straight. (Cassin's Finch bills somewhat resemble Pine Siskin bills in profile in comparison to the other two finches. Cassin's bills are fairly straight until the very tip, where there is a slight curve.)
- **Facial Pattern:** can vary based on wear and individual variation.
 - ◇ House: female plain-faced, male prominent red supercilium and forehead
 - ◇ Purple: female auriculars solid brown with white supercilium, male uniform raspberry red.
 - ◇ Cassin's: female with obvious pattern, but weaker than Purple, male with bright cap contrasting with rest of head; auriculars, malar, and supercilium fairly distinct.
- **Overall shape**
 - ◇ House: relatively slender with a rounded head
 - ◇ Purple: stocky, slight peak to head can give a steeper forehead appearance. Relatively shorter tail, obvious deep notch in tail.
 - ◇ Cassin's: stocky slight peak to head, longer wings/primary projection than both House and Purple. Notched tail.
- **Male coloration pattern:** brightest coloration normally found on:
 - ◇ House: forehead, eyebrow, and malar
 - ◇ Purple: fairly uniform on head, back, and breast
 - ◇ Cassin's: crown

- **Back/rump**

- ◇ House female: back and rump uniformly plain (streaking very subtle)
- ◇ Purple female has obviously streaked back but unstreaked rump
- ◇ Cassin's female has obviously streaked back and rump.

- **Streaking** (females)

- ◇ House: indistinct blurry streaks on a pale dull grayish-brown background
- ◇ Purple: dense, blurry streaking on white
- ◇ Cassin's: crisp, narrow streaking on white

If I can't hear the bird, I will check the bill, face and streaking (in that order).

So, which finch do we have in the photo?

With all that red, it's obviously a male, so that makes identification a bit easier. Since we can't hear a photo, we will have to rely on field marks.

Overall, this is a fairly chunky looking bird with a slightly peaked head, so that will point us towards the Purple/Cassin's. Even if you have difficulty with that elimination of House, we can use the bill, stronger face pattern and obviously streaked back to eliminate House.

Notice the bill. That culmen is fairly straight and the bill look overall pointy.

Now, the face. See how the crown almost looks lit up with red, but the rest of the red is more dilute? The rear portion of the head, the nape and the back have almost no red.

This information alone is enough to get us a positive identification, but let's check the other fieldmarks.

The back is obviously streaked with dark streaking on a grayish background.

Now the breast, abdomen, and flanks (what we can see of them) appear to be relatively unmarked. We can't really see the lower flanks or undertail coverts to check for fine streaking.

Although difficult to see in this photo with the wing tucked against and

(Continued on page 11)



(Continued from page 10)

slightly below the tail, you can also make out a relatively long primary extension and obviously notched tail.



This male **CASSIN'S FINCH** was photographed in the mountains near Walla Walla.



Note the bright cap, brownish malar & auricular patch, and the clear breast and abdomen of the male; the dark and distinct streaks of the female. Both show a straight culmen.

Male and female Cassin's Finches. Photo by Sherry Hagen



Purple Finch female and male. Note the bill on both and the head shape. The streaking and auricular patch on the female are quite distinctive. The male's head looks like the female's, but like it was stained with raspberry juice, the darker parts actually darker red than the supercilium.

Purple Finch and House Finch photos by Mick Thompson

House Finch female and male. Note the rounded head, more slender shape with the relatively long tail. The bill is very short and the culmen very curved. The female has a very plain face and dense indistinct streaking. The male's supercilium and forehead are quite prominent. Otherwise, more of a "dirty face" look.



As we approach the summer hiatus for the newsletter, I would like to know what sort of bird highlight articles or discussion readers would like to include next fall. Should we continue with challenging photo identification? Species highlights? Other requests?

Send requests, questions, comments, and feedback to [Cindy](mailto:vas@vancouveraudubon.org) at vas@vancouveraudubon.org.

INJURED WILDLIFE: WHAT TO DO?

Injured Wildlife Hotline: 503-292-0304

The nearest wildlife care and rehabilitation center is operated by Portland Audubon. Here are some general guidelines from their [Wildlife Care Center](#):



1. **Prioritize your safety**
 2. **Safely contain the animal**
 3. **Keep the animal calm and secure until you can take it to. Wildlife Care Center**
- **Do not handle the animal** any more than necessary to contain it. Limiting contact will reduce stress on the animal.
 - **Keep the animal in a warm, dark, and quiet space.** Keep them away from children and pets.
 - **Many animals benefit from a heating pad** set on low under half their enclosure, or a sock filled with dry rice and microwaved for 2-3 minutes.
 - **Do not feed the animal.**
 - **Be cautious when choosing to leave water.** Many wild animals do not drink standing water, and attempting to help them drink can result in pneumonia. In addition, if an animal spills its water and gets wet, it could get cold and may die. If in doubt, it is better not to leave water.

Bring the animal to the Wildlife Care Center as soon as you can. If you can't bring it to the center during our open hours, or you believe the animal is in critical condition and needs immediate attention after hours, the Wildlife Care Center has a partnership with the [24 hour Emergency Veterinary Hospital Dove Lewis](#). To get in touch with them, call (503) 228-7281.

If you are unable to transport to the care center, try calling Arden 360-892-8872. If he is available to transport a bird, you will be asked to donate a gas mileage compensation and a small donation for the Care Center for the care of the bird at the time of pick up.

The Wildlife Care Center admits native wild patients and operates its Injured Wildlife Hotline from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., 365 days a year.

NWR Updates

Refuge Information current as of publication. Check the alerts on the [website](#) for current information.

Ridgefield NWR

Entrance fee program has been reinstated.

Automatic Gate times for all units: dawn to dusk, times posted at the entrance and on website

"S" Unit

Auto Tour Route: Open Daily

May 1 to Sept 30, foot traffic is allowed on the Auto Tour Route.

Kiwa Trail: Closed until further notice for nesting

Sandhill Cranes. Staff will continue to carefully monitor this activity and open the trail when these birds are no longer using the area. It is extremely important that the public does not use this trail during this sensitive time.

Carty Unit

****New Construction ****

The construction of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge's Multi-Purpose building is well underway! The main entrance looks a bit messy however you can still access the trail from the lower parking lot.

Spur trail from Main Street Bridge Closed During Construction

The pedestrian trail from Main Avenue to the trail head at the Carty Unit will remain closed during the duration of the construction. Visitors can still drive in or walk in from the sidewalk through the main entrance gate.

Port entrance: Lookout open year-round. Trail to Plankhouse opens May 1st.

Steigerwald Lake NWR

Closed to All Public Access for Restoration

[Video update of the Steigerwald project](#)

Vancouver Audubon Society Support & Donation Form

Membership dues support education, speaker programs, newsletter, and conservation projects.

**Renewal date:
September 1st**

_____ I wish to become a supporter of Vancouver Audubon for \$20/year or \$_____

Please include this form and make check payable to and send to: Vancouver Audubon, P.O. Box 1966, Vancouver, WA 98668-1966 **-OR- join/renew/donate online at vancouveraudubon.org**

VAS will not share your information with any other organization. VAS is a non-profit organization under US IRS Code Section 501(c)(3).

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____ PHONE _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____ (req'd for newsletter)

For additional information on membership to National Audubon (Chapter # Y13), go to <http://www.audubon.org/>

May 2021

23/30	24/31	25 Board Mtg	26	27	28	29
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

June 2021

		1 Bird Walk Program	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16			19
20	21	22	23			26
27	28	29	30			

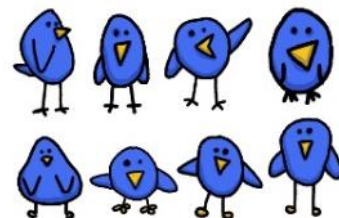
Remember, we don't have newsletters or scheduled programs during July and August. Any special events, will be announced via email, through the website, and on Facebook.

MAY 25 (TUE): VAS Board Meeting via Zoom, 6:30pm

JUN 1 (TUE): Bird Walk, Salmon Creek Trail/Klineline Pond, 7:30am

JUN 1 (TUE): Program: Winter Raptor Survey Program, 6:30pm social, 7pm program via Zoom. All are welcome!

TBD: ANNUAL SUMMER PLANNING MEETING. Contact any board member to be notified of meeting time/location and/or if you have any input.



Contents

VAS Board & Chairs	2
From The Board	2
Programs	3
Field Trips	3
Conservation	4
Wilson Cady's Afield	5-8
Bird ID Challenge	9-11
Ridgefield Updates	12
Membership/Donation form	12
Injured Wildlife	12

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