

Columbia Flyway

VANCOUVER AUDUBON SOCIETY *A chapter of the National Audubon Society*



Volume 50 Number 3

April 2025

vancouveraudubon.org



U.S. Bird Populations Continue Alarming Decline

The **2025 U.S. State of the Birds** report, produced by the National Audubon Society and a coalition of leading science and conservation organizations, reveals continued widespread declines in American bird populations across all main-land and marine habitats, with 229 species requiring urgent conservation action.

The worst losses are among grassland birds (down by 43% since 1970) but forest birds have been hit hard too. Even waterfowl, which had been improving, are showing steep declines since 2022. The report comes five years after the landmark 2019 study that documented the loss of 3 billion birds in North America over 50 years.

Learn more about the health of the nation's bird populations and what you can do to help us bring birds back by checking out the 2025 [U.S. State of the Birds](#) report.

Youth Photo Contest participants report both joy and deeper connection

By Ken Pitts

Vancouver Audubon is now running the [Steigerwald Youth Photo Contest](#). Youth from ages 8 to 18 can enter up to five photos taken on the trails of Steigerwald Lake NWR into four different categories: Plants, Animals, & Fungi, Landscape, People in Nature, and SmartPhones. Our generous corporate sponsors, [Columbia Credit Union](#) and [HD Aluminum Prints](#), are supplying \$1,800 in cash prizes along with high quality aluminum prints of the 12 winning photos. The deadline for entry of qualified photos is May 31, 2025.

Four winning participants from the 2024 contest reported in recorded interviews experiencing both deeper connections with nature and joy upon learning their photos were selected by the judges to be in the top three. [John Mendoza](#) (Spotted Towhee photo) shared, "The contest connected me to nature by just getting me outdoors. I learned more about birds and their different species. I now have a list of different birds and wildlife I would like to photograph." When asked about his reaction to learning he had won both a 1st and 2nd place, John smiled and said, "When I won, my reaction was surprise and joy, because after all the hard work I put in going out to the refuge, that one of them would win was just really cool!"

[Shaunak Deshpande](#) explained, "The peacefulness of the refuge allowed me to observe nature closely and develop a deeper connection with it. Photography became a way to share nature with others, helping them to appreciate it too." He enthusiastically responded when asked his thoughts about winning three cash prizes, "...it was not just a personal achievement, but also a



Photo credit: John Mendoza, 2nd place in 2024 Plants, Animals, & Fungi category



Photo credit: Emmett Caine, 1st place in 2024
Plants, Animals, & Fungi category

asked about winning, she said, "I was very excited and happy! When I found out I got first place, I felt so honored, as I know there are so many landscape pictures that can be taken from the refuge."

Vancouver Audubon members can help promote this contest by sharing this information with families you know that have youth:

[PDF poster](#) that can be shared by email

[JPG poster](#) that can be shared on social media

[Link](#) to the details of the contest

way to showcase the beauty of the Steigerwald refuge and inspire others to appreciate and protect our natural world."

[Emmett Caine](#) (Hoverfly photo) exuded joy when describing how he felt about receiving 1st places in two different categories, "I was super happy, and I was like, astonished that I had won, and it was awesome...and so that was really cool!"

[Shalaka Deshpande](#) (Crown Point from Steigerwald photo) reported, "When I got my first camera at the age of 10, the Steigerwald Refuge was one of the first places I took it with my family." ... "As I started going there often, I have felt a deep connection and passion toward being in the environment and to keep absorbing nature's beauty." When

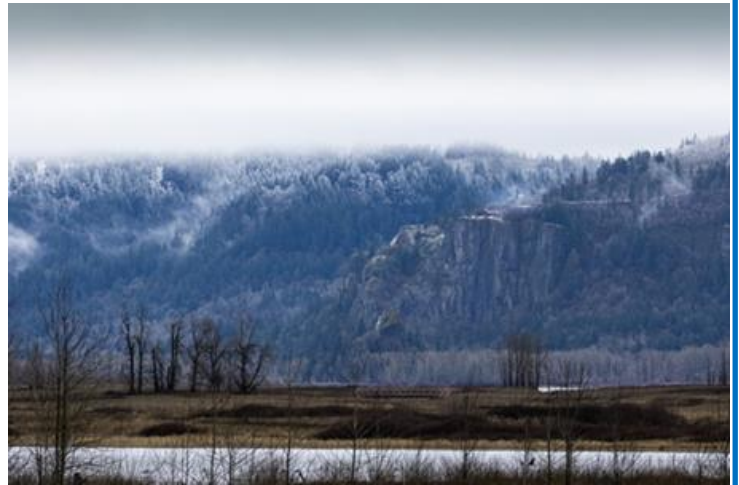


Photo credit: Shalaka Deshpande, 1st place in 2024 Landscape category

Have you renewed your membership? Are you interested in joining our group? Help protect birds and their habitat in southwest Washington by donating or volunteering to help birds locally. Visit our [website](#) to complete a secure transaction using your credit/debit card or PayPal account and/or look for opportunities to volunteer. Annual dues are \$30 for local membership. You can donate an additional amount as well. Welcome!



PO Box 1966 | Vancouver, WA 98668-1966
Website | vancouveraudubon.org
Facebook | [@Vancouver Audubon](https://www.facebook.com/VancouverAudubon)

**Vancouver Audubon Society is a non-profit organization
under US IRS Code Section 501(c)(3).
Chartered December 18, 1975**

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

The Columbia Flyway is published monthly September through June (except January). Vancouver Audubon Board Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of the month, August through May (except December). Membership meetings and programs are held on the first Tuesday of the month, September through June (except January).

THE COLUMBIA FLYWAY is the monthly newsletter of the Vancouver Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Publication deadline is the 20th of the preceding month unless otherwise posted.

Changes Happening to The National Wildlife Refuge System: What Does It Mean?

On March 14, the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) celebrated the 122nd birthday of the National Wildlife Refuge System with a webinar breaking down what's happening in Washington, D.C. and what it means for the Refuge System. Desirée Sorenson-Groves, President & CEO of the NWRA, discussed how recent and impending decisions by the new administration and Congress are impacting national wildlife refuges.

The National Wildlife Refuge System contains 850 million acres in 573 national wildlife refuges supported by 2,100 employees and a \$542 million budget. In the past 15 years, visits are up 53 percent (24 million annual visits) while the work force has declined 30 percent. Over that same period the budget has lost purchasing power: adjusted for inflation, it should be \$731 million.

The Trump Administration's priorities:

- Shrink federal work force
- End grants
- End leases and dispose of buildings
- Sell public lands

Refuge System work force:

Since January, seasonal hiring has been frozen and 26 job offers were rescinded. Approximately 123 probationary employees were fired on February 14. It is unclear how many employees have accepted "Fork in the Road" resignations. Meanwhile, 16 percent of the current work force are eligible for retirement. Reductions in Force (RIFs) are expected next. After the RIFs, massive reorganization of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, parent agency of the Refuge System, and relocation of employees away from Washington, D.C., are anticipated.

Refuge System lands:

Marine National Monuments are ocean areas designated by a presidential proclamation under the Antiquities Act and managed as part of the Refuge System. They are Mariana Trench, Northeast Canyons and Seamounts, Pacific Islands Heritage, Rose Atoll, and Papahānaumokuākea. Trump rescinded the marine monuments in his first term and he is anticipated to rescind them again.

Sale of public lands must go through Congress but the sales could be used as a way to generate federal revenue.

The Trump administration also has issued multiple orders to open all federal lands to oil, gas and mineral extraction. Multiple executive orders open Alaska's wildest landscapes to drilling and mining. Reversing the Western Arctic Special Areas Rule would open more than 13 million acres of intact landscapes to oil and gas leasing and drilling. The orders will also reinstate oil and gas leasing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (previously struck down by the courts), the crown jewel of the Arctic, and provide preferential treatment to destructive mining and pipeline projects that would destroy millions of acres of wildlands.

End protection of migratory birds:

The administration has proposed reversing current policy and bringing back its prior interpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act—which had been deemed illegal by federal courts. Reversing these actions will undo bedrock protections for more than 1,000 migratory bird species and allow industries to kill birds without consequence.

Fiscal Year 2026: The Refuge System is anticipating massive funding cuts in the next fiscal year.

What you can do

The NWRA recommended these actions:

- Be a voice for wildlife refuges and federal employees
- Write letters to the editor in support of local refuges
- Write letters to congressional representatives in support of local refuges
- Share your advocacy for refuges on social media

Use the [Refuge Strong](#) tag to show your support for refuges



Close The Lid

From Wildlife Care Center, Bird Alliance of Oregon

Closing the lids to vault and pit toilets saves lives. If one person had just closed the lid, this beautiful Barn Owl would still be here today.

So, what happened? This adult Barn Owl was found in a vault toilet at the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge and rescued by a biologist on staff before it was transported to the Wildlife Care Center. After an initial exam our team found severe feather contamination with human feces and isopods (small crustaceans) associated with human waste. After we ruled out other injuries, we performed an initial bath and then placed the owl in an incubator to warm up and dry off. The isopods thankfully started dropping like flies, and the bird appeared to perk up with supportive care. While we were initially hopeful, we are sad to say that this beautiful Barn Owl didn't make it. It may have been the stress of the whole ordeal, or something ingested, but what a heartbreaking way to go.

To avoid animals being trapped in vault and pit toilets at trailheads, please close the lid when you are done. There is no guarantee that the vent stack has a screen to keep out owls or other cavity seeking birds. We can all do our part to help mitigate human-wildlife conflicts.



Wildlife Care Center staff trying to save a Barn Owl

GET INVOLVED! Bill Tracker: WA 2025 Legislative Session

Weekly updates and actions to support the passage of priority bills for birds

Track the progress of Audubon Washington's priority bills below during the Washington State 2025 legislative session.

Step 1: Join Audubon Washington's [ACTION NETWORK](#) to receive weekly legislative update emails in your inbox with the key action that we need that week to pass this agenda.

Step 2: Learn about our [2025 legislative priorities](#).

Step 3: Support bills by clicking "Take Action" in the "Status" column. Audubon Washington will update the column weekly throughout the legislative session with the most impactful action you can take to support that bill.

VAS Program

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Dark Skies at Night, Migrants Delight

Mary Coolidge, Bird Alliance of Oregon



Take the Pledge to help Save Energy, Save Birds and See Stars!

Do an audit of your home lighting and follow best practices:

- Turn off your outdoor lights when you're not using them.
- Make sure outside lights aim down and are well-shielded so that they don't create light trespass or glare.
- Install motion sensors on your outside lights so that they're only on when needed.
- When converting outdoor lights to LED, choose warm bulbs (3,000 Kelvins or under).
- During migration seasons, draw your blinds or curtains to reduce light spill.

The night is naturally lit only by the moon and stars, and life on this planet evolved under regular cycles of bright days and dark nights. But in the last century, the night has become liberally colonized with artificial light. Recent research shows night sky brightness increasing globally by nearly 10% per year. Most of us live in cities that are ablaze with light—from billboards to parking lot lighting to street lights—even while we sleep. Not only does this obscure the Milky Way and stars from 80% of North Americans, but the overabundance of light at night also has dire ecological consequences—not just for the millions of migrating birds that use the stars to navigate, but also for mammals, amphibians, fish and plants, as well as for human health.

Join us to talk about the impacts of light pollution, and learn about how you can help in the effort to preserve starry skies while simultaneously maintaining safe and vibrant nighttime cityscapes.

Mary Coolidge has been on Bird Alliance of Oregon's Conservation team since 2008, and serves as the BirdSafe Campaign Coordinator, working to reduce hazards for birds in the built environment. Mary is dedicated to improving efforts to make urban environments more hospitable to wildlife and helping connect people to nature and place right here in the city. Mary splits her time between BAO and the Oregon Zoo's California Condor breeding program.

MEETING LOCATION:

[Evergreen Public Schools Administration](#)

[13413 NE LeRoy Haagen Memorial Drive](#)

Vancouver, WA

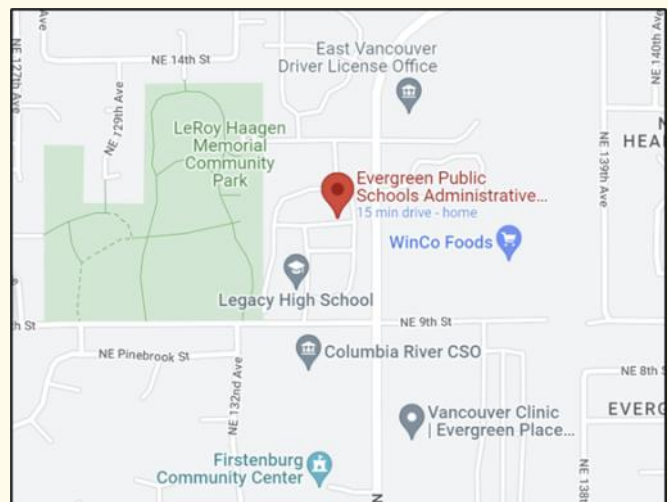
6:30 pm – 6:45 pm - Social time, share bird sightings.

6:45 pm – 7:00 pm - Announcements

7:00 pm – 8:15 pm - Program

Programs are held the first Tuesday of the month except Jan, July, & August. All are welcome, we hope you will join us!

Contact Jackson Wolfe for more information at Jackson@vancouveraudubon.org. Have ideas for a speaker? Please send all topic, speaker, and program suggestions and requests to Jackson.



Enter the parking lot on the LeRoy Haagen Memorial Drive side. (If you navigate to LeRoy Haagen Park, your Google Maps should take you to the correct road).

Please visit the [VAS website](#) for up-to-date field trip details and requirements. Interested in getting field trip announcements in your inbox or as a text? Send a message to vas@vancouveraudubon.org to be added to those lists. Please specify if you prefer email, text through GroupMe, or both.

Tuesday, April 1 First-of-Month Bird Walk Shillapoo Lake

Meeting time: 7:30 am

Leader: Cindy McCormack

Register: Cindy at vas@vancouveraudubon.org

Meeting Location: [Shillapoo Lake Wildlife Area](#)

An excellent variety of waterfowl can be viewed at this location. Raptors, cranes, and waders—oh, my! We will also look for shorebirds, look for Short-eared and Great Horned Owls, check the sparrow flocks, and enjoy any other birds we find. We will meet at Shillapoo's northeast access point, just across the road from the north bridge access for the Vancouver Lake Trail. Continue past Vancouver Lake park, through all the rumble strips to the two wide pullouts along either side of the road.

If weather and time permit, an option to explore a bit of the North Bridge trail can be added.

Hiking OR waterproof boots are recommended. Dress for the weather. Nearest restrooms available at Vancouver Lake Regional Park.



Short-eared Owl

Ken Pitts, Fotofest 2023

Saturday, April 26 Skamania County

Cindy McCormack will lead a trip to Skamania Landing/Beacon Rock SP and other areas of Skamania County along SR-14 on 4/26. Check our website for further details about this field trip.

Naturalist led bird walks at Ridgefield NWR

Birding with Robert Vanderkamp—Saturday April 12th, 8 am and Saturday May 10th, 8 am.

Upcoming walks meet at the [Carty Unit of the Refuge](#) and are limited to 10 people. These generally last two to three hours but you are welcome to stay as long or short as works for you. Walks are free but the \$3 refuge daily fee does apply. For more information about the fee and rules of the refuge [click here](#).

Birding with Ron Escano - Saturday April 5th, 8 am and Saturday May 3rd, 8 am

Ron has years of experience guiding local birding groups. Whether you are new to birding, are looking to sharpen your skills, or just hope to find a group to bird with, Ron is a great person to spend a morning with. His pace is relaxed, but thorough, making sure everyone has seen or heard each species. Ron will help new birders focus on key identification points to build their bird knowledge while sorting through the nuances of sparrow calls for more advanced birders.

VAS Bird Walks & Field Trips

Bird Walk—Saturday, April 19, 2025

Burnt Bridge Creek Greenway—Stewart Glen Trail

Meeting time: 8:00 a.m.

Leaders: Ken Pitts & Cheri Gavin

Register: Ken at kenp@vancouveraudubon.org

Meeting location: [Burnt Bridge Creek parking area](#) (45°40'24.0"N 122°41'24.5"W)

Burnt Bridge Creek Greenway offers great views of ponds near the beginning, has a gorgeous, paved pathway through mixed deciduous and conifer forest, and offers abundant edge habitat with meadow grasses and shrubs. We will walk from the parking area east and take a three-mile partial loop (1.5 out and back) through the varied habitats of the greenway. This is a level 1 A B walk with mostly paved pathways, but with an optional off pavement segment of dirt, gravel and wood chips. There is a portable ADA-compliant restroom available at the trailhead.

There is ample parking space along the north side of NW Bernie Drive. Approach Bernie from NW Fruit Valley Rd. Drive uphill on Bernie until you find a street to comfortably do a U-turn and then park near the end on the north side next to the greenway.

If you would like to be included on text updates, be sure to give Ken your SmartPhone number when you register by email at kenp@vancouveraudubon.org. This



Stewart Glen from the Stewart Glen trail

Photo: Ken Pitts

Upcoming Bird Festivals in Washington

Interested in exploring new areas for birds and possibly making some new friends in the process? Washington State has many opportunities to attend bird festivals each month, both east and west of the Cascade Range. Here are some to choose from in the near future.

April

[Brant Wildlife Festival, British Columbia](#)

[Olympic Peninsula BirdFest](#)

[Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival](#)

May

[Wings Over Whidbey Festival](#)

[Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest](#)

[World Migratory Bird Day](#)

[Yakima River Canyon Bird Fest](#)

For a full list of Bird Festivals throughout the year go to [Audubon Washington Bird Festivals](#).



Black Turnstone in Westport, WA Photo: Jackson Wolfe, Fotofest 2024

Public Engagement—Earth Day

By Becky Boley

Earth Day first occurred April 22, 1970, to bring environmental protection and regulation into the national conversation. By December of that same year, Congress approved the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. Fifty-five years later, Earth Day remains relevant to raise awareness for environmental advocacy, promoting sustainable practices, and to inspire action. Here are a few Earth Day activities and events in the area this month:

April 19

Tree planting with [Clark Public Utilities at Columbia Springs](#), 9am – 1pm

April 22

Clear blackberry overgrowth at Nestwood Forest with [Columbia Land Trust](#), 9am – 12pm

Master Gardener presentation about pollinators and your garden at the [Camas-Washougal Port](#), 12pm – 1pm

Multiple dates and locations around town

Clearing invasive plants and/or tree planting events with [Watershed Alliance](#)

Public Engagement—Volunteer Opportunities

By Becky Boley

Vancouver Audubon will be at the events below in the coming months. We will host a table and visit with attendees to inform them about who Vancouver Audubon is, what we do and share information about regional birding and bird habitat. We also offer a few activities at these events, which can include building a birdhouse, coloring a bird picture, and making book-marks with bird stamps and/or stickers.

We'd love to see you at any of these events as an attendee or volunteer! Volunteer commitments are generally 2 hours – and we're happy to accommodate your schedule for shorter or longer times! Event times are listed, but we also have set-up and take down to do, which is usually 30-45 minutes before and after the event.

If you're interested in volunteering with us at any of these events (or want to receive email about other volunteer opportunities), please email Becky Boley at bboleyn@vancouveraudubon.org and she will add you to her email distribution.



Volunteers help visitors at a Vancouver Audubon event

Photo by Don Rose

Date	Event	Where	Event Time	# volunteers
May 17, 2025	Kids Fishing Festival	Columbia Springs	8a – 2p	9-10
June 21, 2025	Vancouver Pollinator Festival	Marshall Community Center Park	9a – 3p	9-10
July 26, 2025	Nature Days	Columbia Springs	10a – 1p	3-4

IN PRAISE OF GUIDED BIRD TRIPS: ARIZONA WITH STEFAN SCHLICK AND RANDY HILL

Story and Photos By Beth Marlin Lichter

Mid-February Arizona birding is spectacular, as I recently learned on a guided adventure with Vancouver Audubon Society's board member and field trip coordinator Randy Hill, along with Stefan Schlick, both contracted by Bird Alliance of Oregon to organize this itinerary. They made a great team, wrangling ten of us participants, looking out for our well-being while regaling us with 5



Streak-backed Oriole

-packed days of looking for a variety of specialty species. From the first day's stop at Gilbert's Water Ranch, an urban park with lakes and ponds, to our last foray into the iconic birding territory of Madera Canyon, we did indeed find the birds. A couple of butterflies, a dragonfly and Pronghorns made

surprise appearances. Every destination revealed its inhabitants to us as we quietly explored the landscape.

As soon as something was spotted, up went the spotting scopes through which we were able to observe target species such as the rare Streak-backed Oriole, which was at the top of Stefan's bucket list of sightings for us to experience. We found the oriole at the end of a row of pecan trees being worked on by Gila Woodpeckers.

Finding the birds required logistical work and patience but the reward was great. We spotted 142 species.

Randy had us stopping intermittently along the road during what he called "Raptor Day in the Santa Cruz Flats" where numerous birds of prey perched above the endless expanse of agricultural fields on utility poles and flew circles around wide open desert habitats of creosote bushes and jumping cholla cactus.

(continued next page)



Trip Co-Leaders with Spotting Scopes: Stefan Schlick (left), Randy Hill (right) Local Expert Guide Steve Nord (front left in blue shirt) and Participants

Learning Opportunity Hosted by Birds Connect Seattle

Bird University registration is open now!

For those eager to deepen their knowledge about birds in Washington, looking to meet others who enjoy birding and learning, and looking to explore new places to bird, Birds Connect Seattle offers [Bird University](#). This course series is structured to cover the birds of Washington and their habitats with online classes and in-person field trips. Click on the course listings below to learn more and register (for one or several courses) to learn and bird with some of the most wonderful and experienced guides around.

[Birds of the Okanogan with Stefan Schlick](#) (the first class has already occurred, but we have the class recording for those who join later)

[Birds of the Columbia Plateau with Jason Fidorra](#)

[Birds of the Central Puget Lowlands with Dr. Ursula Valdez and Dr. Jack DeLap](#)

[Urban Birds with Dr. Ursula Valdez and Dr. Jack DeLap](#)



Stefan set up his scope in a restaurant parking lot after dinner on a clear starry night so we could see the moons of Jupiter. We felt so well taken care of in the hands of these two trip leaders, who never missed an opportunity to show us something special. Stefan, born in Stuttgart, Germany, left a less than satisfying career track in software engineering, devoting his time now to celebrating the natural world by sharing his knowledge and passion for birds with those who choose to accompany him into wild and sometimes not so wild places.

Two stops on our itinerary were guaran-

Prairie Falcon in Santa Rita Flats

teed birding extravaganzas, as feeding stations were set up for the public to enjoy. A male Northern Cardinal at Paton's Center for Hummingbirds in Patagonia captivated me with his territorial behavior.

The last day of the trip ended on an exhilarating note that makes me want to go back next spring for more. Randy led us up a trail into Florida Canyon and then we headed into adjacent Madera Canyon where he has been birding since 1976. Madera Canyon is understandably one of the most popular destinations for wildlife enthusiasts, home to over 250 species of birds. At 12 years of age, Randy began driving a tractor on his father's prune orchard in Healdsburg, California, very much involved in cultivation and harvesting. Clearly, he thrives outdoors in places that sustain and nurture wildlife. Lucky for us, he invites us to come along.



Male Northern Cardinal at Paton's Center for Hummingbirds



Rivoli's Hummingbird/Santa Rita Lodge

Our last stop on our last day together was Santa Rita Lodge, 5,000 feet above sea level on the northwestern side of the Santa Rita Mountains. We had been birding with Stefan and Randy from Phoenix to Nogales, wetland to desert, and the icing on the cake was being able to enjoy the comings and goings of many bird species, across multiple feeders, from the covered deck of the Santa Rita Lodge in Madera Canyon. The last photo I took on the trip was of a Rivoli's Hummingbird stopping to preen on a branch above the deck.

This was my first trip dedicated to birding. Vancouver Audubon Society member and friend, Lynne Ditullio, signed up as well. We had lots of fun and enjoyed every person on the trip, without exception.

Big thanks to our guides for their generosity of spirit and patience, herding 10 of us out the door and into vans, at 6:30 am.

Quote from Albert Einstein: "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."



Young Birder's Club



FREE for ages 10-18



2 to 3 meetings monthly,
in the field and online



Learn from bird experts



**Bird watching walks, art
programs, research, and
habitat restoration**



 **SCAN ME**

Join us at our next meeting!

See our website for schedule

 vancouveraudubon.org/young-birders-club

 youngbirders@vancouveraudubon.org

American Bittern
Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge
Photo by Jackson Wolfe

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
April 2025 Events Calendar						
		1 Bird Walk— Shillapoo Lake Program Mtg Lights Out Program	2	3	4	5 Volunteer Columbia Springs
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19 Bird Walk— Burnt Bridge Creek
20	21	22 VAS Board Meeting	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

