



Washington Ornithological Society

PROBLEMS AMID
THE CORONAVIRUS
RESPONSE LED TO
OUR MISSING THE
APRIL-MAY ISSUE OF
WOSNEWS - *Apologies
from the editor*

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WOSNews No. 185 June - July 2020

From the Board

ANNUAL CONFERENCE POSTPONED UNTIL 2021

On a Zoom meeting today of our joint WOS/OBA planning group, a decision was made to postpone our upcoming conference in Astoria in September.

This is due, of course, to the many uncertainties caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. This decision was based on a number of factors that you are all aware of, and which in themselves are virtual certainties:

1) our country's recovery from this disease is likely to be uneven among regions and difficult to anticipate in any particular area;

2) the demographic nature of our members, overwhelmingly, leans toward those who are most vulnerable to serious illness;

3) optimum safety of attendees from this disease depends ultimately on the availability of effective therapies and vaccines, neither of which are likely to arrive on the scene in the next few months. Since we cannot be confident of the health and safety of our members who attend this event, we believe it is prudent to reschedule.

We know this will be disappointing to our members as well as to the many people who have expended

much effort in the planning and preparation for this exciting event. **Our current thinking is that we would hold this “joint conference” about a year later**, in early to mid-September 2021, at the same location in Astoria, Oregon, and we will begin working with hotels, caterers, speakers and trip leaders towards that goal.

Our organizations' respective annual business/membership meetings will be held as virtual meetings later this year, with separate announcements from OBA and WOS going out to their respective members separately. And as a replacement for the postponed 2020 conference, we are planning to hold a “virtual conference” with a keynote speaker (yet to be determined), and tentatively scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 12, 2020, with details and information to be sent out soon.

Please continue exercising caution as you go about your daily lives, and we all look forward to the day when we can get out birding unhindered and unconcerned!

Best regards,

Nagi Aboulenein, OBA President

Eric Dudley, WOS President



Our resident hummingbird rebuilt her nest at our family's summer home in Idaho. The nest hangs from a chain under the deck. This is the first time in three years the nest has been occupied.
- James Johnson, Seattle

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The Washington Ornithological Society was chartered in 1988 to increase knowledge of the birds of Washington and to enhance communication among all persons interested in those birds. WOS is a nonprofit educational organization under 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code.

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Washington Ornithological Society
Financial Statement
For Year Ended December 31, 2019

Assets		Expenses
Bank - General Checking	\$ 25,553	Administrative \$ 832
Bank - General Savings	\$ 64,327	Annual Conference Expenses \$ 8,001
Patrick Sullivan Young Birder's Fund (PSYBF) [restricted funds]	\$ 18,892	Annual Conference Refunds \$ 900
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 108,771	Annual Conference Event Management \$ 381
Liabilities		Bank Charge \$ 68
PSYBF [restricted]	\$ 18,892	Board Meeting \$ 383
Equity		Clothing \$ 6,253
Retained earnings	\$ 92,104	Facility Rental/CUH \$ 3,690
Net Income	\$ (2,224)	Financial Audit \$ 660
TOTAL EQUITY	\$ 108,771	Gifts \$ 28
Income and Expenses		Honoraria \$ 1,950
Income		Insurance \$ 2,065
Conference Registration	\$ 13,545	Monthly mtgs/Hospitality Expenses \$ 180
Donations - General Fund	\$ 1,488	PO Box Rental \$ 180
Donations - PS Young Birder Fund	\$ 1,420	Patrick Sullivan Young Birder Award \$ 2,020
Membership Dues	\$ 10,665	(2) Postage \$ 225
Sales and Tax	\$ 2,772	Printing \$ 2,489
Interest	\$ 19	Taxes \$ 224
Total Income	\$ 29,909	Use Fee PayPal \$ 653
		Web Hosting \$ 185
		2020 Annual Conference Deposit \$ 766
		Total Expenses \$ 32,133
		Net Income \$ (2,224)

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Hot Date at the Sewage Treatment Ponds

By David Kreft (first appeared in the Northeast Washington Birders Blog, August 2019)

“Where’re you going birding this morning, honey?” asked my wife.

“Well,” I replied, “it’s August and the birding’s kind of dead right now. But I’ve got a real hot spot in mind,” I said, slightly smug with a pinch of ‘know it all.’ “Wanna come along?”

My wife is great. She indulges my birding habit. Even to a point that you might call it encouragement. I’m a lucky guy. I often try to get her to come along, but rarely do I get a positive response. When I’m on the birds I’m more focused on them, and less on the conversation in the pickup. So, naturally, it’s not on the top of her list of fun times.

But this time, to my surprise, and then chagrin, she said, “Sure! Where’re we goin’?”

“Well, you see, it’s not really a great scenic location,” I stammered. “No great views, or majestic forests, or that kind of thing.”

“OK. Let’s go and you can surprise me. You said it was a birding hotspot and I want to see it.”

“Yes, of course, dear.”

The drive from home was only 10 or 12 minutes. We enjoyed the morning drive in the cool air. The fragrance of newly mowed hay was almost intoxicating. It was good to be out and about before the August sun had a chance to make it hot and sticky. Finally, as we pulled up to a chain link fence and double gates off a dead-end gravel road my wife was looking at me. Awkward silence prevailed for a moment. Mild disbelief and traces of doubt were in her eyes. Was this a joke, a spoof or prank? There was a clear “You’re pulling my leg, right?” kind of look. We got out of the pickup and walked through the unlocked gates, left slightly open to allow local birders to enter that most reliable sanctuary of migrating birds, the local sewage treatment ponds.

“You really know how to show a girl a good time,” she quipped.

“Only the best for you, my love,” I crooned in reply.

Municipal sewage treatment ponds (STPs in birder jargon) are great for finding migrating birds for a couple of reasons. There is abundant water and often shallow water, cattails and bulrushes, and mud flats in some of the ponds. These are especially attractive to migrating shorebirds and waterfowl. Birds that breed on the northern tundra and boreal forests of Canada and Alaska make their way south on long migrations and need stopover places that offer food and cover. STPs are usually surrounded by high chain link fences and are generally free of human and predator disturbance. Plus, nobody hunts ducks that are feeding on, well, stuff we flush or put down storm drains.

We weren’t disappointed. The shorebirds and marsh birds were abundant and in a photogenic mood. We had great views of Sandpipers: Solitary, Stilt, Baird’s and Spotted. Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs strutted through the shallows chasing elusive prey. A sneaky Semipalmated Plover was found hiding among the abundant Killdeer. Sora and young Virginia Rails were popping in and out of the bulrushes. Young Common Yellowthroats darted through the cattails, inspecting the two-legged intruders. Several species of waterfowl in eclipse plumage loafed along the tops of the pond embankments. California Quail ran along the fence line and numerous Eurasian Collared-Doves flashed by us. Song Sparrows and Brewer’s Blackbirds flitted about calling and chattering. We noted 22 species in all during that magical hour of togetherness.

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Hot Date at the Sewage Treatment Ponds (cont.)

Yes, I did spring for lunch and some uninterrupted one-on-one time with my beloved. I doubt she will be so quick to jump at my next birding invitation. At least until she learns more details on the exact location.

So, impress your significant other, and treat them to a hot date at your local STP! You'll thank me for it later. {wink, wink}

Good Birding!

A sampling of what we saw. Photos by David Kreft



Common Yellowthroat – immature male



Lesser Yellowlegs



Immature Virginia Rail



Sora



Sewage treatment pond photo courtesy of Waterworld

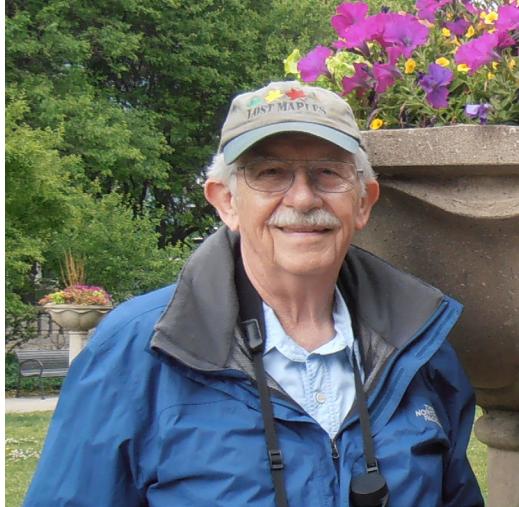
Remembering Paul Webster

Penny Koyama

Paul Webster, Master Birder, field trip leader, Seattle Audubon Shop volunteer, and good friend has left us too soon, at 80 years of age. After declining health, particularly since April 2019, Paul passed away peacefully on January 11, 2020, temporarily housed at his brother's Madrona home, where there was an elevator, a great system for classical music, and a fantastic lake view

available for him and his wife. Barbara cared lovingly for Paul in his difficult last few months, hauling him to numerous medical appointments and carefully ensuring a gluten-free diet. A mysterious medical case for many months, his final diagnosis was blood cancer.

Paul was raised in California, the oldest of four brothers. He was a professor of German Language and Western Civilization at Pacific Lutheran University for 30 years, was the father of two sons, and the enthusiastic grandfather of two boys and two girls. He could write up a storm and over the years authored a column for Seattle Audubon's *Earthcare Northwest*, "Birds in the Balance," subsequently writing on birds, birding, and travel for Tahoma Audubon's "The Towhee." Paul was a member of Seattle Audubon's Master Birder Class of 2004, which is where I first met him. We then participated in coordinating the following class, where Paul specialized in writing its mind-twisting homework. His second-genera-



tion birder wife, Barb, was in that group, where classmate, Matt Bartels, lured them into county birding in 2006, with an argument about the excitement a birder can once again muster for a Mallard! Their first "targeted" birding trip was with WOS in March 2007 to Benton and Klickitat Counties, led by none other than the late Ken Knittle.

Passing the torch, our first county birding trip was with the Websters in February, 2011, to Skamania County, where, yes, the Mallard was exciting! My husband, David, and I shared many two-couple trips after that, with Paul offering occasional species accounts and keeping a careful list, using the four-letter codes. It was from Paul that we learned that County Line Ponds was not in Adams Co. and, unfortunately for our then-Island Co. list, Rosario was in Skagit Co. Paul was well-known and appreciated in the local birding community. Along with Barbara, he led SAS field trips, most often to Whidbey Island, and on their home turf, West Seattle. For several years, they participated in the Discovery Park Bird Count, and they worked CBCs for the Seattle and Skagit counts.

His last birding trip, a careful, but much-enjoyed neighborhood excursion, was in the fall to see the Alki-area Ruddy Turnstone. Sadly, this is yet another loss to our little birding subculture in Washington, and Paul will be missed by many family, friends, and birders alike.

A Tea-Kettle Song

Article and Photos by Thomas Bancroft

A loud booming song came rattling up the ravine. It sounded like “*tea-kettle-tea-kettle-tea-kettle*” then a pause and more “*tea-kettle-tea-kettles*.” I jumped from foot to foot, trying to stay warm as I scanned the deciduous hardwood forest. The temperature hung around freezing, and I hadn’t brought enough layers to Pennsylvania for doing this Christmas Bird Count.

The melody jumped to the other side of the gully, but nothing seemed to have moved under the massive



red oaks and hickories. The bird should be hopping through the leafless bushes, maybe clinging to the bark on one of those trees, or zipping along a branch, all places that it should be easily visible. I shuffled to my left twenty paces, trying to get the blood moving, and started a systematic search. I knew what the bird was, a Carolina Wren, but for some unknown reason, I desperately wanted to see it.

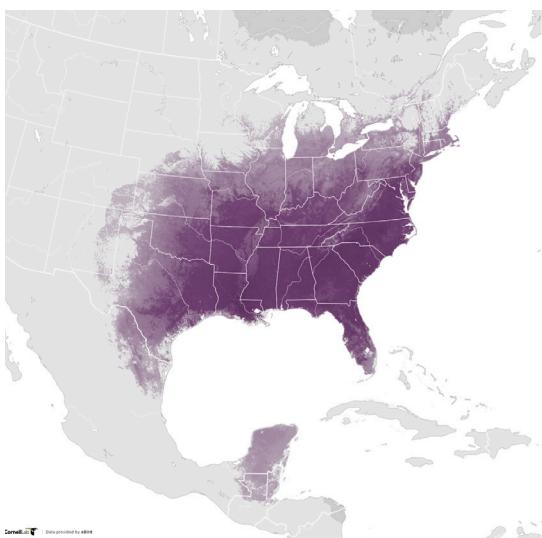
These guys are small and chunky with a reddish-brown back and cap. Their white eyebrow and dark eyeline give them a distinguished look, and that long barred tail radiates energy. They always seem to be at high speeds, tackling life with gusto. Maybe it was envy that made me want to find it.

This was one of the first birds I’d learned as a small child. My sisters still have the farm where I grew up, and our place was just a quarter-mile up the hill from this location. For several years, a pair tried to nest in a little shed. A small cardboard box sat on a high shelf just above the lawnmower. They built their little grass cup in there and laid their creamy-white eggs with rusty brown spots. I’d try to sneak in and pull out the lawnmower without disturbing them. I don’t know if they ever were successful there. Once, late in the summer, I used a step ladder to look into the box and found four cold eggs still nicely clumped in the perfectly woven nest. That shed is gone now.

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Tea-Kettle Song (continued)

These little birds remind me of the Bewick's Wrens that live in my Seattle yard. Bewick's occasionally visit my suet in winter, and when it is warm, one will sing from the tops of bushes in my front yard. These two species are in separate genera but closely related. When we had heavy snows on the farm, Carolina Wrens occasionally came to our feeders, but their



primary food was insects and spiders even in winter.
The general warming

of the Eastern United States over the last 50 years has allowed Carolina Wrens to move north and increase in numbers. Severe winters, especially ones with snow that lasts for several weeks, knock back populations substantially. Christmas Bird Count data for Pennsylvania shows a significant crash after a particularly harsh winter in the mid-1990s. This wren has bounced back, though.

Perhaps, it's that ability to recover after a catastrophe that was making me want to find this bird. A decade ago, I moved to Seattle following my wife's

death and a job loss. It took a while to find the right conditions, to find friends, to

"*che-wortel, che-wortel, che-wortel*" interrupted my thoughts. It came from farther down the valley and closer to the trail. The wren had moved, and I hurried along. There it sat, bouncing up and down on those two thin legs, looking left and right, no indication of being cold.

A pair lived in this ravine throughout those years following the population crash. Another couple lived through those times in the black walnut grove around my boyhood home. They tried to nest a few times on the back porch of that house where my sisters still live. These birds persevered through those hard times.

The wren flitted up through a bush and looked right at me. It seemed to say, "What are you thinking about? Get on with it!" It then darted left, dashing down over the hill. I stared for a while and then turned to continue my count. That ball of energy had somehow warmed me up.



World Birds: The Purple Grenadier

Story and Photos By Thomas Bancroft

A purplish-blue zipped across in front of us and landed on a twig. I yelled for our driver to stop. The road had been rough and the going slow in Nairobi National Park, but there was also so much new to see. My binoculars found the small bird. It had stretched out, extending its head and neck as far as possible to strip small seeds from a stem. Some whitish seeds



already were stuck to its bright red conical bill. Its overall color was astonishing, like nothing I'd ever seen.

A thin blue stripe ran from the base of the bill over the top of the eye, not quite meeting a slightly wider blue one that came from the lower mandible. A thin red ring of feathers circled the eye. In the subdued light at 7 a.m., the pupil was wide open, but still I could see a red iris that matched the feather ring. Its head, nape, and throat were cinnamon and graded into a belly of cinnamon and blue feathers. Its back and flight feathers were brownish and covered dark blue tail coverts and the base of the black rectrices. At only five inches long,

this male Purple Grenadier was striking!

It looked much in body shape and size to a small sparrow or finch from North America, yet, I knew that this bird was not closely related to any of those birds. This grenadier was an Estrildid. A bird family found in Africa, southern Asia, and Australia. They are often called waxbills because of the shine on their mandibles. I'd seen several species in this family when I traveled in Australia, but it still thrilled me to see this one. I'd gawked at its colors in the field guides as I prepared to come to Kenya.

Now one actually sat in front of me.

The resemblance to our small sparrows is an example of convergent evolution. Different, unrelated groups take on similar size and shapes to exploit a similar resource. In this case, small seeds. Estrildids are thought to have evolved in India and then spread, radiating into additional species in Africa and Australia. Our New World sparrows are an entirely separate group that originated in the Western Hemisphere. While our finches are part of a northern Palearctic group that had expanded into North America and evolved into additional species.

The grenadier shifted around, showing its other side and then flitted into the grass, disappearing. I stared for a moment at the twig where it had sat before thanking our driver, and we continued our search of these African plains.

Oregon Vesper Sparrow recommended for listing as endangered in Washington

WDFW seeking public comments on species' status report

OLYMPIA – With a declining population and an estimate of just 300 left in the state, the Oregon Vesper Sparrow is struggling to maintain its foothold in Washington and the Pacific Northwest coast.

Decline in native prairie and savannah habitat and reduction of genetic diversity in remaining populations pose serious challenges to the continued viability of the species.

Today, WDFW wildlife managers are working with partners like Joint Base Lewis McChord, American Bird Conservancy and the Center for Natural Lands Management to oversee a strategy of prairie protection, banding, and monitoring to bring these birds back.

Large-scale loss of native prairie habitat likely played a major role in the decades-long decline of the population, which breeds in western Washington, western Oregon, and extreme northwestern California. The birds are

present in the state from April to September.

Washington's population of about 300 individuals is found primarily at sites in Thurston and Pierce counties with a smattering more—numbering only in the dozens—estimated for both San Juan Island and islands in the lower Columbia River.



The birds once occupied breeding locations dispersed widely from southwestern British Columbia and the San Juan Islands through the southern Puget lowlands.

WDFW staff members are tentatively scheduled to report on the listing recommendation with the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission at its meeting on October 2. The commission is a citizen panel appointed by the governor to set policy for WDFW.

For meeting dates and times, check the commission webpage at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission>. The status report on the Oregon Vesper Sparrow listing recommendation is available on [WDFW's publications website](#), and the agency is welcoming review and comment on its findings.

The public can provide comment on the status report through August 17, 2020. Submit written comments on the report document via email to TandEpublic-com@dfw.wa.gov or by mail to Taylor Cotten, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, P.O. Box 43141, Olympia, WA 98504-3200.

In addition to Washington's state endangered status recommendation, the Oregon Vesper Sparrow is currently scheduled for review for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

is the state agency tasked

with preserving, protecting, and perpetuating fish, wildlife, and ecosystems, while providing sustainable fishing, hunting, and other recreation opportunities.

Forty-five species of fish and wildlife are listed for protection as state endangered, threatened or sensitive species in Washington today.