

**SPRING IN THE WASHINGTON CASCADES  
A RELAXED & EASY TOUR**

**JUNE 5–11, 2016**

**LEADERS: BOB SUNDSTROM & RAFAEL GALVEZ**

**FIELD LIST COMPILED BY BOB SUNDSTROM**

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**By Bob Sundstrom**

Our Spring in the Washington Cascades tour begins in Seattle and comes at a perfect season to bird across the Cascade Mountains and among the varied habitats near Leavenworth, Washington. Just over two hours east across the Cascade Mountains from Seattle and near the confluence of Icicle Creek and the Wenatchee River, Leavenworth looks up at splendid, snow-capped Mt. Stuart. Our lodgings for four nights sit alongside the Wenatchee River as it tumbles down from the mountains, and every guest room features a balcony overlooking the rushing river. Early morning and during afternoon breaks, the balcony is a lovely spot to sit and watch: perhaps Violet-green Swallows fluttering at the balcony railing, Common Mergansers flying up the river, or pairs of Vaux's Swifts chattering overhead in synchronized flight.

On short walks near our lodging, which is set in Ponderosa pine woods, we had excellent views of White-headed Woodpecker, Pygmy Nuthatch, California Quail, and Black-headed Grosbeak. One of VENT's Relaxed & Easy tours, we had an excellent breakfast at the inn each morning, picnicked or dined at a café each lunchtime, and had a fine dinner close by in Leavenworth each evening. We took time for breaks at the inn during each day's series of events, and added options for those who might want a bit more birding time.

Highlights were many. While we scoped an American Dipper standing on a stone in Icicle Creek, Rafael spotted Harlequin Ducks farther up the rushing stream. Taking positions on the bridge over the creek, we watched as a beautifully patterned male Harlequin Duck came bobbing down the fast-moving waters. The duck would float on the surface for a moment, then dive under in search of prey, and then reemerge ever closer to our viewpoint, finally cruising right under the bridge to continue its bobbing and diving until it disappeared downstream. A few moments later, it flew back upstream, likely to start the process all over again.

One morning we drove up a canyon in the Entiat Mountains, birding a variety of spots as the habitats change with elevation. Near a tall basalt cliff just above the Columbia River, a pair of Peregrine Falcons screamed and glided back and forth until one of the pair rocketed across our view on a high speed stoop, snatching a swallow in midair. At other stops in the canyon, a Lewis's Woodpecker swooped from pine branches as it caught insects in midair; Yellow-breasted Chats sang atop small saplings; a Canyon Wren sang its memorable glissandos; and a pair of Chukars walked off the roadside and up a rocky slope. Wet spots attracted hundreds of butterflies, many of them swallowtails. We picnicked among the songs of Cassin's Vireos, grosbeaks, thrushes, chats, and other warblers, and then drove a bit higher into the canyon where a Northern Pygmy-Owl flew in and perched in the pines for superb scope views and photos.

In the Wenatchee Mountains one morning, we parked along a vast camas meadow backed by mountain conifer forest. Iridescent male Lazuli Buntings sang from perches atop the shrubs as tiny male Calliope Hummingbirds with purple gorgets held vigil over their territories while

perching on bare twigs. Nashville and MacGillivray's warblers sang from brushy places, and Townsend's Warblers sang from the conifers. In an aspen grove, Red-naped Sapsuckers, Cassin's Finches, and Chestnut-backed Chickadees mobbed an owl imitation—soon followed by a pair of White-headed Woodpeckers—one of the most anticipated birds of the tour. A bit farther along the road, a pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers showed nicely as they bounded from tree to tree. An Evening Grosbeak dropped down to the roadside just a few feet from the group, picking up bits of gravel for its gizzard with its massive bill, while gorgeous Western Tanagers called overhead.

Early in the trip while still on the west slope of the Cascades, we had watched a pair of Red-breasted Sapsuckers at a nest cavity—giving us all three Western sapsucker species during the course of the tour. On other days in the higher elevations of mountain forest, we had great views of a petite Pacific Wren, lovely yellow and black Townsend's Warblers, "Slate-colored" Fox Sparrows, and Rufous Hummingbirds—as well as a sneaky pair of Varied Thrushes. At a tiny pond in the arid Columbia Basin, we watched a trio of Virginia Rails walk out from the cattails and approach within a few feet of the vans.

Washington is a big state with many kinds of natural landscapes, so it's impossible to see all of its birds in a week-long tour. But VENT's Spring in the Washington Cascades tour incorporates some of the richest spring birding possibilities in the region, and with the luxury of spending most nights at the same comfortable inn, with diverse wild country within reasonable easy distance.

## **ITINERARY:**

**June 5:** Arrivals at Seatac and get-acquainted dinner. Night at Seatac Marriott.

**June 6:** After breakfast at Seatac hotel, birded in the lowlands west of the Cascade Mts. at Lake Sammamish State Park. Next east on I-90 up west slope of the Cascades, birding along Denny Creek Rd. near Denny Ck. Campground, before arriving at Snoqualmie Pass. Continuing east on I-90, birding railroad ponds at S. Cle Elum. After lunch at El Caporal, birded back roads east through Swauk Prairie, then drove north on Hwy 97 across Blewett Pass. Birded Peshastin Ck. from small bridge along 97, where located American Dipper. Reached Leavenworth late afternoon, checked in Alpine Rivers Inn. Dinner at Visconti's in Leavenworth. First of four nights at Alpine Rivers Inn.

**June 7:** Optional bird walk before breakfast in vicinity of Alpine Rivers Inn. First of four 6:30 a.m. breakfasts on consecutive mornings at Alpine Rivers Inn. Morning birding along Camas Ck. Rd. in the Wenatchee Mts. bird at several elevations to above 3300'. Lunch at Big-Y Café in Peshastin. Afternoon break at Inn. Pre-dinner birding option to Icicle Ck. Canyon. Dinner at Visconti's in Leavenworth.

**June 8:** Optional bird walk before breakfast in vicinity of Alpine Rivers Inn. Birded Swakane Canyon from the Columbia River at 250' through various habitats to the top of the canyon at

2800', picnicking near 2000'. Returned to Cashmere via Nahahum Canyon Rd.; afternoon break at hotel. Dinner Visconti's.

**June 9:** Optional bird walk before breakfast in vicinity of Alpine Rivers Inn. Re-crossed Blewett Pass to bird along Bettas Valley, then farm roads north of Ellensburg. After a Starbucks stop in Ellensburg, birded sagebrush habitat along Old Vantage Hwy., then continued east across Columbia River to Frenchman Coulee. Lunch at small café in Quincy, before birding at Quincy Wildlife Area. Drove Hwy. 28 along towering basalt cliffs on east side of Columbia R., and then Hwy. 2 back to Leavenworth. Dinner Visconti's.

**June 10:** Optional bird walk before breakfast in vicinity of Alpine Rivers Inn. After breakfast at Alpine Rivers Inn, loaded up luggage and drove up to Forest Road 6700 near Stevens Pass to bird mountain forest. Returned to Leavenworth for lunch at Bug Y Café. Re-crossed Blewett Pass to bird near hatchery near Cle Elum, before heading west on I-90 toward Seatac. Arrived Marriott 5:00 pm. Farewell dinner at Aqua Terra and final night at Seatac Marriott.

**June 11:** Departures.

### **BIRDS:**

[names in *italics* are rare or unusual; ***bold italics*** are exceptionally rare or unusual]

### **GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:**

Canada Goose – a few of the resident Great Basin form, most along the Wenatchee River

Wood Duck – a couple of quick sightings

Mallard

Harlequin Duck – wonderful study of a breeding plumage male floating and diving on the rapid stream of upper Icicle Creek

Barrow's Goldeneye – a female and a few ducklings, seen twice at Cle Elum railroad ponds

Common Merganser – females on several streams

### **GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:**

California Quail – wonderful views of males crowing from sentry posts near the Inn

*Chukar* – seen by most of the group, a pair close to road fairly far up Swakane Canyon

*Dusky Grouse* – Rafael spotted one at a remarkable distance as it stood on a rock in Swakane Cyn.

### **GREBES:**

Pied-billed Grebe – at Quincy Wildlife Area

### **CORMORANTS:**

Double-crested Cormorant – a few at Quincy Wildlife Area

### **BITTERNES & HERONS:**

Great Blue Heron

### **AMERICAN VULTURES**

Turkey Vulture

### **EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:**

Osprey – mostly sitting atop nests, adults now incubating or brooding very young chicks

Bald Eagle – along Lake Washington on the drive back toward Seatac; 5 or 6 birds in the air

Northern Harrier – just one, at Quincy Wildlife Area

Swainson's Hawk – a dark morph south of Quincy

Red-tailed Hawk

**RAILS & COOTS:**

Virginia Rail – amazing, close views of three coming out of the cattails!

American Coot

**PLOVERS, SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:**

Killdeer

Spotted Sandpiper – on the Wenatchee River

Long-billed Curlew – Rafael spotted one in an alfalfa field north of Ellensburg

Wilson's Snipe – visible in a marshy spot, despite its near perfect camouflage

**GULLS, & TERNS:**

California Gull – at Lake Sammamish

Caspian Tern – a couple at Quincy Wildlife Area

**PIGEONS & DOVES:**

Rock Pigeon

Band-tailed Pigeon – a few the first morning, at Lake Sammamish State Park

Eurasian Collared-Dove

Mourning Dove

**OWLS:**

*Northern Pygmy-Owl* – one of the highlights of Swakane Canyon was the tiny owl that posed for wonderful scope views

**NIGHTJARS:**

Common Nighthawk – heard by Rafael and Rick near dark at Alpine Rivers Inn

**SWIFTS:**

Vaux's Swift – chattering overhead, daily at Alpine Rivers Inn

White-throated Swift – great views at Frenchman Coulee, sometimes with the swifts below us

**HUMMINGBIRDS:**

*Anna's Hummingbird* – a flashy adult male at Alpine Rivers Inn was a surprise for the area

Rufous Hummingbird – seen best in the mountain meadow near Stevens Pass

Calliope Hummingbird – posing for photos and scope views along Camas Ck. Rd. and in Swakane Cyn.

**KINGFISHERS:**

Belted Kingfisher

**WOODPECKERS & ALLIES:**

Lewis's Woodpecker – several in the lower part of Swakane Canyon, a beautiful, flycatching woodpecker

Williamson's Sapsucker – male and female in the Wenatchee Mts., along Camas Ck. Rd.

Red-naped Sapsucker – in the aspens just beyond the big camas meadow

Red-breasted Sapsucker – pair at an active nest cavity near Lake Sammamish

Downy Woodpecker – near Alpine Rivers Inn

Hairy Woodpecker

*White-headed Woodpecker* – One of the most anticipated birds of the trip, we didn't have to wait long to see one: a female landed low on a pine trunk right next to the group on the first pre-breakfast walk near the Inn. Also, nice scope study of male and female in the aspen grove along Camas Ck. Rd. We even saw one on the final morning optional walk near the Inn, a kind of going-away present.

Northern Flicker – of the “red-shafted” variety

**FALCONS:**

American Kestrel – especially prevalent near Quincy

Peregrine Falcon – the pair at the mouth of Swakane Canyon put on an amazing aerial show

**FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES:**

Olive-sided Flycatcher – scoped near Stevens Pass

Western Wood-Pewee – a regular sighting most days of the trip, including near the Inn

Willow Flycatcher – mostly heard

Hammond's Flycatcher – nice scope view of a singing bird well out on Camas Ck. Rd.  
Dusky Flycatcher – posing very nicely at the camas meadow  
Pacific-slope Flycatcher – along Denny Ck. Rd. the first morning  
Say's Phoebe – in lower Swakane Canyon, at the first stop  
Western Kingbird – widespread east of the Cascades, in open habitats  
Eastern Kingbird – seen best around Quincy Wildlife Area

**VIREOS:**

Cassin's Vireo – at the picnic meadow in Swakane Canyon, fine view after much chasing about  
Warbling Vireo – mobbing the pygmy-owl whistle  
Red-eyed Vireo – the final afternoon, amazing open view of this reclusive songbird

**JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:**

Gray Jay – small flocks glided in to owl whistling, both along Camas Ck. Rd. and near Stevens Pass  
Steller's Jay – the dark, crested jay in the Inn neighborhood, and near a nest at Lake Sammamish  
Black-billed Magpie – common in places in very open country  
American Crow  
Common Raven

**LARKS:**

Horned Lark – terrific looks at males, especially in the sage

**SWALLOWS & MARTINS:**

Tree Swallow  
Violet-green Swallow – superb views, even of the rarely seen violet tail and rump!  
Northern Rough-winged Swallow – near the Inn and along several streams  
Bank Swallow – nesting in an irrigation ditch bank south of Quincy  
Cliff Swallow  
Barn Swallow

**TITMICE through CREEPERS:**

Mountain Chickadee – the chickadee with the white line above the eye  
Chestnut-backed Chickadee – seen best along Camas Ck. Rd., coming to an owl imitation  
Red-breasted Nuthatch – not as red-breasted as early in spring  
Pygmy Nuthatch – wonderful, amazingly close views near Alpine Rivers Inn  
Brown Creeper

**WRENS & DIPPERS:**

Rock Wren – in the basalt near Frenchman Coulee  
Canyon Wren – seen after a long, patient wait in lower Swakane Canyon, where one sang and sang its descending series of notes  
House Wren – nesting near the Inn  
Pacific Wren – a tiny wren with a stub of a tail, singing its long song at Denny Ck. Campground  
Marsh Wren – at the Quincy ponds  
American Dipper – seen and scoped, both along Peshastin Ck. and upper Icicle Ck.

**KINGLETS:**

Golden-crowned Kinglet – a male flashing its fiery orange crest was a hit near Denny Ck.

**THRUSHES & ALLIES:**

Western Bluebird – several pairs on Swauk Prairie the first day  
Mountain Bluebird – a sky blue male and very close views of recent fledglings in Bettas Valley  
Swainson's Thrush – seen well the first morning, its beautiful song was heard at several places  
Hermit Thrush – seen at Denny Ck. Campground, its lovely song also heard widely in the mountains  
American Robin  
Varied Thrush – a couple along the roadside on the forest road east of Stevens Pass

**MIMIDS:**

Gray Catbird – a singing bird in the shadows of shrub at the railroad ponds

Sage Thrasher – nice scope views in the sage, after a good bit of searching

**STARLINGS & ALLIES:**

European Starling

**WAXWINGS:**

Cedar Waxwing – pairs almost daily

**WOOD WARBLERS**

Nashville Warbler – seen well at the Swakane Canyon picnic spot

MacGillivray's Warbler – often heard, seen best at the camas meadow

Common Yellowthroat

Yellow Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler – many good views of Audubon's males, including one that sang daily at the Inn

Black-throated Gray Warbler – in the treetops along lower Denny Ck.

Townsend's Warbler – fine views in the mountain conifers of this attractive black and yellow warbler

Wilson's Warbler – mostly heard

Yellow-breasted Chat – scoped in Swakane Canyon, where many males were singing, sometimes on an open perch

**SPARROWS & ALLIES:**

Spotted Towhee

Chipping Sparrow

Brewer's Sparrow – finally scoped nicely in the sage; tiny, with an amazing trilled song

Vesper Sparrow

*Sagebrush Sparrow* – great scope views of a very accommodating bird, which posed showing breast and back features; formerly part of Sage Sparrow species, which has been divided into Sagebrush and Bell's Sparrow species

Savannah Sparrow

Fox Sparrow – terrific view of a singing “Slate-colored” Fox Sparrow, near Stevens Pass

Song Sparrow – the heavily marked *morphna* subspecies of the Pacific NW

White-crowned Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

**GROSBEAKS, BUNTINGS & ALLIES:**

Western Tanager – great looks at colorful males with red faces and yellow bodies

Black-headed Grosbeak – the jazziest singer of the tour, posing nicely on the morning bird walks

Lazuli Bunting – memorable views of a singing male, posing over and over again at the camas meadow

**BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES:**

Red-winged Blackbird

Western Meadowlark – one of the West's great singers

Yellow-headed Blackbird – first seen near Frenchman Coulee

Brewer's Blackbird – one of the more common sighting in the open country on the tour

Brown-headed Cowbird

Bullock's Oriole – very flashy orange males and dull yellow females

**FINCHES:**

House Finch

Purple Finch – the best view was of a male whose colored feathers were a golden orange, instead of the normal raspberry color

Cassin's Finch – regular near Inn and along Camas Ck. Rd.

Red Crossbill – seen by some in Swakane Cyn.

Pine Siskin

American Goldfinch

Evening Grosbeak – incredible views of one on the ground almost at the group's feet, as it picked up bits of gravel for its gizzard

**OLD WORLD SPARROWS:**

House Sparrow

**MAMMALS, HERPS & OTHER VERTEBRATES:**

Douglas' Squirrel – the playful tree squirrels near Alpine Rivers Inn

Yellow Pine Chipmunk – several at a rest area below Stevens Pass

Yellow-bellied Marmot – near their burrows at Alpine Rivers Inn

Mountain Cottontail – seen by Margaret

Mule Deer – the only deer species in the area of the tour