



R. Höcken

# Birding IN THE Backyard

**AUGUST 2025**

## VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW

BY KELSEY

Violet-green Swallows are sleek little birds with long, pointed wings. When perched, their wings visibly extend past their slightly forked tails.

You're most likely to spot Violet-green Swallows as they flit around acrobatically, hunting down flying insects on the wing. They do most of their hunting over water bodies like lakes, marshes, and streams, where the insect populations are high.

Keep an eye on power lines and dead trees near water bodies; if you're lucky you may spot a perching Violet-green Swallow.

When first spotted or in low light, Violet-green Swallows appear to have a dark back and bright undersides.

In good lighting, the adult male swallow has the classic bright green-bronze back and violet rump. They also have a green head cap with white cheek patches that extend into their white belly. During flight, the white extends around the upper side of their rump, giving them bright white 'saddlebags'.

The female Violet-green Swallow is usually drabber in colour, with a paler green back, brown cap, and dusky cheek patches. Some females are almost as bright green-violet as the males, needing the head cap and cheeks for a proper identification.

Violet-green Swallows are a social species, and can often be found in groups with other swallows or swifts.

The Violet-green Swallow is a cavity nester, and will use a properly sized nest box where available. They prefer a wide open area around the box, with a hole size of 1 3/8" to 1 1/2".



ralphhocken@shaw.ca

2010.05.05

In areas where House Sparrows are abundant, the round hole can be exchanged for a longer, narrow oval opening that House Sparrows can't fit through. Swallows, with their ability to rotate their shoulders, are able to fit into the narrow oval for nesting.

Violet-green Swallows are fairly common visitors during the spring and summer, and usually move into the area once the insect populations are high. They don't visit backyard feeders, but can be spotted flitting around in the air after insects like mosquitoes.



ralphhocken@shaw.ca

2010.04

# EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE VS MOURNING DOVE

## EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (LEFT) AND MOURNING DOVE (RIGHT)



EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE  
—R. HOCKEN

THE EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE is a large dove with a small head and a long square-tipped tail. They're a chalky, light brown to a grayish-buff bird with broad white tail patches. Around the back of their neck is a black crescent, and their wingtips are darker than the rest of the wing.

MOURNING DOVES are brown to a buff-tan above, with large black spots on the wings. Their belly is a pale peach colour, with short, pinkish legs and a thin, black bill. During flight, note their long, fan shaped tail with large white tips.

While Mourning Doves are a North American native species, Eurasian Collared-Doves were introduced to Florida in the 1980s, and have spread across the continent since.



MOURNING DOVE  
—J. PURVES

## PREPARING FOR FALL

BY COLIN



P. Coxon

With the month of August just arriving, there is little thought towards the upcoming seasons of fall and winter...for people.

For the birds and many other animals, this is the time for them to begin planning and taking action to ensure their survival over the winter.

One of those survival plans that usually begins in August is the southbound migration. Take a stroll along a local beach and watch for shorebirds like Western and Least Sandpipers, or keep an eye out for the return of the Harlequin Ducks. A few good places to check out include the Englishman River Estuary in Parksville, Columbia Beach in French Creek, and in Nanaimo, Pipers Lagoon, Neck Point Park and the Nanaimo River Estuary.

As for what's happening around the backyard, birds are still visiting feeders and bird baths. With the summer heat, bird baths and other water sources can be a bigger draw for visiting birds. Remember to keep both your feeders and bird baths clean and freshly topped up, including hummingbird feeders.

Suet, sometimes thought to be a purely winter offering, still gets a lot of activity through the summer. Mid-August through September is when the woodpeckers and their young are likely to swing by. Keep an eye out for Northern Flickers, Downy Woodpeckers, and the occasional Pileated Woodpecker. One bird that isn't seen on suet feeders during this time? The European Starling. Starlings have usually progressed to flocking and feeding on bugs and berries, leaving the suet feeders alone for the other birds.

Birds are also beginning to gather in flocks in preparation for winter. Some common flocking birds include Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Bushtits and Dark-eyed Juncos.

In addition to flocking, a few bird species cache—or hoard—seeds for winter. They include chickadees, nuthatches and Steller's Jays. They cache seeds away to use as emergency food if other food sources are low.

August may appear to be a quiet time for birding, but there's actually plenty of activity to watch as your backyard birds prepare for the coming seasons.

## Nectar Fortress

Got ants?

Ant-repelling clear gel with cinnamon oil that ants hate. Draw a border and stop them cold. Made with natural ingredients, it's safe for use around birds, children, and pets.

For use with non-porous materials. Dispense a thick line of gel around anything you don't want ants getting to. Great for protecting hummingbird feeders as well as other outdoor areas such as patio tables.



\$15.99 EA.



# FROM FINE DINING TO HOSTILE TAKEOVER

BY DAVE

By now, most of us are familiar with the tangents that can occur when attempting to research a simple, familiar topic.

I planned for a quick blurb about the American Bullfrog, scientific name *Lithobates catesbeianus*, including when (late 1930s) and why (frog leg farming) they were introduced into British Columbia, and where to find them (pretty much any still or slow moving muddy-bottomed body of water).

This led to me looking up the approximate introduction date of Green Frogs, or *Lithobates clamitans*, of which there's no certainty. The first records I found were in the Victoria area, followed by the Fraser Valley in the forties. They likely started in backyard ponds alongside goldfish and koi before being accidentally spread by fish stocking.

Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*) were introduced into the Cowichan River systems between 1932 to 1935, and Pumpkinseed Sunfish arrived in BC sometime in the early 1900s.

Okay, back to Bullfrogs.

There are two genetically distinct populations of Western Painted Turtle, which are the only extant, native, freshwater turtle in BC. The coastal population on Vancouver Island can be found from Victoria to the Alberni Valley, and up to the Courtenay-Comox area.

## Bullfrogs.

Bullfrogs reach a length of ~20cm from the tip of their snout to their butthole. They are green, or brown, or both, with darker mottling and dark, striped legs.

Their *tympanums*, or external eardrums, are an easy way to determine the sex of the Bullfrog. Female frogs have tympanums around the same size as their eyes, while those of the males are much larger.

Right behind their eyes, Bullfrogs have a fold of skin that runs from above the eye to curve down behind their tympanums. The fold is also present on Green Frogs, though it continues down the length of their smaller, ~10cm body.

Bullfrogs start breeding when the weather heats up. The males float around amongst aquatic plants, usually near the shore, calling. The call is said to sound like the bellowing of a bull, or a deep, "jug-o-rum". Personally, I think whoever named them has never heard a Bullfrog.

Female American Bullfrogs can produce up to 20,000 eggs per breeding season. She lays her eggs in loose, jelly-like masses that float on the surface of the water until hatching.

These large frogs have equally large mouths, and will eat basically anything that they can fit inside. This can be a problem for native species like Red-legged Frogs and Western Painted Turtles, who are prey-sized. Bullfrogs have also been known to take ducklings, and if moved into a backyard pond they can prey on goldfish.

Frogs' tongues are attached at the front of their mouth; unlike us they can't use their tongue to push food into their throat. Instead, they use muscles to pull their eyes down into the mouth to push their meal down their gullet.

In Washington and Oregon, they've taken young Western Pond Turtles (*Actinemys marmorata*), which used to be found in British Columbia as well.

Western Pond Turtles had been found in Burnaby Lake, and let me tell you I searched that lake almost every day as a kid hoping to spot one, without any luck.

With only three specimens of Western Pond Turtle found in BC (1933, 1936, and 1966), it's impossible to know if the Bullfrogs played a part in their extirpation.

As mentioned, Bullfrogs were originally introduced as a livestock species; however the large, vegetarian tadpoles overwinter in ponds and don't metamorphose until the next autumn. After the metamorphosis, it takes the young frog three to four years to reach full size. Hardly the quick turnover the farmers were looking for.

So, the Bullfrogs were released, and their populations began to spread.



## HAPPY FROG RAIN GAUGE



Painted metal frog holding cattail rain gauge makes an adorable addition to any yard or garden space.

The frog sits on the ground and doesn't have to be anchored in dirt.

26" x 12 1/4" x 7 1/4" in size.

Measures up to 5 inches of rain.



## DID YOU KNOW?

While many people prefer to trap and relocate invasive species instead of killing them, it's actually not recommended as the relocation can contribute to the spreading of the invasive species.



# WHAT ABOUT MIGRATION

BY KELSEY



R. Hocken  
lphocken@shaw.ca

## MIGRATION DROPOUTS

Though many birds have evolved migratory patterns, there are some within migratory bird species who have since *stopped* their migratory behaviour, known as “migration dropouts”.

Migration dropouts are members of migratory species that choose to settle down in an area rather than continue their migratory behaviours. The reason behind the dropouts is still a mystery.

Take the Galápagos Hawk, for example. Genetics evidenced it's an offshoot of the Swainson's Hawk, a North American species. Though hawks don't usually travel over open water, it's thought that a migratory group was blown off course many, *many* years ago, and became the founders of a new species. But why didn't the hawks continue trying to migrate away from the new island? It remains unknown.

The Galápagos Hawk wasn't an isolated event, either; several other species have stopped migrating as well. One notable case is a population of Barn Swallows found in Argentina, nesting under a bridge. Their population has grown since their original discovery in 1980, likely from both offspring of the original dropouts, and other dropout swallows.

Though the reasoning behind their behaviour remains uncertain, migration dropouts help to explain how non-migratory species and migratory populations elsewhere are genetically related.

The most iconic image of migration in many minds is probably the V-shaped flocks of geese, honking their way across the skies. But they aren't the only birds that travel.

Out of over six hundred and fifty species of birds found in North America, over half are migratory. Whether it's a short migration, like a change in elevation on a mountain, or long distance like South America to Alaska, plenty of birds are migratory.

The main reasons for birds to migrate include the search for food, nesting locations, and sometimes escaping the cold. Though many species can withstand freezing temperatures as long as they have a steady, reliable food source, the colder the weather, the harder it is.

Wild birds can be grouped into four general groups; permanent residents, who don't migrate and can find food sources year round. Short migrants migrate short distances, such as between elevations on a mountain as they follow food availability. Mid-distance migrants can travel a few hundred miles, and long-distance migrants can go as far as from Canada to South America.

While shorter distance migrants likely evolved to migrate chasing food availability, long distance migrants have much more complex patterns. The birds' need to migrate stems at least partially from their genetic makeup—taking cues from weather, geography, food sources and availability, and the length of the day, among other factors.

While the definite meanings behind migratory behaviour haven't been completely understood, one theory believes that during periods of glacial retreat, tropical birds' breeding grounds moved further and further north. The seasonal abundance of insects as a food source, paired with the longer days, allowed the birds that moved more north to raise more young than those who stuck around the tropics.

As breeding ended, and the winter weather encroached on the north, the birds moved back south in search of higher temperatures and more readily available food sources, resulting in the beginnings of migratory behaviours.

Another theory is that migration evolved from a series of smaller movements as wild birds searched for food sources, and better areas for breeding.

Though migration, especially over long distances, can seem like a more extreme adaptation, it's actually a logical response to resource availability.

Some places, as birds migrate, have higher concentrations of migrating birds than others; known as migrant traps. Migrant traps include areas like peninsulas, which are the last stop of some migrating birds before they head out over water.

Migrant traps are often excellent birding hotspots, and can sometimes result in lucky birders catching uncommon visitors as they migrate through an area.

### References

[allaboutbirds.org/news/the-basics-how-why-and-where-of-bird-migration/](http://allaboutbirds.org/news/the-basics-how-why-and-where-of-bird-migration/)  
[allaboutbirds.org/news/the-evolution-of-bird-migration/](http://allaboutbirds.org/news/the-evolution-of-bird-migration/)



### Avian Dripper

Attaches to your backyard hose to slowly drip fresh water into your basin. Drip frequency is controlled with a valve, and it works purely through water pressure with no electronics.

\*Bird bath not included.

\$75.99 EA.



# THE PURPOSE OF PESTS

BY IVY-LYNNE

As we enter into the final month of summer, most of us have encountered one of humanity's universally acknowledged enemies; the wasp.

Few insects face the level of animosity that wasps do. Even Aristotle hated wasps, famously stating that hornets and wasps "have nothing divine about them as bees have." While some of this dislike is warranted, much of it comes from the idea that wasps don't serve any purpose.

Bees, the direct dependent of wasps, are much better perceived even though they sting just like wasps do. One reason the two similar insects are regarded so differently is that the important ecological role of bees is universally recognized ("Save the bees," anyone?).

Wasps, on the other hand, are often regarded as nothing more than the malignant bullies of the insect world, intent on ruining picnics and barbecues alike.

This notion isn't entirely accurate.

Most people think this way about wasps because they are misunderstanding the wasp. Before we examine the important role that wasps play in our ecosystem, let's get to know the wasp a little better. Broadly speaking, wasps belong to two categories; social wasps and solitary wasps.

Social wasps are the most commonly recognized wasps. They have a more painful sting than solitary wasps, and usually reside in paper-mâché-like nests, made out of wood fiber by worker wasps. Social wasp colonies can have hundreds to thousands of wasps within a single nest. They are the most aggressive wasps, and fiercely protective over their nests.

When invaders attack the nest, social wasps will spray the intruder with a specific pheromone to let other wasps in the colony know who the target is.

Solitary wasps, in comparison, don't reside in large colonies like the social wasps do. A female solitary wasp usually builds her nest in the ground and raises her offspring independently.



A solitary wasp may occasionally sting, but their venom is different than that of a social wasp. Social wasp venom is curated to cause pain; in order to deter you away from their nest. Solitary wasp venom works more like a sedative, paralyzing its victim. For humans it's an unpleasant sensation, but it doesn't hurt the way a yellowjacket sting would.

While a certain level of caution and respect is pertinent around social wasps, their at times aggressive behaviour shouldn't make you write them off entirely. Wasps may seem like the ruffians of the insect world, but like bees they serve an important purpose.

Unlike bees, wasps are predators, and their predatory behaviours do serve a purpose.

Adult wasps eat primarily nectar and pollen, but their larvae require a protein-heavy diet. They can be incredibly effective insect predators.

Adult wasps will kill and gather insect carrion, usually tearing it to pieces, and bring it back to the larvae in their nests. Spiders, caterpillars, and other insects that can cause harm in your garden are the perfect prey for wasps.

Research has shown that common hunting wasps can control the fall army worm, a worm that often attacks crops in Brazil, as well as the Boer Moth who munches on sugarcane. Properly managed, social wasps can serve as a natural form of insect repellent instead of chemical pesticides, an idea that has been completely underutilized. Wasps' hunting of bugs also helps to maintain biodiversity by controlling insect populations.

Besides insect population control, wasps are also pollinators, even if pollination occurs accidentally. As adult wasps go from flower to flower to drink nectar, they spread pollen. One researcher found evidence of wasps visiting nearly nine hundred and sixty plant species, one hundred and sixty-four of which appeared to be totally dependent on them for pollination.

The role that wasps play in defending our gardens, pollinating our flowers, and keeping insect populations from taking over is important to keep in mind as wasps fly around all summer. Instead of opting for a bug-zapper racket, maybe leave them an unattended can of soda or bit of hot dog on a picnic table, as a thank you for all their hard work.

## 12" PLASTIC SAUCERS

Make your own bee waterer with a shallow dish, filled with rocks. Add some water (or sugar-water if you're feeling fancy) and make sure the rocks stick out above the surface.

The bees, wasps, and other backyard insects can perch on the rocks and have a safe drink, without the risk of falling in.



\$5.99 EA.



# BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are on Sundays (Nanaimo) and Tuesdays (Parksville). Locations and cancellations are posted to [thebirdstore.blogspot.com](http://thebirdstore.blogspot.com).

**Bird Walks are on pause for the summer months and will resume in September with exact dates TBD.**

The Sunday Bird Walk leaves The Backyard at 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings, or meets on location at 9:15 a.m.

The Parksville/Qualicum Beach Tuesday Bird Walk meet up location is the Parksville Tourist Information Center parking lot by Highway 19, Northwest Bay Rd. and Franklin's Gull Rd. in Parksville, also at 9 a.m., or on location at 9:15 a.m.

Bird Walks are not held during the summer months (July & August) but resume in early September. There is no charge for our bird walks, and they are designed to conclude before lunch (average approximately 2 hours).

We decide on the location of each bird walk the week before the scheduled bird walk outing. During the week we compile information about what birds are being seen and examine the weather forecast to ensure the walk is scheduled for the most productive location.

**All experience levels welcome. Bring your own binoculars when possible for the best experience.**

Check out our [online map](#) for common bird walk locations around Nanaimo and Parksville.

## HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday-Saturday 9:30-5:30

Sunday 12:00-4:30

## UPCOMING HOLIDAY HOURS

August 4th, *BC Day*: CLOSED

September 1st, *Labour Day*: CLOSED

## CONTACT US

6314 Metral Drive, Nanaimo, BC

250-390-3669

Toll Free 1-888-808-BIRD [2473]

[info@thebackyard.ca](mailto:info@thebackyard.ca)

[thebackyard.ca](http://thebackyard.ca)

[thebirdstore.blogspot.com](http://thebirdstore.blogspot.com)

Follow Us:



@TheBackyardWildbirdStore



@thebirdstore\_nanaimo



# BIRD SIGHTINGS

Report bird sightings by emailing

[birding@thebackyard.ca](mailto:birding@thebackyard.ca) or calling 250-390-3669

## JULY 12TH

25 Common Nighthawks at Timberwood Drive.

100+ Common Nighthawks at Morrell Sanctuary.

## JULY 15TH

10 Crossbills (Juv.) at Reef Road in Nanoose.

## DELIVERY SCHEDULE FOR AUGUST

**North Nanaimo to the Comox Valley**

August 13th and August 27th

**South Nanaimo to Duncan**

August 6th and August 20th

## AUGUST

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					1	
			S			
			N	World Lizard Day 14		National Honey Bee Day 15
			S World Mosquito Day			
			N	G		International Bat Night 20
International Bat Night 1						

## LOCAL FIELD NATURALIST GROUPS

[Nature Nanaimo](#) | [Arrowsmith Naturalists](#) | [Comox Valley Nature](#)  
| [Cowichan Valley Naturalist Society](#) | [Malaspina Naturalists](#) |  
[Rocky Point Bird Observatory](#) | [Saltspring Trail & Nature Club](#) |  
[Victoria Natural History Society](#) | [Yellowpoint Ecological Society](#)

