

BIRDMAN

Spring migration

BY TED A. GLOVER

Spring is in the air and the migration of thousands of birds is well under way by now. Many of these little fellows have wintered far to the south, some as far as South America. But they are on the move now and it is fun to keep our eyes out as they return to the Applegate Valley.

Rufous Hummingbirds are among the first to arrive, coming into our area in early March. Band-tailed Pigeons arrive here about mid-March. They have a distinctive light gray-tipped tail, yellow bill and legs, and a beautiful lavender hue on their bodies.

By the end of April the Black-headed Grosbeaks are back showing off a buffy orange breast and white patches on their wings as they move around foraging in the trees for pine and other seeds and various insects. Also arriving in April are the spectacular Lazuli Buntings, the male a vibrant sky-blue color with reddish breast and white belly. You'll see them close to or on the ground foraging for seeds, or at your thistle and sunflower feeders often with groups of American and Lesser Goldfinches.

One really special spring and summer

visitor to our area is the Western Kingbird. You should spot them quietly perched on power wires or fences watching for flying insects. If one happens by, off they fly to pick them out of the air, then return to their perch to gobble it down and wait patiently for the next one. The Western Kingbird has a light gray head, throat and upper breast, but a bright yellow belly. The tail of the Western Kingbird is square-tipped and black, with white on the outer edge of each side that is very noticeable when flying.

A relative of the Western Kingbird is the Tropical Kingbird that has a limited range north of the Mexican border, but is, in fact, the most widespread of all the kingbirds, nesting from Arizona and Texas

to central Argentina. But every year in the fall some Tropical Kingbirds wander along the Pacific Coast, even as far north as Canada and Alaska. We saw a pair of Tropical Kingbirds at the Arcata Marsh this past October.

Take some time this spring to notice the birds as they travel through our beautiful valley. The colors are magnificent as they reach their peak breeding plumage and begin to search for nesting sites to raise their young.

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The **Band-tailed Pigeon** is the largest pigeon in North America. It is found at altitudes between 3,000 and 12,000 feet, and feeds on seeds, especially acorns. Photo: Gary Kramer, fws.org.



Male **Lazuli Bunting**. The Lazuli Bunting is a North American songbird named for the gemstone lapis lazuli. Its habitat is brushy areas and sometimes weedy pastures. Photo: Dave Menke, fws.gov.



The **American Goldfinch** is the only finch in its subfamily that undergoes a complete molt. It is generally monogamous and produces one brood each year. Photo: Peter J. Thiemann, Flickr photo stream.



The **Western Kingbird** derives its name from its "take-charge" behavior. These birds defend their territory against much larger birds—even hawks. Photo: Peter J. Thiemann, Flickr photo stream.

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