

BIRD EXPLORER

Nesting songbirds in the Applegate

BY PETER J. THIEMANN

Soon some of our colorful songbirds will return from tropical Central America to nest here. There are four species that stand out with their stunning display: the Black-headed Grosbeak, the Western Tanager, the Common Yellowthroat, and Wilson's Warbler.

The male Black-headed Grosbeaks arrive first toward the end of April. They come to our bird feeder for sunflower seeds, then stake out a territory and start singing robin-like from the top of our big-leaf maple trees. When the maples leaf out, the female Grosbeaks arrive and nest building starts high up in the maples. By now plenty of food is available with flowering madrone trees and insects everywhere. The male Black-headed Grosbeaks continue to sing well

into May along with Song Sparrows and Lazuli Buntings. They all fill the Applegate Valley with joy and exuberance.

The arrival of the first male Western Tanagers is like a splash of tropical splendor. They come to our ponds for a bath, which is truly spectacular! Nesting high up in coniferous trees, the tanagers come down to flowering madrone and maple trees to feed. Flying insects, especially bees, are their preferred food. If you want to see Western Tanagers in your backyard, put out some fresh orange halves.

Then there are two colorful warblers that attract the attention of birders: The Common Yellowthroat and Wilson's Warbler. Both display much yellow color and like water habitat. In the riparian zone near creeks and rivers,

they are low down in shrubs. The Wilson's Warbler male has a distinct black cap with much yellow. The female is easily confused with the Yellow Warbler that shares the same habitat. Nesting low in some stream side shrub, the Wilson's Warbler becomes very secretive and hard to find. That is also true for the Common Yellowthroat, a warbler that prefers the water's edge with cattails and tule. The male has a stunning black face mask with considerable yellow on its breast and undertail covert. The Common Yellowthroat should not be confused with the much larger and secretive Yellow-breasted Chat, which is also found in wet, brushy areas.

And now, with the return of colorful neotropical birds, it is time to think about the upcoming 2015 Mountain

Bird Festival in Ashland on May 29 through 31. The festival features many interesting birds like the Mountain Bluebird and has field trips to find them. Klamath Bird Observatory is sponsoring the event. In my earlier Bird Explorer columns, I wrote about the elusive Great Gray Owl in southern Oregon. Together with Audubon we have now installed 11 nesting platforms and will be monitoring those in April. At the Mountain Bird Festival there may be a chance to see this awesome bird in the wild (visit <http://www.klamathbird.org/community/mountainbird>).

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Black-headed Grosbeak



Western Tanager



Common Yellowthroat



Wilson's Warbler

PHOTO CREDIT

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Proceeds to benefit the Applegate Grange and the Cantrall Buckley playground project.

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HAPPY
Mother's Day