

### Birds— Winter into Spring

by Alan Roedell, Master Birder and  
Publisher of Earthcare Northwest

*There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of birds. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter.* —Rachel Carson



Purple Martin

© 2006 Kevin Li

With winter segueing into spring and many of the birds we enjoy leaving for their breeding grounds, we're ready for the heralds of the new season...

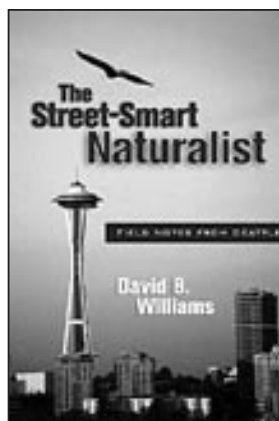
Common Yellowthroats, Orange-crowned Warblers, and others. Barn Swallows return, or maybe they didn't really leave this year. Birds that winter in South and Central America, such as Rufous Hummingbirds and Western Tanagers, are already making their way north.

In this issue of *Earthcare Northwest*, we'll talk about where our winter birds come from, and we'll focus on a special bird of summer, the Purple Martin. Please see pages 8 and 9 for more.

### Program

**The Street-Smart Naturalist:  
Field Notes from Seattle  
With David Williams**  
Thursday, March 16, 7:00PM  
Center for Urban Horticulture  
Free and open to the public!

Botany and bugs, geology and geese, creeks and crows—living in Seattle doesn't have to separate us from the natural world. Naturalist David B. Williams offers a presentation based on his book, *The Street-Smart Naturalist*. He will discuss the history of Canada Geese in Seattle, how suburban development helps crows, what Seattle looked like botanically in 1850, and what clues are left in the landscape to interpret this story.



Doors open at 6:30PM with Nature Shop selections, displays, and refreshments. Books will be available for purchase and signing. The Center for Urban Horticulture is located at 3501 NE 41st Street in the Laurelhurst neighborhood. From NE 45th Street, turn south on Mary Gates Memorial Way to NE 41st Street.

### Inside

Seattle Audubon	2
...For Birds	
Skagit County Northern State Recreation Area	4
Seattle Audubon Volunteers	5
...And Nature	
The Battle to Restore Columbia and Snake River Wild Salmon and Steelhead	6
Feature	
Birds—Winter into Spring	8
Field Trips	10
Classes	12
Good Deals	14

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the editor's discretion.

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## Of Note

• **New volunteer orientation, Tuesday, March 21**, at 7PM at the Seattle Audubon Center. Register with Lorraine at [lorraineh@seattleaudubon.org](mailto:lorraineh@seattleaudubon.org) or 206-523-8243, x12.

• **Time to think...Birdathon, May 2006!** This is the year to get involved!—Toddler Birding, Family Birding, Boat Birding, Bike Birding, Owling, Corporate Teams, Beginning Birding, and more. There's something for everyone this year. Find your donors now!

• **Spring Audubon Council of Washington, March 24-26**, Ft. Warden. For more information, contact [nladenbe@aol.com](mailto:nladenbe@aol.com).

• **Donate your old vehicle** to Seattle Audubon and help support its programs. Call 206-523-8243, x7, and leave a message. And a hearty *thank you* to Horace Parker and Alan Johnson, who recently donated vehicles.

• **Save the date: Spring Plant Sale at Seattle Audubon, Saturday, April 8.**

• **Wish List**—Wanted: a new, large piece of carpet for our basement conference room.

• **Volunteer Opportunities—Something for Everybody!**

—file and do administrative work — lead a monthly mailing group — scan/archive historical records — run a small eBay auction — join the Birdathon planning group — help develop our on-line Breeding Bird Atlas — serve as an intern in the conservation, development, education, or volunteer programs — help organize our annual dinner.

• **Volunteers needed for bird surveys** in riparian and shoreline habitats of King County. Feeder watches, bird surveys, data entry, and public education. All levels of experience welcome; training begins March 2006. For more information contact Sherry Hudson at [Pugetsoundbird@gmail.com](mailto:Pugetsoundbird@gmail.com).

• **Volunteers needed for Black River Channel Restoration Project.** Saturday, March 11, planting, and Saturday, April 22, installation of the drip irrigation system. Contact Doris Yopez at [dorisdandelion@yahoo.com](mailto:dorisdandelion@yahoo.com).

• **Seattle Audubon 2006 Awards—Nominations Due April 21.** Please help us recognize individuals who go the extra mile for birds and nature in education, conservation, and science. The deadline for nominations is 4PM, April 21. For more complete details, consult the Seattle Audubon web site or contact Ann Nez, Awards Chair, at [nezac@jps.net](mailto:nezac@jps.net).

• **Thank You to** —The BirdNote Content Advisory Group: Paul Bannick, Ellen Blackstone, Herb Curl, John Kessler, Dennis Paulson, Todd Peterson, Victor Schefler, Bob Sundstrom, Idie Ulsh, Connie VanDeventer and Frances Wood, and administrative volunteer Amanda Gibson, as BirdNote celebrates one year on the air

—Nature Shop volunteers who helped at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show: Karen Adair, Carrie Aikin, Diana Aubin de Paradis, Barbara Clark, Mike Donahue, Carolyn Eagan, Barb Faville, Theres Fillmore, Charlie Kahle, Gina Lozier, Teri Martin, Virginia Morrison, Walt Oelwein, Eldon Olson, David Shettleroe, Sue Thompson, Mary Anne Thorbeck, and Alison Wysong.

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## A Time of Changes

by Marina Skumanich,  
Interim Executive Director

March is a time of changes. Our wonderful wet-season friends—the ducks, geese, and raptors (including those Snowy Owls!) that spent the winter here—are already heading northward, eastward, or upward in elevation toward their nesting areas.

While it is always a bit sad to see them go, it means, of course, that around the corner are our next season's friends: the shorebirds passing through on their way up north and the songbirds and other migrants that will spend the summer here. And all the while, the



days are getting longer and longer, as we move toward the summer solstice.

Changes come to organizations just as they do in nature. At Seattle Audubon, we have had some changes in the past few months. In particular, we said farewell to Executive Director Mark Buckley in December, when he stepped down from the position for personal reasons. We miss Mark, but are already hard at work seeking

his replacement.

Seattle Audubon will continue forward with new leadership, and with the same underlying commitment to cultivate and lead a community that values and protects our beloved birds and the environment, whatever the season!

## Welcome, Karen Shea

Karen Shea has joined the Seattle Audubon board as Conservation Chair. Karen has diverse executive level experience with public, private, and not-for-profit business throughout her professional career. Most recently, she was president and owner of the *Images of Nature* gallery in Kirkland. She has served as a volunteer in several environmental organizations and as a board member and advisor to business organizations supporting the growth initiatives in Kirkland.

Karen grew up outside of Chicago where her interest in nature began early. She developed a true passion after

spending time at her family's cabin in Jackson, Wyoming. A long-standing member of numerous environmental organizations, she's always in pursuit of ways to be more actively involved in making a difference for the environment. "I am extremely excited about this opportunity and look forward to achieving great things with Seattle Audubon."



## Spotlight on Volunteers— Alan Humphrey



With unrivaled talent and dedication, Alan donated 400 hours to oversee the technical development of the improved BirdWeb ([www.birdweb.org](http://www.birdweb.org)), doing much of the work himself. He is now working to launch the on-line publication of *Sound to Sage*, the breeding bird atlas for King, Kittitas, Kitsap, and Island Counties. Alan has photographed our "Rare Birds." One of his photographic images is in the latest Discovery Park calendar.

Born in Tucson and raised in the Southwest, he graduated from Lewis and Clark College and always wanted to come back here. He was introduced to birding and Seattle Audubon by his son, who became interested in birds while doing a second grade project about the Union Bay Natural Area. His wife's reading of a volunteer opportunity in *Earthcare* led him to volunteer his technical wizardry to BirdWeb upon his retirement from Amazon.com.

### SEATTLE AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT

Seattle Audubon cultivates and leads a community that values and protects birds and the natural environment.

Seattle Audubon is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

### Invest in the Future—Make a Bequest to Seattle Audubon

Contact Christina Peterson  
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[chrisp@seattleaudubon.org](mailto:chrisp@seattleaudubon.org)



**SEATTLE AUDUBON CENTER  
and NATURE SHOP**  
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## Skagit County Northern State Recreation Area

by Eric Wagner, graduate student in biology at the University of Washington

The Northern State Recreation Area has an understated quality that makes it easy to miss. Regardless of its peculiar history, or perhaps because of it, the NSRA is a pleasant spot to spend a couple of hours on an overcast afternoon. (The ambience of the place—subdued, brooding—lends itself more to clouds than sun.)



Courtesy of Skagit County Parks & Recreation

In the foothills of the Cascades, the Northern State Recreation Area is a deceptively large 726-acre portion of the former Northern State Hospital. The hospital itself opened in the early 1900s, and was a state mental asylum until it closed in 1976. In 1991, Skagit County purchased part of the grounds, and initially planned to build public ball fields, concessions, and an equestrian center. Those plans have since been abandoned, but people still ride horses through the area.

From the parking lot, you can follow one of several meandering loop trails or out-and-backs, none of which are terribly long. Some of them are graveled

and some aren't, and those that aren't can be soggy so wear appropriate shoes. Step carefully at all times, though: trails of every sort are littered with coyote scat, among other things.

The park has a nice sampling of habitats. Small stands of conifers hide Black-capped Chickadees, Bushtits, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Hedgerows teem with Song, Fox, and Golden-crowned Sparrows, as well as towhees, juncos, and the odd wren. Downy Woodpeckers and Northern Flickers fly through the cottonwood and alder thickets, while Pileated Woodpeckers call from the forests at the park boundary. Waterfowl fly over on their way to areas with more standing water. Red-tailed Hawks and the occasional Bald Eagle circle over extensive open fields. Watch, too, for American Kestrels, hovering, searching for prey in the grass below. Hansen Creek, once an important salmon stream, runs through the site and is slated for restoration by the county.

The park's most interesting components are, by far, the remains of the hospital's own dairy and poultry operations, all in varying stages of decomposition. Although I saw only Rock Pigeons flying in and out while I was there, the floors were covered with owl pellets, and people have reported seeing Barn and Northern Pygmy-Owls. The county warns visitors to stay out of these "historic structures"—a wise injunction given that their structural integrity doesn't inspire much confidence.

*Directions from Seattle: Take I-5 North past Burlington. Exit at #230 and follow SR-20 East through Sedro-Woolley. Continue on SR-20 about a mile past its SR-9 junction until you hit Helmick Road. Take a right on Helmick and drive about a quarter-mile. On your left is a large gravel parking lot (with a small kiosk) in an open field. Further up Helmick is a smaller parking area, tucked in between some of the old barns. There is a port-a-potty on-site.*

## Seattle Audubon Volunteers

Last month, we recognized Seattle Audubon volunteers who have given more than 100 hours of service from 1996-2005. This month we recognize and thank all our other Seattle Audubon volunteers, many of them approaching 100 hours of service, others beginning to volunteer, and others whose service goes unreported. Please let us know if we have inadvertently omitted your name from the list below:

Bola Agbonile, Alison Agness, Adam Ah-ringer, Sally Alhadeff, Robyn Allison, Brid-  
gid Anderson, Catherine Anderson, Janine  
Anderson, Jeffrey Anderson, Tracy Angulo,  
Helen Anshell, Vanarasi Antony Swamy,  
James Applegate, Lynn Arnold, Molly Bai-  
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sica Wood, Valerie Woolley, Cheryl Wotus,  
Amy Yambor, Sung Yang, Ning Zhang, and  
Zelma Ziemann.

Good News!

## Seattle City Light Goes Green

Seattle City Light has cut its net greenhouse-gas emissions to zero. City officials credit conservation, payments to companies for reducing their greenhouse-gas emissions, payments for city, Metro, and garbage trucks to switch to biodiesel, shedding partnership in a coal-fired power plant, and of course, reliance on hydropower, which comes with its own issues.

Mayor Greg Nickels said "We have a fundamental belief that we can power the city without toasting the planet." In 2000, Seattle generated 636,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year. Seattle achieved its progress without a huge subsidization by taxpayers. The cost per household was estimated to be around \$2 annually.

From *The Seattle Times*, November 10, 2005

## The Battle to Restore Columbia and Snake River Wild Salmon and Steelhead

by Joseph Bogaard,  
Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition

Last month, the Bush administration announced its newest salmon policy for the Columbia and Snake River basin. Given the failure of its past programs to restore healthy runs of wild salmon and steelhead and the habitat that they depend upon, one might think that a brand new policy would be welcome.

Unfortunately, the new policy continues to downplay the critical roles of a safe migration corridor (in other words—"a healthy river for salmon") and the habitat protection and restoration efforts that our endangered fish so desperately need. Instead, the administration has taken aim at Northwest fishing communities.

At a major salmon conference in Portland, administration representative and Director of the Council on Environmental Quality, James Connaughton, parachuted in at the last minute, dumbfounding hundreds of regional scientists gathered to discuss long-term recovery strategies. Claiming that hydropower improvements are "well under way," Mr. Connaughton announced plans to greatly restrict fishing seasons in order to restore endangered fish.

Northwesterners understand that an



USFWS, Tim Knepp

*There is a fire in water. There is an invisible flame, hidden in water, that creates not heat but life. And in this bewildering age, no matter how dark or glib some humans work to make it, wild salmon still climb rivers and mountain ranges in absolute earnest, solely to make contact with that flame. — David James Duncan, A Prayer for the Salmon's Second Coming*

"All-H" approach is necessary: we need to face the problems of hydro, habitat destruction, harvest, and hatcheries. But that is not what is occurring in the Columbia Basin, where dams are the primary cause of salmon mortality. This supposedly new policy ignores the fact that there isn't much of a fishing season left today; as stocks have declined, so have the fishing opportunities.

While fishermen harvest less than 3% of the salmon, dams are allowed to kill up to 90%. Targeting fishermen while ignoring dams is nothing more than bad science and fuzzy math. A *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* editorial called the new policy "phony as a fishing lure." "As long as the administration tries to divert attention from the impact of dams, it doesn't have a plan."

Meanwhile, Christine Gregoire and the other Northwest governors, as well as the Columbia River Treaty tribes, are struggling to work with the federal government as it rewrites yet another Columbia and Snake Rivers salmon plan under court order. The previous plan—with a price tag of \$6 billion—tried to redefine dams as part of the natural environment. The judge rejected this illegal plan last year and ordered the administration to produce a new plan—in collaboration with the states and tribes—by October 2006. Stay tuned!

For more information:  
<http://www.wildsalmon.org> or contact [joseph@wildsalmon.org](mailto:joseph@wildsalmon.org).

## Seattle Audubon Chooses Biodiesel!

We are proud to announce that Seattle Audubon will switch to biodiesel fuel to heat our main office and the Nature Shop. The decision to switch will come as no surprise to Seattle Audubon members. Promoting a healthy environment starts with everyday decisions. In the short-term, biodiesel may cost a little more

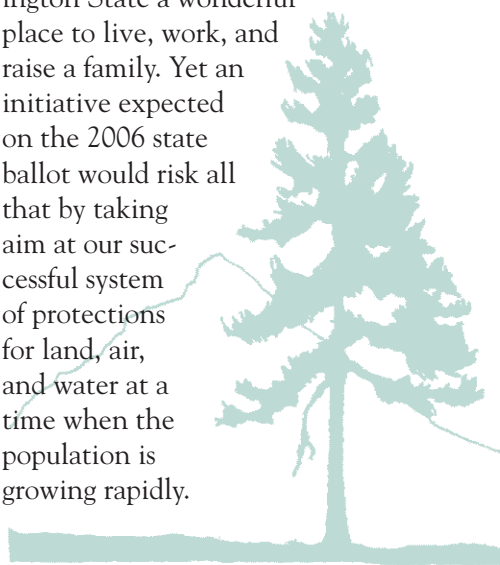
per year, but we are confident that we are leading the way, and that prices will soon compete with those of traditional petroleum products.

The switch to biodiesel is made possible with help from Laurelhurst Oil, a Seattle-based family-owned company and a local leader in biodiesel.

## Developers' Initiative Coming to Washington in 2006

by Matt Mega,  
Urban Habitat Program Director

Beautiful wildlife, spectacular scenery, clean air and water, wide open spaces: these are the hallmarks that make Washington State a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. Yet an initiative expected on the 2006 state ballot would risk all that by taking aim at our successful system of protections for land, air, and water at a time when the population is growing rapidly.



If approved, this developers' initiative would create a loophole for developers and other special interests to get around land-use laws that safeguard our health and safety *and* protect habitats for species across Washington. Wisely, Washington voters soundly rejected a similar initiative, Referendum 48, in 1995.

Oregon wasn't so lucky. Backed by timber companies and developers, Oregon's Measure 37 was approved in 2004 and requires that governments either pay landowners for claims of diminished property value due to land-use laws or not enforce those laws at all. More than 2,500 claims have been made so far. Over and over, Oregon's cash-strapped governments have had to let reasonable, common-sense protections for clean water and habitats fall by the wayside, when they have been unable to pay property owners.

In rural Polk County, the board of commissioners approved a Measure 37 demand for one million feet of commercial space (the size of a large shopping center) on farm and forest land. "The demand approved by the county means clogged roads, destruction of farmland, and reduced property values," said local resident Allison Hamilton.

Measure 37 was struck down in a county court in October 2005. The judge ruled the measure is unconstitutional because governments cannot be forced to choose between protecting the health and safety of citizens and paying private parties to comply with the law. Not surprisingly, the special interests who sponsored the measure are aggressively challenging the ruling. The ultimate outcome in Oregon remains unclear, but Measure 37 has clearly created an unnecessary and expensive legal mess, generating confusion and frustration in communities across the state.

Washington must say "No" to a developers' initiative to avoid stories like that of Washington County farmer, DeLoris Grossen. Her county has seen almost 400 Measure 37 claims, more than any other local government in the state of Oregon. "You can't farm if your neighbor sells his (land) to a condominium builder," said Grossen. This threat to her livelihood prompted her to join other farmers in the lawsuit against the measure.

The initiative planned for Washington will be worded differently from Measure 37, but the intent will be the same—to create a loophole for developers who don't want to be slowed down by neighborhood or community concerns. And the effect will be the same—more irresponsible development, more lost habitat, more snarled traffic, and erosion of our outstanding quality of life.

To learn more and get engaged, contact Dan Stonington with the Community Protection Coalition at dan@protectcommunities.org or 206-323-0520.

## Seattle Audubon Continues to Advocate for Owls

by Alex Morgan,  
Conservation Director

As Spotted Owl populations continue to decline across Washington, Seattle Audubon continues to address the species' needs from policy, scientific, and legal perspectives. In the past year, our efforts have resulted in two critical studies by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife—a statewide habitat assessment and an analysis of the failing state rules for logging in owl habitat.

Recently the Forest Practices Board adopted an emergency rule to eliminate the process of decertification for two years until the completion of a federal recovery plan.

Finally, as a result of Seattle and Kittitas Audubons' legal efforts, the federal government has at last begun developing a recovery plan for Spotted Owls. This plan is long overdue but, upon its completion, will guide the actions of state and federal agencies, private landowners, and conservation groups for years to come.

While each of these is an important stride toward owl recovery, our efforts are far from over. Stay tuned for coming news and information about our efforts to protect this imperiled species.

# Birds— Winter into Spring

by Alan Roedell, Master Birder and Publisher  
of Earthcare Northwest



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Sanderling at Water's Edge

This long, wet winter is almost over. Without birds, it would have been tedious. We're thankful we had chickadees and hummingbirds to remind us to fill the feeders, and once in a while a swarm of Bushtits would sweep in to decorate a bare tree. The crows, starlings, and Rock Pigeons are ubiquitous, but still interesting to watch. If they seem all too human, it's

because they've learned how to live with us. They don't migrate because we supply everything they need in the way of food and places to safely nest and roost. As long as there are lawns, there will be starlings. As long as there is garbage, there'll be crows. Rock Pigeons can live just about anywhere; it's just easier for them to live around people. (You almost want to cheer when you see them nesting on rocky cliffs in the foothills of the Cascades.)

Sometimes harsh conditions force birds to leave their winter grounds to look for better conditions. This year Snowy Owls came south, because up north there were too many of them and not enough food. A few years ago there were large flocks of Common Redpolls all around the Puget

Sound region, even in the arboretum. For a while, they were easy to find; then they disappeared. Pine Siskins, regular visitors to our thistle feeders were not to be found this year. Reportedly, large flocks have been seen in Oregon. Since these movements are not regular occurrences, they are called irruptions.

Some of our most desirable visitors come from higher elevations to the lowlands where their food isn't buried in snow. Varied Thrushes intrigue us, because they look like robins except for the distinctive "V" on their breasts. Golden-crowned Kinglets show off their acrobatic skills, 'though mostly hiding their golden crowns. The striking Townsend's Warblers are treetop dwellers, but a few visit lowland suet feeders in winter. Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows will win any observer's heart. When spring comes, they'll go back to the forests in the foothills and mountains. These movements are called altitudinal migration. It happens every year.

If you go to the coast or north Puget Sound, you'll find thousands of Dunlin putting on a show that will take your breath away. Pursued by a hungry falcon, they form dark flocks that flash dazzling silver, as they perform extreme maneuvers to confuse the relentless raptor. On the sandy beaches, hundreds of Sanderlings have been skillfully choreographed to chase the waves as they go out, vigorously plucking organisms from the sand and beating a hasty retreat as the waves chase them back up the slope, and then repeating *ad infinitum*. Shorebirds are masters of migration, some commuting thousands of miles from their winter homes to the long days of feeding and breeding in the north. They do it because their ancestors did it and they were successful. It has worked for them for thousands of years.

We are lucky to live in an area where we can observe them, and with luck, our great-great-great-grandchildren will be fortunate enough to do the same.

## Seattle Audubon Sightings, Winter 1966-67

This was the winter of the SNOWY OWLS. Many were seen in Seattle and in various places from Southern Oregon to Northern Washington. A man from Ocean Shores reported seeing 27 in one group. Two Western bluebirds were seen near Issaquah. 100 Sanderlings were seen feeding at night at Alki beach. An Emperor Goose was seen at Whiterock. 18 Trumpeter Swans were sighted on the slough of the Skagit.

## The Purple Martin— A True Bird of Summer

by Alan Roedell, *Publisher*

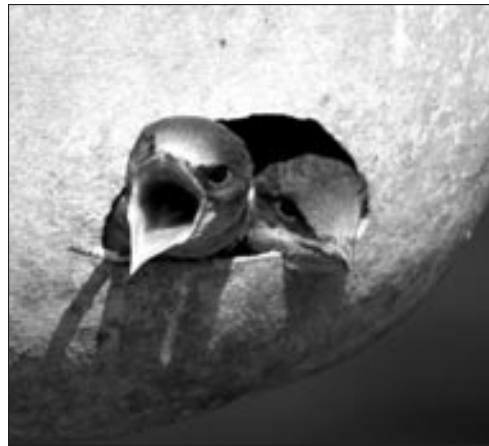
After a four- to eight-thousand-mile trip, Purple Martins spend their non-breeding season from Colombia to Argentina, eating insects. Their migration north is timed so as to arrive in our area when the quantity of prey food is adequate for the high energy requirements of courtship and egg-laying, usually around mid-April.

Thousands of Purple Martins once nested in Seattle and its suburbs until starlings and House Sparrows, more aggressive nesters, gained the upper claw, as it were, and took over every suitable nesting cavity in the region. By the late '80s there was only one known nesting pair of martins left and then, nothing. In 1996, Ken Jacobsen wrote an article in *Earthcare Northwest*, decrying the decline of a once-numerous bird and suggesting that a nest box program might help to bring back the beautiful and useful Purple Martin.

Kevin Li answered the call. Kevin, an environmental scientist for King County, began building and installing nest boxes on pilings near Ballard and the lower Duwamish River area. Almost immediately, Purple Martins began nesting in them and successfully raised young. Kevin soon discovered that the job doesn't end there. House Sparrows and starlings found the nest boxes suitable for their nests, too. Kevin carried a long ladder on top of his car and often used a boat for the otherwise inaccessible nests. Evicting unsuitable tenants wasn't a fun job, but a necessary one. Later, Kevin discovered that hollowed-out gourds were preferred only by martins. Starlings and House Sparrows didn't like the large hole or the swaying, or both. The gourds are pricey and hard to clean, but if properly cared for they will last for five years.

Martins, the largest of our North American swallows, are not leery of people. Humans have long recognized their importance to agriculture. Native Americans, before Europeans came here, hung up gourds for them to nest in, and immigrants did the same. Today, throughout middle and eastern North America, there are probably hundreds of thousands of gourds, boxes, and martin houses erected and tended by farmers and townsfolk who know the value of having martins for neighbors. Although not the hard-core mosquito-consumers they were once thought to be, they do eat thousands of insects each day, many of which are detrimental to food crops.

The males, dark purplish-blue, and the females, dark blue above and grayish brown below, build a nest within a cavity using leaves, twigs, mud, and grass. The female lays a clutch of three to six eggs, which hatch after 24 to 28 days. Both parents participate in feeding them until they can fend for themselves. In late August they stage in large groups and head south for the long trek to South America, to return again the next spring.



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*Portions of this article originally appeared in the newsletter of the Washington Ornithological Society, Volume 100, and are used here with permission. Thanks, WOS.*

## One Person=75 pairs of Purple Martins

Kevin Li was scheduled to write the accompanying article, but unfortunately he passed away January 30, while scuba diving in Puget Sound. It is an unimaginable loss for his family and friends, and also for those who knew him from meeting him in the field or just knew of his work and wished him well.

Dennis Paulson writes: "While the rest of us were out there being edified by birds, Kevin found a way he could return the favor. He was best known to most of us through his unflagging efforts to provide nest boxes for Purple Martins, to get them to return to this region. He had help from many others, but I think Kevin, by his enthusiasm and many hours of hard work, can be credited for turning around the decline of that charismatic species. His life should be an inspiration to all of us to give back to nature just as it gives so much to us."

Thank you, Kevin.