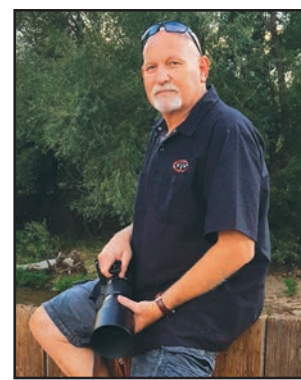


Birds of El Paso County

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Fountain Valley's Bird Whisperer

Lazuli Buntings



A male Lazuli Bunting.



I hope the spring migration has been a joy to all. Hopefully, some of my tips helped you bring new birds to your yard. I am so blessed to have heard from several readers this month. It sounds like some readers got to see some Bullock's Orioles for the first time. For me, spring seems to have been a bit delayed. Normally, by the 1st of June, I am on the backend of seeing all the migratory birds. I usually get the heaviest of the migration in the 1st or 2nd week of May. This year it seems like everything is a couple of weeks behind. Maybe they knew the late winter storm was coming. I am just now seeing heavy numbers of Orioles and my usual Buntings and Grosbeaks. One of my favorite visitors every year is the Lazuli Buntings and this year, I wasn't disappointed.

The Lazuli Bunting is a beautiful little song bird. The brilliant blue color on its head and tail are where it gets its name. The name "Lazuli" comes from the beautiful blue gemstone "Lapis." The Lazuli Bunting has some of the most varied colors of the Buntings outdone only by the Painted Buntings. The beautiful blue or even turquoise-colored head and tail, a pumpkin-colored chest and white belly make for a stunning looking song bird. The female Lazuli Buntings can look much like a finch or sparrow and easily go unnoticed. I just recently saw an image of an Indigo and Lazuli Bunting Hybrid spotted in El Paso County. The blue on the head was so much more brilliant. Hybrids can happen between different species of buntings. The most common Buntings in our area are the Lazuli and the Indigo. In the beginning of May, a female Painted Bunting was spotted behind the Fountain Library at the bird feeders. I assume there was a male nearby. This is very rare for our area so keep your eyes open.

I wish I had some great tips on attracting Lazuli Buntings. The best advice I can give is the same as I always say: Migrating birds will only stop

where they see other bird activity. Keep your yard and feeders busy, and you never know who might stop by. Lazuli Buntings are a very small song bird. They are about the size of a sparrow or finch. They do not tend to hang out in flocks so a single one stopping by can be easily missed. Lazuli Buntings have a beautiful little song but as small as they are, their song is hard to hear unless you are very close. Some migrating birds can be heard long before you see them. Grosbeaks for example have a beautiful song that carries. I can often hear them from a half a block away. I can play Grosbeak calls and hear them respond from 100s of yards away. You almost need to be within 20 feet of a bunting to hear them. Playing calls to attract them is difficult as well. Most recordings I have found are very faint. Much like a Gold Finch, if I see them and I am close, playing their song will draw their attention but it won't bring them in from any distance.

As small as the Lazuli Buntings are, they can be easily missed and you may never know you had any visit your yard. I try to take a few days during the migration to just sit in the yard and watch. I have made many wonderful discoveries doing that. Many birds I would have never known were here. They are not drawn to any special foods like jelly or fruits. Regular bird seed and black oil sunflower seed seems to be what they come to. Lazuli Buntings will behave much like a sparrow. They will eat a bit from a feeder and then head back off into a bush. Sitting and watching is your best bet to see one. I have seen several while at parks or on nature hikes but they are usually alone and move very fast. If you are not a big hiker or spend much time at the parks, your yard is best chance you have to see one in El Paso County. Try to make it a point to spend some time just watching feeders, especially the feeders where the sparrows hang out most. There are actually some really nice feeder cameras out now. They are

feeders with little cameras attached to them. You can set them up and connect them to a smart phone or a PC. Even if you are not watching it all the time, you can scroll back throughout the day. Some even have alerts on them and will beep when a bird is in view of the camera. I'm seriously thinking about setting up a couple of them.

The images I shared for this column are all from my backyard habitat. I spent many hours sitting and waiting by the feeders, and it was well worth it. I think I have seen a female Lazuli Bunting, but they are so small and can easily be mistaken for a sparrow or a finch so I can't say for sure if I have. They may stick around for a few weeks and then they will head off to nest. If you have never seen one, it's not too late this year. Keep an eye on those feeders and around bushes and shrubs. Please feel free to reach out. I have had the most readers I have ever had reach out this last month and it means so much to me. I love seeing all the birds our area has to offer, but my heart is full when someone writes and says they followed my tips and saw their first Oriole, Bunting, Grosbeak or Gold Finch. Maybe you have a wonderful story about a new backyard visitor. I would love to write a column one month with just readers' stories and also share any pictures you have taken. Have a beautiful month of June. I am off to Cuchara for 10 days next week; I will be in Hummingbird heaven, and I always bring my own feeders. If you go camping or just spend a day in the mountains, always take feeders and food. You never know what you might see. Happy birding!

Feel free to message me on Facebook, email or give me a call if you observe behavior in birds that you have never seen. If I don't know about it we can learn together.

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