

Recovery challenges for Birds at Risk in Garry Oak Ecosystems of British Columbia

Suzanne Beauchesne

Western Wildlife Research, 1799 Swayne Rd, Errington, BC,
< smbeauchesne@shaw.ca >, Phone: 250-954-1822

The Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, Vertebrates at Risk Recovery Implementation Group (Vertebrates RIG) established a list of vertebrate taxa that have high priority for research and recovery efforts in the Georgia Depression Ecoprovince of south western British Columbia. The taxa selected rely on Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*) or associated ecosystems for the majority or an important part of their lifecycle, and are either in decline or are currently extirpated from the region. As an initial step in understanding the issues related to individual species, stewardship accounts were developed for four priority species: Coastal Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus affinis*), and the Georgia Depression Populations of the Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*), Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), and Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*). At the same time, Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) contracted the preparation of a status report for the Streaked Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*), a fifth priority species for the Vertebrates RIG.

The Vesper Sparrow is the only one of the five priority bird species with an extant breeding population in the Georgia Depression; the other four species are considered extirpated as breeding species. Observation of a breeding display by a Streaked Horned Lark in 2002 represents the only recent record of that species in the region during the breeding season. Western Meadowlarks and Lewis's Woodpeckers occur in the non-breeding season on an annual or nearly annual basis, but breeding has not been reported for some time. There are no breeding or non-breeding records of Western Bluebirds during the past five years, although this species did breed on Vancouver Island until at least the mid-1990s. The stewardship accounts outline population trends, identify potential threats to the species, and recommend management actions for each species. There are common themes between the five species and some of the suggested management actions have the potential to benefit more than one species. Challenges pertaining to recovery of the birds at risk in Garry oak and associated ecosystems are outlined.