



Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) x Lazuli Bunting (*P.ameona*) With Fledged Young in East Kootenay, British Columbia

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On 22 August 2010, a male Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*; Figure 1), in company with an unidentified female bunting, was observed by TW along the edge of a shrubby sewage lagoon at the city of Cranbrook's treatment facility in southeastern British Columbia. The birds were first observed in a rose (*Rosa* sp.) bush on the berm of the dyke. The male subsequently flew to an adjacent stand of immature Douglas-firs (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* var. *glauca*) on the southern side of the lagoon. During that same observation, both the male and female were observed flying from the Douglas-fir thicket to a patch of water smartweed (*Polygonum amphibium*) growing on a sand bar at the base of the berm and sweet clover (*Melilotus* spp.) growing on the southern shore of the berm. Both individuals were observed hunting grasshoppers and returning to the Douglas-fir thicket to feed fledged young. On 27 August PD visited the site and observed the two adults and at least two fledged young. On 28 August, a group of naturalists visited the site and again observed the family group. The male Indigo Bunting was at the edge of the Douglas-fir in the rose bush on the berm, while the female (still unidentified) and young were feeding on insects in the water smartweed and sweet clover.

During each observation, the group remained within 30 m of each other, with repeated "shweep" calls keeping them in contact. Observations on both 27 and the 28 August lasted about 90 minutes. On one occasion, the two young were heard calling

from the Douglas-fir. In response, the female immediately flew to them and perched nearby. The female was observed to remain fairly close to the young for much of the time, whereas the male was more inclined to be slightly apart from the group.



Figure 1. Male Indigo Bunting. Photo by Tony Wideski, Cranbrook, BC., 28 August 2010. BC Photo 3737a.

The general habitat of the area is the drier site series of the Interior Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone (IDF dm2, 02; Tisdale and McLean 1957). The microhabitat used was a narrow (< 20 m wide) Douglas-fir thicket bordering the south side of the sewage lagoon, several willow (*Salix* spp.), and rose bushes on the dyke across the lagoon and within 20m of the Douglas-fir thicket and the sandbar vegetation which was largely smartweed and sweet clover.

Upon examination of the photographs taken on 27 August, it became obvious from the white wing bars on the female, that it was a Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*; Figure 2). The family group was seen again in the same location on 1 and 6 September and at least one bunting was glimpsed for the last time on 11 September. Potential nesting habitat could have been provided by the immature Douglas-fir thicket on the south side of the lagoon.



Figure 2. Female Lazuli Bunting. *Photo by Tony Wideski, Cranbrook, BC., 24 August 2010. BC Photo 3737b.*

Hybridization between these two species has been documented where their ranges regularly overlap in the western Great Plains and parts of Montana and North Dakota (Sibley and Short 1959, Kroodsma 1975, Payne 1992). Further east, where ranges normally do not overlap, vagrant male Indigo Buntings will attempt to breed with Lazuli Buntings and have been reported along the British Columbia-Alberta border (Greene et al. 1996). Kroodsma (1975) mentions Lazuli Bunting is not extending its range eastward as fast as Indigo Bunting is dispersing westward.

Another noteworthy record for the Kootenay region of the province was of a male Indigo Bunting and a female Lazuli Bunting in the company of two fledged birds at Nakusp in 1990 (Gary S. Davidson pers. comm.).

There are three hybrid records of Indigo x Lazuli buntings for Oregon (Marshall et al. 2006) and none reported for Washington (Wahl et al. 2005). †

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About the Authors



Tony's interest in birding began at an early age growing up in the Lower Mainland of southwestern BC. Having a 30-year career in forest management and engineering with the British Columbia Forest Service allowed him to work in various areas of coastal and northern interior of the province, which made for great birding. He has participated in Christmas Bird Counts in Prince Rupert and Fort St. James. Tony is a Registered Professional Forester and is currently a senior manager in a dual role with the Forest Service and Integrated Land Management Bureau in Cranbrook. Along with his wife Pam, he is an active member of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists and enjoys participating in furthering local knowledge related to birds of the East Kootenay region.



Peter retired as a habitat and wildlife biologist with the BC Ministry of Environment in 2004 after 22 years as a civil servant. Recently he has been volunteering his time and interests with the Rocky Mountain Naturalists and the Rocky Mountain Trench Restoration Society. Peter has been an amateur bird watcher for more than 30 years. And has participated in the Breeding Bird Atlas, Breeding Bird Surveys, the British Columbia/Yukon nocturnal owl surveys, the annual Christmas Bird Count, and "Little Big Day" birding competitions. He has also participated in Flammulated Owl inventory and nest-site analysis and Williamson Sapsucker inventory and habitat analysis in the East Kootenay.