

## Endangered Species and Spaces

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### 4.18 American Avocet: *Recurvirostra americana* (Gmelin)

Order: *Charadriiformes*  
Family: *Recurvirostridae*

#### Status

Global Rank: G5  
Provincial Rank: S2S3B, SZN  
COSEWIC: not addressed

Provincial Listing: [Blue list](#)



#### Distinguishing Features

Striking colouration and large size make the American Avocet easily identifiable. It has an extremely long, slightly upturned bill, long pale blue legs, pinkish-orange head and neck, with a white abdomen and back, and black wings. Total length is

41 - 51 cm (Godfrey, 1986).

#### Distribution

Columbia Basin: American Avocets are known to have bred at Duck Lake near Creston, but this site is no longer in use (Campbell et al. 1990). Currently may be found infrequently throughout the Columbia Basin in suitable habitat during migration.

British Columbia: Breeding is locally distributed at a few known sites mainly in the Thompson - Okanagan, and historically in the West Kootenays and Lower Fraser Valley. There are numerous records of migrating birds throughout the southern third of the province and in the vicinity of Ft. St. John (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Global: Breeds from Northwest Territories, s. British Columbia, c. Alberta, s. Saskatchewan, sw. Manitoba, sw. Ontario and Minnesota south locally to s. California, c. Nevada, n. Utah, s. Colorado, s. New Mexico and San Luis Potosí and east to Kansas and coastal Texas. Winters mostly in coastal lowlands of California and Texas south to s. Mexico (Cannings, 1998).

#### Habitat

Nesting normally occurs on the shores and flats of sparsely vegetated lakes and sloughs, particularly alkaline ones such as Alki Lake near

Kelowna, the major breeding site in British Columbia. Coastal habitats used in migration include mudflats, estuaries, small ponds, spits and sparsely vegetated muddy shorelines. Interior habitats used in migration include lowland marshes, shallow alkaline ponds, shores of larger lakes, and sewage lagoons (Cannings et al. In prep.).

## Threats

Prior to the 1960s, the American Avocet was considered an infrequent visitor. A small breeding population is now established, and has the potential to increase over the long term (Campbell et al. 1990). Most of the breeding population is concentrated at Alki Lake near Kelowna where an estimated 19 pairs nested in 1997. In addition, a few other pairs breed sporadically at various scattered sites in the dry interior each year (Cannings et al. In prep.). The major breeding site at Alki Lake is under immediate threat because it is part of an active land-fill owned and operated by the City of Kelowna. Loss of breeding habitats to alteration or destruction of wetlands is also of concern. Nests are susceptible to trampling by cattle. The very small size of the breeding population also make the species susceptible to random environmental fluctuations (Cannings et al. In prep.).

## Biology

American Avocets forage in shallow water, typically with muddy bottoms. The main food items are aquatic invertebrates, but terrestrial invertebrates, fish, and seeds are also eaten. Nesting birds usually arrive in the first two weeks of May, and 3 - 5 eggs are laid shortly thereafter. Nests consist of a small depression lined with grasses and other vegetative material. Most American Avocets migrate south in early September (Campbell et al. 1990, Cannings et al. In prep.).



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