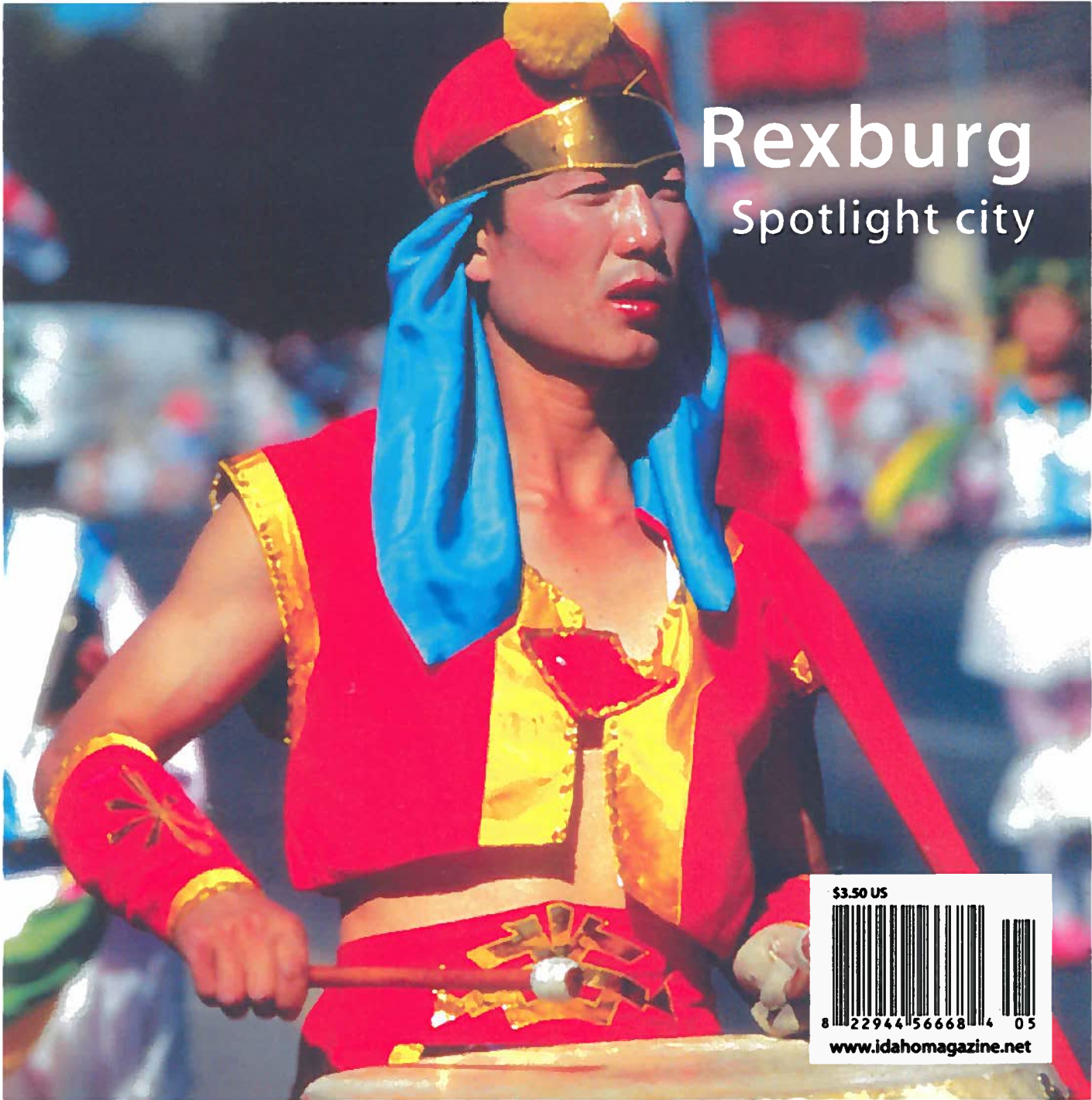


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Winging Their Way Home

by Greg Kaltenecker



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GBO

Adult Cooper's hawk.

Idaho's summertime avian residents will continue their annual cycle of returning to the state in spring.

Where have they been? Many of the bird species common in Idaho during summertime are considered *neotropical migrants*, which means that they breed at northern latitudes in the U.S. and Canada, but spend the winter in southern Mexico or even farther south. Warmer temperatures and ample food make the long migration worthwhile for the birds.

Neotropics refers to their wintering grounds: the tropics of the New World. These birds are only in Idaho for a short time. Arriving in April or early May, they hurry to attract mates, build nests, lay eggs, and to hatch and raise their young. They begin to prepare for fall migration in late July, and by mid-August, they are on the move south again.

Most of Idaho's *neotropical migrants* winter in western Mexico, from the state of Sinaloa southward. The western tanager, a brilliant yellow songbird with an orange head, common in Idaho's forests during the summer, fits the typical pattern. Some species, though, like the distinctive yellow warbler, winter as far south as Colombia.

Look for distinctive birds like the Bullock's oriole, which breeds near streams or lakes and weaves an intricate hanging nest. The lazuli bunting, a brilliant blue songbird, is one of the most common breeding birds in southwest Idaho at lower elevations. This bird has an interesting *buzzing* song that's hard to miss.

Songbirds are not the only *neotropical migrants*. Swainson's

hawks, seen throughout Idaho in May and June, spend the winter months eating grasshoppers in Argentina. In addition to Swainson's hawks, other common migratory raptors include turkey vultures, osprey, Cooper's hawks, and sharp-shinned hawks. Many water birds, like double-crested cormorants, terns, black-crowned night herons, and grebes all may winter south of the border.

Watch your feeders closely this spring, and when you head out for a hike take your binoculars and look for Idaho's *neotropical migrants*. But hurry, because in a few short months, they will be gone again, winging their way to warmer climes.

Greg Kaltenecker is the director of the Boise State University Idaho Bird Observatory.



(Below) The orange-crowned warbler is a common breeding bird in Idaho forests.

(Below Right) The yellow warbler is another common breeding bird found near streams, lakes and marshes. Its song is a rapid sweet-sweet-oh-so-sweet. They are known to winter as far away as South America.

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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BNA

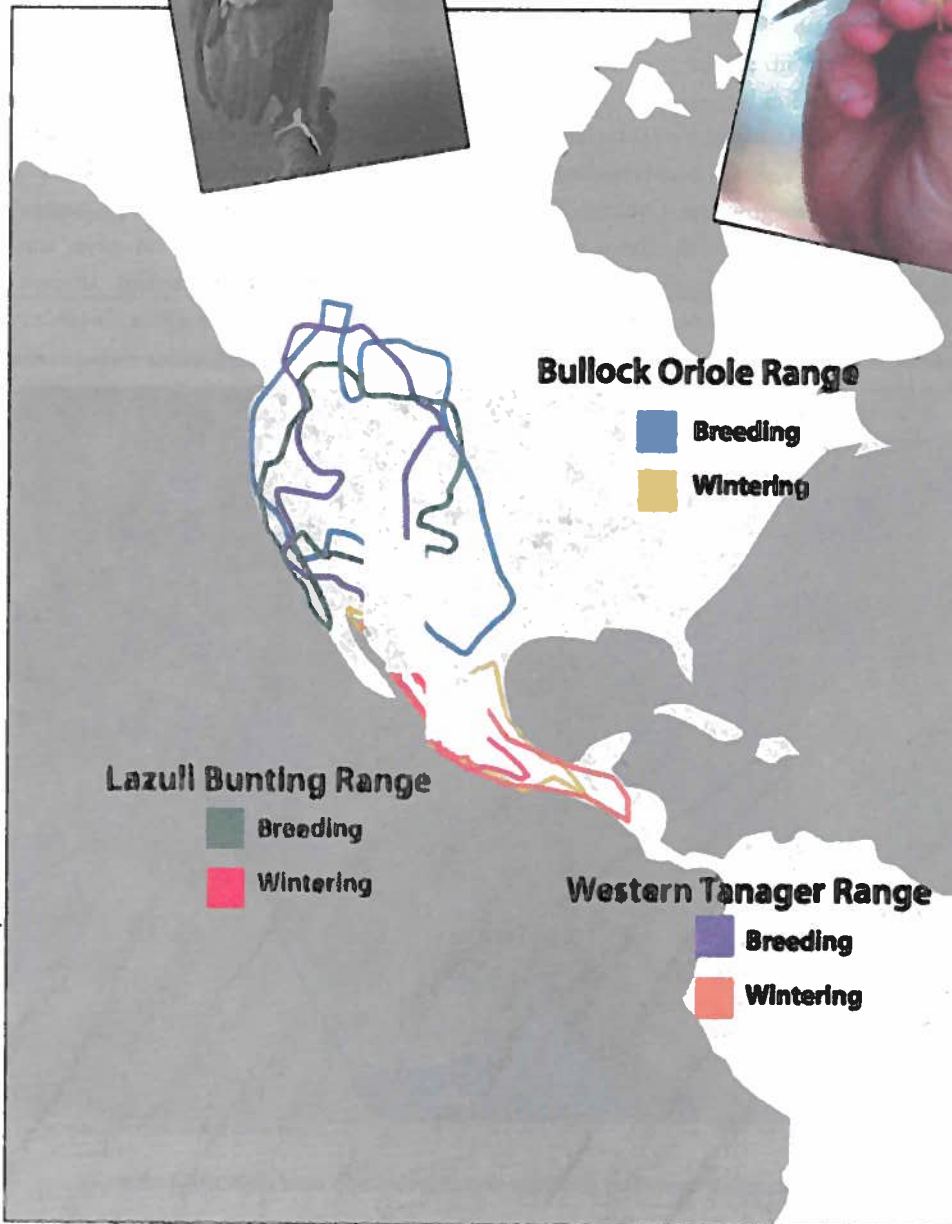


PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BNA

(Above Left) Western sharp-shinned hawks winter in the western portion of Mexico from the state of Sinaloa southward.

(Far Left) The luzull bunting is a common breeding bird in southern Idaho.

(Left) Bullock's orioles can be found nesting near lakes and streams in Idaho. They build an intricate hanging nest. They are also one of Idaho's most colorful birds.



(Top Left)
 The black-crowned night heron breeds in colonies in Idaho and may spend the winter as far away as Mexico.

(Top Middle)
 Townsend's warbler is the official bird of the Idaho Bird Observatory. They can be found in many Idaho habitats during spring and summer.

(Top Right)
 Wilson's warbler is yet another brilliant neotropical migrant songbird, common in Idaho during the breeding season.