

*Recurvirostra americana*

# American Avocet

## Linking Communities

The American Avocet is one of the target species of the Linking Communities Project. Commonly seen around Chaplin Lake, Reed Lake, Old Wives Lake, as well as many other wetlands in the prairies. It is a relatively tame bird, not prone to flight, and so is easily a favourite to watch. The American Avocet's habitat is threatened currently by ongoing problems with water quality and previously through drainage of the prairie potholes. The importance of these lakes for the American Avocet is undeniable as the lakes provide the habitat needed for nesting and feeding. The use of these lakes as breeding grounds is an example of why linking communities for monitoring and research is needed.



## Identification

Distinguishable by its rusty coloured head and its long recurved bill the American Avocet can be seen feeding on the shorelines of many prairie wetlands. It is a large shore bird with long blueish grey legs, black wings with white coverts, outer scapulars, and secondaries, and a black back. Males and females have similar plumage but females are smaller in size and have a shorter, more recurved bill.

## Habitat & Distribution

First sightings of the American Avocet are usually between late March and late May as they migrate up from their wintering grounds along the Atlantic coast of the southern US to their northern breeding grounds in the Prairie Provinces. The American Avocet can be found in open areas with little vegetative cover primarily around saline lakes and prairie potholes. They prefer shallow lagoons, up to 20 cm deep, with muddy shores for feeding.



## Feeding

Feeding mainly on aquatic invertebrates as they wade through the water, their diet may also include small fish, terrestrial invertebrates, and seeds. The American Avocet has a distinctive feeding pattern called scything where it pushes its slightly open bill side to side through the water as it walks on the muddy substrate. They may also feed by pecking, plunging their head into the water, or snatching insects from the air.

## Nesting

Nests are ground scrapes located on slightly elevated areas near the water's edge and lined with nearby material such as grass, shrubs, pebbles, and feathers. The American Avocet has been known to practice brood parasitism, where eggs are laid in another female's nest to be incubated. Brood parasitism can also occur from other species such as cormorants, terns, and stilts, which lay their eggs in the nest of the American Avocets. These parasite eggs will be incubated and the chicks will be raised by the female. Both parents incubate the eggs adding more lining to the nest as they change spots. The chicks are born relatively mature, able to feed themselves and walk around, and therefore, only stay on the nest for 24 hours.

