

BRITISH COLUMBIA

FIELD ORNITHOLOGIST

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The **BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGIST** is published four times a year by **British Columbia Field Ornithologists, PO Box 8059, Victoria, BC V8W 3R7**. A subscription to this periodical is a benefit of membership in the society. Members will also receive a copy of the annual journal, **BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS**.

Send material for publication in any format (mail, phone, FAX, print, IBM WordPerfect files on discs, etc.) to the Editors (name, address and phone no. page 2). We especially welcome bird-finding information for the "Site Guide" series & articles about birdwatching experiences, preferably (but not necessarily) in British Columbia.

Membership in British Columbia Field Ornithologists is open to anyone interested in the study & enjoyment of wild birds in British Columbia. Our objectives include: fostering cooperation between amateur and professional ornithologists; promoting cooperative bird surveys and research projects; and, supporting conservation organizations in their efforts to preserve birds and their habitats.

Membership dues: Individual memberships or library subscriptions, \$20.00; junior memberships (age under 18), \$10.00; Family memberships (two or more persons at one address), \$25.00; U.S. and foreign memberships, \$20.00 (U.S.). Memberships are for the calendar year. For further information, or to join, write to Michael Shepard, Membership, British Columbia Field Ornithologists, PO Box 8059, Victoria, BC V8W 3R7.

Editors for the **BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGIST**: A. & M. Buhler
Distribution of **BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGIST**: Allen Wiseley

EDITORS' NOTES AND NOTIONS

Christmas bird counts are over and spring migrants are winging their way northwards. For members who were at the AGM in Tofino last year you may remember that those low flying White-fronted Geese got a "Directors-at-Large" nomination. Well, many other migrants have heard about the BCFO Annual General Meeting being held in Kamloops this year and are lining up to be seen, heard, and possibly nominated up there. Make certain you, as members, keep May 13-15 in Kamloops free to join the fun, to help the Society, & to enjoy the camaraderie which a meeting of like-minded birders can provide. See notes on the AGM agenda on page 5 of this issue. PLEASE read and/or bring a copy of the CONSTITUTION and BYLAW proposed amendments (this issue page 4) and a copy of last year's minutes (June 1993 BCFO 3(2): 4-5) to the AGM in Kamloops so that you are better prepared for the business of the meeting.

In our last issue we asked members to send us some Kamloops-focused material. Well by mid-January we got panicky and started phoning people for input. The response was great -- such that you get a special AGM issue of 24 pages instead of 20 pages. Thanks to all who wrote to us. We apologise to our authors/readers for the small graphics boxes but space was at a premium in this issue. We apologise also if we had to hold your article over to a later issue. You don't know how nice it is for us (the Editors) to have a couple of articles on hand for the next issue! Keep us happy -- keep sending them in!

In this issue you will find a great SITE GUIDE to Highway 5A and a companion article on Beaver/Guichon Flats; articles about Burrowing Owls and Swainson's Hawks with a Kamloops focus; an article on Kamloops bluebird trails and one on the Salmon Arm Bay nature project (one field trip goes to Salmon Arm); two reports of rare sightings for BC (Great-tailed Grackle & Prairie Warbler); an interesting note on Northern Shrike behavior; and a listing of many events, trips, meetings, etc of interest to the birding community. This issue gets to you a bit later than we had hoped but we waited for Mike's report on the directors' meeting held the 19th of this month.

Please introduce yourselves to us at the AGM. We have spoken to so many of you over the telephone and we would like to put faces and names together. We will probably ask you to submit an article on something or other but don't let that put you off saying hello. Thanks again for your input and we'll see you in Kamloops in May!

BCFO OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS, 1992-1993

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	Rick Howie	578-7542	
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UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

compiled by Wayne C Weber

- Apr 6-10, 1994 **BC WILDLIFE FEDERATION AGM**, Courtenay, BC. Write BC Wildlife Federation, 102-6070 200th St, Langley, BC V3A 1N4. (533-2293).
- Apr. 8-10, 1994 **BRANT FESTIVAL**, Parksville-Qualicum. Big Day birding competition, wildlife art show, children's activities. Contact Brant Festival 94, PO Box 99, Parksville, BC V9P 2G3. (248-4117 or 248-4347).
- Apr. 21-24, 1994 **FEDERATION OF BC NATURALISTS AGM**, Chilliwack, BC. Write FBCN at 321-1367 W Broadway, Vancouver, BC V6H 4A9. (737-3057).
- Apr. 24-
May 1, 1994 **AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION REGIONAL CONFERENCE**, Key Largo, FL. Write ABA, PO Box 6599, Colorado Springs, CO 80934, or phone (toll-free) 1-800-835-2473.
- May 1, 1994 **BCFO FIELD TRIP** in the Comox-Courtenay area. BCFO members are invited to join Comox/Strathcona Naturalists on their 18th annual **SPRING BIRD COUNT**. Birders are divided into 13 groups starting between 7-8 AM, and finishing by 4 PM. Refreshments and tally-up at Royston Hall at 5 PM. To take part, please phone organizer Barbara Sedgwick (335-0064) by April 24th at the latest.
- May 4-6, 1994 **FIFTH ALASKA BIRD CONFERENCE**, Cordova, AK. Write Mary Anne Bishop, Copper River Delta Institute, U.S. Forest Service, P.O. Box 1460, Cordova, AK 99574, or phone (907) 424-7212.
- May 12-15, 1994 **BC FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS 4TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**, Kamloops, BC. See page 5 for details.
- May 14, 1994 **SPRING BIRD COUNT, VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**, from midnight to 12:00 noon. For details, phone David Pearce (477-2664).
- May 14, 1994 **little BIG Day -- Kootenay Style**. Last year one of our members attended the Okanagan Big Day and was very excited about our club (Rocky Mountain Naturalists) hosting a "little" BIG Day. We will begin our 12 hour Day at 6:00 AM on Sat, May 14, 1994. Teams of 2-4 individuals. Registration \$20.00/team. Monies remaining after deduction of expenses will be donated to an East Kootenay conservation program to be announced at the 7:30 PM dinner in Cranbrook after birding ends at 6:00 PM. Registration/information available by writing: Ruth Goodwin, 404 Aspen Road, Kimberly, BC V1A 3B5; or phone Greg Ross (489-2566) or Ruth Goodwin (427-5404)
- May 15, 1994 **VANCOUVER BIRDING BIG DAY**, sponsored by Vancouver Natural History Society. A fund-raising event for Nature Trust of BC; proceeds intended for wetland habitat acquisition in the Vancouver area. Organizers George Clulow (438-7639) or Martin Gebauer (543-7764).
- May 22, 1994 **OKANAGAN BIG DAY CHALLENGE**. For details, contact Dick Cannings, 3007 West 7th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6K 1Z7 (phone 734-9489).
- May 28, 1994 **SECOND OKANAGAN MOUNTAIN PARK BIRD COUNT**, hosted by the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club, with help from the Central Okanagan Naturalists & BC Parks. All birders are invited to join in this survey of a large but relatively little-known Provincial Park. Contact Eva Durance (492-3158) in Penticton or Brenda Thomson (764-4296) in Kelowna.
- June 13-19, 1994 **AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION BIENNIAL CONVENTION**, Minot, North Dakota. Write ABA at PO Box 6599, Colorado Springs, CO 80934, or phone (toll-free) 1-800-835-2473.
- June 17-19, 1994 **OREGON FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS** annual meeting at Southern Oregon State College, Ashland. Contact Colin Dillingham, 437 Azalea Park Road, Brookings, OR 97415, or phone (503) 469-9624.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS Continued

- June 17-19, 1994 **12TH ANNUAL MANNING PARK BIRD BLITZ.** Join this cooperative count of birds in Manning Provincial Park. As in previous years, the group campground at Lone Duck Bay in the park will be reserved for participants. Contact park interpreter Michael Tilitzky at 105-985 Jervis St, Vancouver, BC V6E 2B7 (phone 687-4681), or contact the Manning Park office (840-8836) after May 15th.
- June 21-26, 1994 **JOINT ANNUAL MEETINGS** of AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, & COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, at the University of Montana, Missoula. Contact Dr Donald Jenni, Biology Dept, Univ. of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812. ph (406) 243-5823.4

SOCIETY NEWS

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

The Board of Directors is proposing the following changes to the constitution and bylaws of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists (BCFO) for approval at the Annual General Meeting to be held May 14, 1994 at Cariboo College, Kamloops. The changes are required by the Registrar of Companies, Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, in accordance with the Society Act (RS Chap. 390):

CONSTITUTION

1. Delete the Society's location from the constitution.
2. Delete bylaw 46 and insert it into the constitution under a new heading entitled "Provisions". The provision will state:

It is the unalterable provision that members of this Society shall have no interest in the property and assets of the Society. In the event of dissolution or winding up of the Society, any funds and assets of the Society remaining after satisfaction of its debts and liabilities shall be vested in and become the absolute property of a registered Canadian charitable organization whose objects most closely accord with those of this Society as determined by its members at dissolution.

BYLAWS

1. The wording highlighted in **bold** lettering will be **ADDED** to bylaw #4:

Membership dues for the current year shall be payable on the first day of January. A member shall be considered in arrears if his/her dues are not received by the first day of March and is no longer considered to be a member in good standing.
2. The Registrar of Companies has advised the Society that Section 7 of the Society Act allows only one vote per membership. Therefore, bylaw #6 will be amended to **DELETE** the wording highlighted in **bold** lettering:

Each individual, corporate, or institutional member shall have one vote at an Annual General Meeting or any other meeting of the Society. **Each family membership shall be entitled to two votes at any meeting.** A corporate or institutional member may vote by means of its authorized representative, who is entitled to speak and vote, and in all other respects to exercise the rights of a member.

3. **ADD** new bylaw #24 to the section relating to "Directors and Officers". All subsequent bylaws are renumbered by one:

The members may by special resolution remove a director before the expiration of his/her term of office, and may elect a successor to complete the term of office.

SOCIETY NEWS Continued

NOMINATIONS FOR BCFO DIRECTORS: There will probably be at least two vacancies on the BCFO Board of Directors, to be filled at our AGM in Kamloops on May 14. Anyone wishing to nominate a member for the Board should send the nomination in writing, together with the signed consent of the nominee, to the BCFO Secretary, Michael Shepard, at 1241 Broad Street, Victoria, BC V8W 2A4. Nominations may also be made from the floor at the AGM, providing the nominee is there to consent. If you would like to become involved in BCFO affairs, this is your chance!

HELP WANTED WITH THE JOURNAL -- An Editorial Board consisting of Wayne Weber, Martin McNicholl & Mary Taitt has been established for our journal, **BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS**. However, we are in urgent need of volunteers for two positions:

PHOTO EDITOR -- Responsibilities will include obtaining and selecting suitable photos for the journal (in consultation with the Editorial Board), liaison with photographers, ordering black-and-white prints from a photo lab, and possibly some involvement in final layout as well.

LAYOUT/PRODUCTION EDITOR -- Responsibilities will include formatting, layout, and preparation of camera-ready copy for submission to the printer. The volunteer for this position will need to have an IBM-compatible personal computer, preferably with WordPerfect, and it would be very helpful if he or she has a desktop publishing program as well.

Volunteers for both positions should preferably be located in the Greater Vancouver area, where the rest of the journal staff are located. If you are interested, phone Wayne (597-7201)/Martin (294-2072). Exact responsibilities can be worked out by mutual agreement. Any assistance would be appreciated!

**BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS
1994 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
KAMLOOPS, BC**

"MEASURING BIODIVERSITY IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE"

Dates: May 13 to 15, 1994
Location: University College of the Cariboo, Department of Biology
Program: Forest bird communities in managed and unmanaged stands: measuring biodiversity in a changing landscape.

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS

Friday, May 13

17:00 Registration (AGM Registration Fee \$25)
 19:00 Wine and Cheese Bar

Saturday, May 14

05:00 - 09:00 **Early Morning Birdwalks:** Five separate trips planned
 09:00 - 12:00 **Paper Session:** Unmanaged forest bird communities
 13:30 - 16:00 **Paper Session:** Managed forest bird communities
 16:30 - 17:30 **Business Meeting:** (Annual General Meeting)
 17:30 - 18:30 **Social Hour and Poster Session**
 19:00 **Banquet:** (Additional charge of about \$20/person)
 21:00 **Evening Field Trip:** Night Birds of Lac du Bois

Sunday, May 15

08:00 **Field Trips:** Salmon Arm, Merritt-5A, Douglas Plateau

Registration forms and full information will be sent to all 1993 and 1994 members very shortly. We look forward to seeing you all in Kamloops!!

SOCIETY NEWS Continued

PRESIDENT'S NOTES

by Mike McGrenere

The BCFO held its first director's meeting outside the Vancouver/Victoria area with a meeting in Kamloops on Saturday March 19. Directors had time to do some birding on Sunday and were able to locate some early Spring migrants such as Say's Phoebe and Mountain Bluebird.

Our journal, *British Columbia Birds*, was a major agenda item for discussion at the director's meeting. It has become apparent that the production of the journal (taking the articles and actually producing a final product) is an area where we have a lack of experience and need assistance. The 1992 issue, which was scheduled to be mailed out in January, should be mailed in late April. Please see the request for assistance with the journal production on page 5 of this newsletter.

The directors would like to seek members opinions about our journal and newsletter. A survey will be included with the 1992 journal asking members to provide comments on content and format for consideration of both the directors and the editors of these publications.

The arrangements for the annual general meeting in Kamloops from May 13 to 15 were outlined and include an excellent selection of field trips and guest speakers. A registration package will be mailed to all members in early April.

Lastly, some of our directors will be stepping down at the annual general meeting. We will need people to fill these vacancies. Please give consideration to your participation on the board for 1994/95. You can contact me (Mike McGrenere) or other directors if you are interested or would like additional information. ☺

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PELAGIC BIRDING TRIPS FROM WESTPORT, WASHINGTON -- scheduled for May 14; July 9 & 16; Aug 6, 13, 20, & 27; Sept 1, 10, 11, & 24; and Oct 8 & 9, 1994. For more information, or reservation, write T.R. Wahl, 3041 Eldridge, Bellingham, WA 98225, or phone (206) 733-8255.

In addition to the usual trips which travel up to 40 miles offshore, two deepwater trips, travelling up to 70 miles offshore, are scheduled for April 16 & 30, 1994. A deepwater trip in April 1992 found Murphy's Petrel, Laysan Albatross, and Parakeet Auklet, as well as the more regular species.

PELAGIC BIRDING TRIPS FROM UCLUELET, BC are operated by the Western Institute of Global Studies (WIGS), 1241 Broad St, Victoria, BC. Trips are organized by Michael & Cynthia Shepard. Scheduled dates for 1994 are April 23, July 23, August 20, September 3, October 8, and November 12. Costs of these trips vary depending on the date; however, early booking discounts are available, and an additional \$10 discount is offered to members of WIGS. For additional information, please write WIGS at the address above, or phone 388-4227.

POINT PELEE AND DURHAM REGION, ONTARIO, May 9 - 24, 1994. We need eleven people to cost-share a fully escorted trip. Fly from Victoria/Vancouver. Total cost \$1490.84 including taxes and insurance. Thirty-four species of warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, breeding Woodcock, Loggerhead Shrike, Upland Sandpiper, Little Gull, Whip-poor-will are possible. Contact Derrick Marven, 1887 Frances Street, Duncan, BC V9L 4Z9, phone (604) 748-8504 for itinerary.

BC NEST RECORD PROGRAM is a volunteer project designed to gather as much information as possible on nesting biology of birds in BC, including geographic distribution of breeding birds, nest locations, timing of the nesting season, and breeding success of common species. All nests found with eggs or young, even of common species like Robins or Barn Swallows, can provide valuable information, but the best information comes from repeated visits to a nest. An annual report on the results is published in *B.C. Naturalist*. Even if you can only report on a few nests, your contribution will be appreciated. For information & a supply of nest record cards, please contact Margaret Harris, PO Box 10, Penticton, BC V2A 6J9 (phone 492-8958).

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS Continued

LOWER FRASER VALLEY RAPTOR NEST SURVEY -- The Ministry of Environment, Land, and Parks, Lower Mainland Region, is planning to repeat last year's survey of raptor nests in the Lower Fraser Valley, east to Langley and Maple Ridge. The main interest is in locating Red-tailed Hawk and Bald Eagle nests, but we are interested in locations & details of breeding activity of all raptor species. We are grateful to all the observers who provided information in 1993, and we welcome new or repeat observers. Time constraints precluded preparation of a report on the 1993 survey. We hope to produce a short report by early 1995.

Prospective participants contact Tom Plath, BC Ministry of Environment, Lands, and Parks, 10334 152A Street, Surrey, BC V3R 7P8 (phone 582-5287).

WASHINGTON STATE BREEDING BIRD ATLAS -- This project, begun in 1987, continues through 1994 and probably 1995. Discussion & a map showing coverage through the end of the 1990 field season was published in the **BCFO Newsletter** (SEE **BCFO Newsletter** 1(1):7-9, 1991). Additional data was gathered through 1993, but several areas of the state still have very poor coverage.

For information, contact Atlas Project Coordinator, Dr Phil Mattocks, 915 East Third Ave, Ellensburg, WA 98926. ph (509) 962-2191, or the Seattle Audubon Society, 8028 35th Ave NE, Seattle, WA 98195. ph (206) 523-4483).

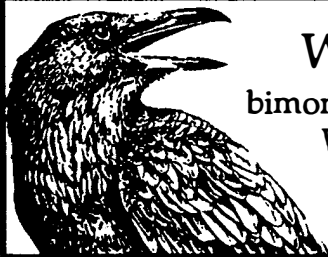
THE BREEDING BIRD SURVEY (BBS) is a cooperative project supervised by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service. It involves running a 39.4 km (24.5 mile) survey route by car, once a year, during the month of June or first week of July. The observer stops every 0.8 km (0.5 miles) for exactly 3 minutes & records all birds seen and heard at each stop. About 2000 routes are surveyed every year in North America, including 40 to 50 in BC. The BBS is designed to measure both short-term and long-term changes in bird populations in a statistically reliable way. For most species, it is the single best indicator of continental or regional population trends.

If you are interested in the BBS and would like to be assigned a route, contact the BC coordinator, Wayne Campbell, Wildlife Branch, BC Ministry of Environment, Lands, and Parks, 780 Blanshard St, Victoria, BC V8V 1X4 (phone 356-1376), well before June 1 if possible. If you cannot contact Wayne, Dick Cannings (734-9489) or Wayne Weber (597-7201) can help to assign you a route.

OKANAGAN BIG DAY CHALLENGE 1994 -- If you enjoy birding in the Okanagan Valley in late May, consider taking part in the 9th annual Okanagan Big Day Challenge. This event is a competitive team effort to find as many bird species as possible in the Okanagan Valley on the Sunday of the long May weekend (May 22 this year). For additional details, see reports by Dick Cannings on the 1986-1990 and 1993 Big Day Challenge (**BC Field Ornithologist** 1(1):10-16, 1991 or 3(3):6, 1993). Each team is led by a top birder who is familiar with the Okanagan. We try to pair newcomers or beginning birders with an expert. If you don't mind an 18-20 hour marathon, this is a great way to get a quick introduction to birds & birding areas of the Okanagan Valley. Participants are invited to a buffet breakfast at Mary & Tom Collins' at 12408 Coldstream Creek Rd, east of Vernon, from 9 AM to noon the next day, May 23. Prizes!

The Big Day Challenge is also planned as a "birdathon" to raise money for the Nature Trust of B.C. for habitat acquisition in the Okanagan. Teams are asked to solicit pledges from as many friends as possible. The target for this year's challenge is \$10,000 (about \$1000 to \$1500 per team).

If interested, please contact Dick Cannings at 3007 West 7th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V6K 1Z7 (phone 734-9489). ☐



Washington Ornithological Society
 bimonthly newsletter - a periodic journal - annual meetings
 Washington's premier ornithological organization
 dues: individual - \$10 U.S.; family - \$14 U.S.

PO Box 85786, Seattle, WA 98145



Prairie Warbler -- First Queen Charlotte Island Record.

by Margo Hearne
Box 187
Masset, BC V0T 1M0

Margo Hearne's Notes

I was working at my desk when the phone rang. "There's a Prairie Warbler in the garden", Peter shouted. "OK", I shouted back, hung up, grabbed my binoculars from the desk, jumped into sandals but not jacket and rushed out the door, across the road. Peter was putting on his jacket as he rushed out his front door, and we both ran to get a view of the bird on the large, old alder tree in his yard. It was about half-way up the tree, on the left. "Bit of an eye-ring", I yelled. Peter said, "Look at the tail, look at the tail bobbing. Look at that bird!" We watched for about three minutes; it moved fast, active, never still. It suddenly flew from the alder, across the road and away. We walked back to the house. "Did you ever see a bird like that before?" Peter asked. I described the warbler I had seen on the day of the Christmas Bird Count, how it had flown in beside me on a low alder, moved, never still, turned on the branch, its yellow neck and breast, black stripes down the sides, how its back had reminded me of an Orange-crowned Warbler, no distinctive markings, didn't have the facial pattern of a Townsend's (which juvenile birds also have in a faded way), and what a puzzle it had been even as I concluded it had to be a Townsend's given the range of a Prairie Warbler. I had even drawn a little diagram of the bird yet it nagged at my mind over the holidays. How delighted I was now to see it again and have Peter confirm it for a Prairie Warbler! We concluded it has been around, and may still be though we have not seen it since. My description of our January bird: Obvious black striping on sides of breast, yellow breast and fading past belly, olive back, no visible markings on wings, thin eye-ring, moved fast; a very bright yellow warbler with no obvious facial markings.

Peter Hamel's Notes

The bird we saw on January 25, 1994: I was working down in my office, looked out the window, saw a warbler in the tree, thought it was a Yellow-rumped Warbler, but put my binoculars on it anyway, and got blown away! It was an adult Prairie Warbler in rich plumage! I tore upstairs and phoned Margo. By the time I got to the front door, she was at the house, jacketless. This brightly plumaged bird was an adult. It was a plump little warbler that constantly twitched its tail showing white spots in the outer corners. The facial pattern was quite pale, showing a thin white eye-ring with a gray stripe through the eye. The face was the only area that showed pale markings. The back was clear yellowish olive green with no sign of rusty spots. The throat, breast and belly were an even richer yellowish-orange. Well-pronounced fine black streaks were confined to the sides and flanks. There were two inconspicuous whitish wing bars that blended into the darker wings. We observed the bird in a mature alder about 20 feet up at a distance of about 30 feet with 8X binoculars. It was overcast but good visibility. When the bird flew over our heads and disappeared across the street it uttered several times a distinctive soft, weak call note. I (Peter) have seen this species almost yearly during spring and summer for over 40 years in southern Ontario.

This bird was first seen by Margo on December 18, 1993, as she had seen it in an alder about 6 feet away from her. Margo observed the bird for about a minute. She is not familiar with the Prairie Warbler and couldn't conceive of it being seen there. She remarked that evening at the CBC dinner that she was puzzled by this bird but thought it was an unusually plumaged Townsend's Warbler. She had noted that it was very active and kept moving. The olive green back reminded her of an Orange-crowned Warbler. There was no streaking on the back and it had a very yellow breast and belly. The bird lacked the Townsend's triangular facial pattern of yellow and grayish-black, present in all ages. In a drawing she noted the black striping confined to the sides. This reminded her of the Canada Warbler's necklace but did not meet in the centre. ◀

EDITORS' NOTE: The Prairie Warbler was seen by both Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne at about 11:00 am on 25 January 1994. Margo Hearne provided us with two sets of notes, those which she had made and those which Peter Hamel had written. Thanks Margo & Peter for sharing the excitement! Readers keep binoculars handy & check out the birds at your place, you never know your luck. Keep good notes and write to us.

SITE GUIDE: Merritt - Kamloops on Highway 5A

by Rick Howie
Site 15, Comp 48, RR#3
Kamloops, BC V2C 5K1

Introduction

Birders travelling to Kamloops from either Vancouver or the Okanagan via the Coquihalla Highway #5 have an important decision to make at the town of Merritt some 100 km south of Kamloops. If you wish to maximize the variety of bird species and birding opportunities, leave the Coquihalla and turn north on Hwy 5A at the outskirts of Merritt. **The following article describes the potential for birders who opt for this route.** This is a great road to just bird along at an easy pace and stop at any spot that looks interesting. Inevitably, there will be lots of birds to enjoy at every stop because that is just the kind of route it is -- productive. If you are in a rush to reach Kamloops, stay on Hwy 5 but do not despair. There are a few turnoffs which give you access to upper elevation habitats and the possibility of seeing birds not found along the lower route followed by Hwy 5A.

Distances

The following description follows Hwy 5A beginning at the Swakum Mountain Road which joins the highway on the left side a short distance north of the turnoff from the Coquihalla Highway. Set your odometer at this point but do not worry about exact distances as all of the features and landmarks described are very obvious or well-marked even if the distances are off by some measure. If you follow the sites in sequence, you will have no problems staying oriented.

Route Guide**km 0.0 Swakum Mountain Road**

This is a good gravel road which heads west through pasture land, passes under the Coquihalla Highway and climbs up through Ponderosa Pine habitat into the Douglas Fir zone and beyond. The network of roads and loop options goes beyond this guide but good access to birds typical of the dry interior forests is possible. Williamson's Sapsucker has been seen in the pines along the lower parts of this road.

km 6.7 Nicola and Mill Creek Road

For the past 6 km, you will have been driving through fields of cultivated alfalfa, pastures and other agricultural endeavours. By late May, you might see Bobolink in these fields and watch for Common Snipe on fenceposts. Great Blue Herons may be seen in flight near the colony along the Nicola River to the east of the fields. A cluster of ranch buildings cleaved by the highway signifies your arrival at the tiny community of Nicola. You might enjoy the esthetics of the historic Murray Church while sorting out the many swallows which typically hawk for insects over the cottonwoods along Mill Creek. Mill Creek Road on the left provides access to a few km of riparian habitat before it climbs up through the pines and terminates in a maze of old logging roads after crossing over the Coquihalla Highway. If you are adventuresome & have a high-clearance vehicle, you could connect up with the Swakum Mountain Road and make a loop trip back to the start of this road log. Take the wrong turn-off, however, and several seasons could pass before another lost birder finds you. The Mill Creek Road is worth exploring as Pacific-slope Flycatchers can be found in the cottonwoods during June. At the northern edge of Nicola, the Monck Park Road departs to the left and provides access to good Ponderosa Pine habitat & the west side of Nicola Lake. (see **BCFO newsletter**, Feb. 1992, **SITE GUIDE: Monck Provincial Park**). Fields along this road have produced Bobolink and Willow Flycatcher are common. Golden Eagles have nested on the cliffs to the west of the road and House Wrens can be found in the small housing community along the lake edge and along the park entrance road. Flammulated Owls have been reported in Monck Park. Back at Nicola, proceed north on Hwy 5A and cross the Nicola River which drains Nicola Lake. A dirt road departs on the right and runs obtusely back in a southerly direction towards Merritt. It crosses grasslands of the Merritt Commonage and provides access to Sharp-tailed Grouse habitat. These birds dance and display on their

SITE GUIDE: Merritt - Kamloops on Highway 5A Continued

leks from March until late May but are usually gone from the dancing sites by about 8:00 AM. Proceeding north along the main highway takes you past the productive south end of Nicola Lake. Waterfowl can be abundant during the spring and fall migration periods but viewing distances are a little long. Watch for Osprey that nest on the powerpoles and on the hillsides to the east of the highway. (SEE BC Field Ornithologist June 1993, 3(2):13 Finding Sharp-tailed Grouse by Chris Charlesworth).

km 9.5 Cattail Marsh

An expanse of cattail marsh can be productive for Marsh Wrens, American Bittern, Virginia Rail, Sora, Yellow-headed Blackbird and Willow Flycatcher in shrubby areas. The lake edge is a little closer for waterfowl viewing.

km 11.0 Rest Area

This is a convenient spot if the last comfort break that you had was somewhere back on the Coquihalla. You can scan the lake from this point and it is often productive for waterfowl in migration, particularly in late fall. In summer, the cliffs and broken, shrubby terrain along the east side of the highway past the reststop are home to large numbers of Cliff Swallows and a scattering of House Wrens, Nashville Warblers and Lazuli Buntings.

km 19 Marina

As part of the 1993 Summer Games, a marina was built as a legacy facility on Nicola Lake. It provides convenient access to the lake-shore and the shallow bay north of the parking lot is used for loafing by a variety of birds, especially when lake levels are low and sand bars are exposed. September can be productive for White Pelicans, gulls and Common Terns. Bonaparte's Gull can be common during the first two weeks of May. This is also a good time to watch for Western Grebes, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter & other waterfowl.

km 20.0 Quilchena Hotel

A trip up the Nicola Valley is not complete without a stop at this historic landmark that is fully operational & dripping with atmosphere. The food is great and the golf course deceptive. Great Horned Owls can be found in the trees around the hotel or heard along the nearby lake-shore. A Mockingbird was found on the hotel roof one winter but more normal summer birds include Veeries and Northern Waterthrush along the lakeshore, Savannah Sparrows and possibly Bobolink. Vesper Sparrows are found in the drier areas behind the hotel. Kokanee spawn in the creek crossing the golf course during September and skeins of Sandhill Cranes pass overhead in April and again in September. A White-rumped Sandpiper was seen just north of the hotel in early June, 1973 -- a most unusual record!

km 22.0 Pennask Lake Road (Minnie Lake Road)

For a truly rewarding exploration of the grassland environment, this road is a must. A detailed description is not possible in this guide, but depending upon the season, you can experience impressive raptor migrations that include Swainson's, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawk, Kestrel and Prairie Falcon. Even Ferruginous Hawk has been seen. Other species of interest include Long-billed Curlew, American Avocet, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, Burrowing Owl (very rare), Horned Lark, Clay-coloured Sparrow, and Snow Bunting. Movements of several species of sparrows (Chipping, Vesper, Savannah & White-crowned) during the spring and fall is usually quite heavy.

km 22.5 Willow-lined Slough

Hardly past the Pennask Lake turnoff lies a small slough lined with willows bordering Nicola Lake. Pulling off of the road can be tricky as the highway curves in this area, but the site can be worth a look. A variety of dabbling ducks & Canada Geese can often be seen and in late spring and fall migration, the muddy edge may harbour shorebirds. Both species of yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, Baird's Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper and Red Phalarope have all been seen here. Common Snipe trigger momentary hopes of a rare sighting.

SITE GUIDE: Merritt - Kamloops on Highway 5A Continuedkm 25.2 Douglas Lake Road

Marked by an attractive log church, this turnoff takes you through the famous Douglas Lake Ranch and ultimately leads to Hwy 97 at Westwold. You can also loop back over to the Pennask Lake Road and arrive back to Hwy 5A near the Quilchena Hotel but that may be the subject of another site guide.

km 26.7 Nicola River

Just S. of Kokanee Beach resort, the highway crosses the delta of the Nicola River. Osprey nest on snags here and, during September, Herring, California, and Ring-billed Gulls loaf on the sand bar while snacking on the odd Kokanee. Watch for Common Loons, grebes, both species of goldeneye & other waterfowl.

km Guichon Ranch

Two ponds at the entrance to the ranch can be very productive for waterfowl in the spring & fall. Both dabblers and divers use the ponds which are close to the road and provide good viewing. All species of teal, Shoveler, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, scaup, goldeneye and Ruddy Duck are typical. Long-billed Curlews may use the wet seepage in fields south of the ranch entrance road.

km Beaver Flats (See pgs 23-24 for another report on this area)

Developed in about 1992 by Ducks Unlimited to benefit waterfowl, this area has become a virtual mecca for birds both in migration & during the breeding season. In addition to a long list of ducks, the shallow ponds have produced American Avocet, Baird's Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Sora and Black Tern to name but a few. A fenced pulloff provides safe viewing away from the highway but not all of the ponds can be seen from this site. **Remember, this is private land!**

km 42 Peterhope Lake Turnoff

A large sign advertising the fishing resort marks this turnoff which leads to upper elevation fir and pine forests. Ruffed Grouse can be flushed from the riparian thickets along the right side of the road for the first km or so.

km 43 Planet Mine Road

Turn off to the right for access to Ponderosa Pine and Douglas Fir habitats. Typical species include Clark's Nutcrackers, three species of nuthatches, Mountain Bluebirds and Townsend's Solitaire.

km 44.8 Stump Lake

This pulloff is at the south end of Stump Lake and does provide some views of this productive end of the lake. It is safer than using the road edge farther along the lakeshore. In addition to large numbers of ducks and coots, watch for Black Swifts over the lake along with Black Terns, especially if there is a large hatch of midges. For the next 8 km, you travel along the edge of Stump Lake with various opportunities to pull off and scan for waterfowl, Pied-billed, Red-necked and Eared Grebes as well as a variety of passerines along the shore. Watch for nesting Northern Orioles and Eastern Kingbirds. In winter, Sharp-tailed Grouse may be seen in the tops of cottonwoods picking buds and Short-eared Owls patrol the adjacent grasslands. Watch for White Pelicans from mid to late April and large numbers of Sandhill Cranes peaking in numbers around April 20. About 5.5 km to the north, a rest stop with toilets provides good access to the lake edge for some walking into surrounding treed and grassland habitats. Waterbirds are not usually too abundant right at this popular reststop but do scan the lake anyway. Deeper water birds like scoters may occasionally be seen.

km 59.5 A large boulder and Stop of Interest sign talking about the Empire of Grass marks this pulloff above Napier Lake. Check above the bluffs on the opposite side of the road for Golden Eagles that nest here regularly. Depending upon the time of year, the lake below may have good numbers of diving ducks but viewing conditions are not the best for close views.

SITE GUIDE: Merritt - Kamloops on Highway 5A Continued

- km 61.3 This is the north end of Napier Lake where it is separated from Ritchie Lake to the north by a shallow marshy area. The latter half of May could produce small concentrations of Bald Eagles and Common Mergansers as they are attracted to spawning suckers. Pulloff conditions are poor so I advise continuing to the next stop for safer viewing of Ritchie Lake.
- km 62.3 A widening on the left side of the road provides the only safe pulloff to view Ritchie Lake. This is the most productive of the chain of lakes that you will pass enroute north from this point. Diving and dabbling ducks can be abundant during the spring and fall migration months so the lake is always worth a look. During chironomid hatches, large numbers of swallows swoop and dart over the lake. Driving north for the next 9 km, you will pass alongside Trapp Lake. Pulloffs are awkward for much of its length but, except for the south end, it seldom harbours many birds. Grebes and diving ducks are the most abundant waterbirds.
- km 72.2 In this vicinity, watch for opportunities to pulloff beside the south end of Shumway Lake. During chironomid hatches in late May, Black Terns can often be seen easily here. The south end is the most productive and there are usually a few birds north of the boat launch a short distance beyond the south end of the lake. A pair of Bald Eagles have nested on the opposite side of the lake just north of the boat launch site.
- km 76.5 The Campbell Valley Road leaves Hwy 5A on the right side. It provides a nice circuitous tour into Kamloops through good forested birding habitats that I do not have space to describe in this article. If you want a nice change of pace and do not mind adding 25 km onto your trip, take this side road. Turn left when you reach pavement again some 10 km along this road and you will eventually reach Kamloops.
- km 80.4 Jackson Road departs to the right into the grasslands for a few km before terminating at a private ranch. Buildings along the road often harbour Say's Phoebes and during April, you may surprise a flock of Sandhill Cranes. Typical grassland birds may be found such as Horned Larks, Vesper Sparrows or Lapland Longspurs during September.
- km 83.4 After passing Separation Lake in a depression along the right side of the highway, Beresford Road departs to the right and appears to lead into a private ranch house. In fact it does, but you can drive straight ahead at the ranch driveway and head eastward across the grasslands on this public road right-of-way. Close all wire gates if you proceed past any of them as this is cattle country and wandering stock are not appreciated. This road does provide access to Separation Lake and good grassland birding but private land abuts all sides of the road. **Do not leave the road without permission.** As you proceed north along the highway from this point, watch over the fields and drumlin on the right side of the road. The area is excellent for raptors migrating through in spring & fall, as well as Sandhill Cranes during April.
- km 87 Rose Hill Road joins the highway from an obtuse angle on the right. It provides excellent grassland birding opportunities and can be a great place to watch migrating raptors. The opportunities are too complex to describe in this article but if you follow the road, it will ultimately take you into Kamloops. It is worth it! Take a chance and stop a lot!
- km 88.9 You have reached the small settlement of Knutsford and a turnoff to the left. As with the previous road, good birding opportunities exist and you can ultimately make a circuitous trip back into Kamloops. This will have to wait description in another article but again, do not be afraid to explore. You can always backtrack. This area to the west of the highway is home to Sharp-tailed Grouse, Horned Lark, Great Gray Owl & lots of private rangeland.
- km 93.5 Highway #1 and the friendly city of Kamloops. More terrific birding opportunities abound! Hopefully, you have enjoyed your trip from Merritt to Kamloops and it is recommended that you return south along the same route. You did not see it all during one trip. If you are so inclined, I would be pleased to enter your sightings into my data bank in order to make any future publications about the birds of Kamloops that much more accurate. ↩

Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)

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Have you heard of an owl called Mr Howdy? The burrowing owl gets its nickname from its head bobbing action. A 9-10 inch tall bird of the dry treeless grassland, the Burrowing Owl is a light brown color with beige spots and bright yellow eyes. It is easy to identify and can be observed by its burrow into which it quickly dives when threatened by a passing raptor. More often it will fly from ground predators such as the fox or coyote.

Recent observations of a continuous decline indicate that the species is not maintaining itself. Since the 1950's and the onset of modern agriculture, the Burrowing Owl has seen a rapid contraction of its range within Canada. Their numbers have dropped from the thousands in each of the three prairie provinces to less than 575 in Manitoba, an estimated 1000 in Saskatchewan, & probably less than 800 in Alberta. Annual declines of >10% have been reported since 1982. At one area in Saskatchewan, only 10% of the habitat first surveyed for these owls in 1975 is now occupied.

In BC the population has historically been observed in the Okanagan, Similkameen, Thompson, East Kootenay and Nicola Valleys. It is classified as a 'red' listed or endangered species for BC. Following the turn of the century, Frank Frolek observed that in the Beresford district south of Kamloops Burrowing Owls occupied the burrows created by yellow bellied marmots and occasionally badgers. Although its numbers were never plentiful, the Burrowing Owl was often observed by the home-steaders in the interior grasslands. Wayne Campbell (then with RBCM) has reported that one observation was made east of Williams Lake in Beaver Valley a number of years ago.

The Burrowing Owl gets its name from the fact that it often uses abandoned burrows. However, Orville Dyer of Penticton has found that in sandy soils, owl parents are capable of digging their own burrow. These are long tunnels, often up to three meters or more in length and sometimes over a meter deep in the ground. They appear to turn a number of times to prevent light from reaching into the nest.

Dawn Brodie, veterinary technician at the Kamloops Wildlife Park, reports that captive breeding flock females will lay up to 11 eggs & incubate the eggs for 21-23 days. The male will drop food at the entrance of the burrows as the female will not let the male into the nest. In one observed instance a male appears to have entered the nest and to have treated the young nestlings as another food source, killing and storing them as an additional food supply for the female. This female renested and laid six eggs the second time. The male was then kept out of the nest pen.

In the wild, the male is kept busy for the first few weeks supplying food in the form of voles, mice, small grassland birds and numerous beetles and grasshoppers to the female, who in turn feeds the family. Once the young are older, the female will join the male in the search for food. Hunting is often done from a low perch. The owl will pounce on or catch larger airborne insects (eg grasshoppers) with its feet.

The breeding success of the owls appears to be determined by food supply. In the dry grasslands, the white-footed deer mouse is up to 7 to 9 times as abundant as meadow voles. However, it appears from pellets collected at the burrows, that the Burrowing Owl in the late summer, fall & winter will catch the meadow voles far more frequently than the white-footed deer mouse; in the order of 8:1. The difference in the behavior of the two rodents is possibly a clue to the foraging opportunity of the owl. The nocturnal white-footed deer mouse is quick. The owl dropping from a low perch is probably unable to attain the required speed to catch this rodent except by surprise. Young rodents along with numerous large beetles and grasshoppers make up the largest component in the owl's diet.

Observations in other regions of the Burrowing Owl's range have indicated that they are attracted to natural burn areas in the grasslands. Ralph Ritcey, retired wildlife biologist in Kamloops, has reported that a burn site in the Lac du Bois grassland north of Kamloops attracted owls in the mid 1980's. The question is, are the prey more abundant or just easier to catch in these situations?

Burrowing Owl Continued

The Okanagan Burrowing Owl transplant program has had some success, although the numbers of owls returning is somewhat of a disappointment. There appears to be a low return rate for these birds. Just under 600 owls were brought into BC's south Okanagan region from the neighbouring Washington State population in the mid to late 1980's. In 1993, according to Orville Dyer, six pairs fledged about 32 young, but in earlier years nest sites located near riparian systems have been predated by weasels. Orville reports some male Burrowing Owls are returning to the area they were raised in at three years of age, possibly as first time breeders. Ontario's Owl Rehabilitation Centre has reported that one year old Burrowing Owls will breed in captivity.

In the Kamloops area a number of release programs of one year old birds have taken place since 1983. Successful breeding took place in 1988 at Cache Creek when one wild and one released bird raised seven young and at Beresford were one released pair raised three young.

In the earlier years, yearling birds to be used in reestablishment programs were brought in from Ontario's Owl Rehabilitation Centre. For the last 3 years, captive flocks of adult birds brought in from Washington State and located at Kamloops Wildlife Park and Stanley Park have been used to raise young birds. The young birds are wintered at the parks and prepared for release the following spring. Nine were released in 1992, 15 in 1993 and another 21 are being prepared for the 1994 spring release. However, no successful breeding has been observed by these young owls. It appears to be a possibility that they are not initiating breeding when there is insufficient food in the area of burrows. Birds released in the vicinity of trees have abandoned the sites even though there was a high density of rodents. It now appears that tree encroachment onto grasslands has become part of the problem.

Three of the birds released in 1993 have wintered in Kamloops. They have been watched closely by Ernest Leupin, a student working with Dr Tom Dickinson of the University College of the Cariboo in Kamloops. Some interesting diet information has been gathered by Ernest including findings of some insects in the pellets during mild weather in both January and February.

The problem of reestablishing Burrowing Owls in the BC interior has proved to be quite complex. Hopefully, through investigation as well as trial and error the problems of reestablishing them can be overcome. It appears at this time, that of the three life-requisite systems (food supply, security, & breeding), food supply is the weak link, although the availability of burrows in key foraging areas may also be part of the problem. Attempts will have to be made to improve the habitat of the meadow voles and grasshoppers. There are other problems as well. What is happening to all the owls when they go south for the winter? There does not appear to be simple answers to all the questions, and much further study will be needed. ◀

OREGON FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

BC birders and field ornithologists are invited to join **OREGON FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS (OFO)**, a statewide organization with similar aims and activities to BCFO. All OFO members enjoy the following benefits:

- ◻ **OREGON BIRDS**, OFO's quarterly journal, which includes articles on status and identification of Oregon birds, bird-finding guides to top birding spots, Oregon Records Committee reports, and news items.
- ◻ **ANNUAL MEETING**, with a full program of field trips and illustrated talks. The 1994 meeting is at Southern Oregon State College in Ashland from June 17-19 (SEE Page 3, Upcoming Meetings and Events).
- ◻ **OFO BOOKCASE**, which sells OFO Special Publications, back issues of **OREGON BIRDS**, and a limited selection of other books and tapes.

To join send money order for \$19 US (single membership) / \$25 US (family membership) to: Treasurer, Oregon Field Ornithologists, PO Box 10373, Eugene, OR 97440, USA. ◀

The Salmon Arm Bay -- A Nature Area in the Making

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Shuswap Lake has been scoured by past glacial actions so that today its shorelines are rocky and precipitous. In only five places does the action of incoming rivers or creeks form relatively shallow areas of water. The largest of these, as large as all the rest put together, is the Salmon Arm Bay. This bay, created through siltation of the incoming Salmon River, is gradually silting in to create flood plains of marshland habitat. On these marshlands many wildlife residents look for shelter, food and breeding habitat. In the shallow waters the fish fry from around the lake come to spend their first year of life. Here they feed within protection of the inshore vegetation in waters that are relatively warmer than the cold deep waters of the Shuswap Lake. It makes the Salmon Arm Bay unique in the Shuswap Lake system. For centuries wildlife, particularly birds, have lived, bred, and migrated through this bountiful area. It took the incursion of man to bring problems to this land of marsh, river, lake and mountains.

Stretching out from the mouth of the Salmon River are mudflats which, as their elevation increases, become seeded with growth. Flooded in the spring through the fall, but left dry in the winter by receding water, the majority of growth on these mudflats is Reed Canary Grass with intrusions of Bulrush, Cattail, and Reed. Along the upland areas springs and streams form incursions into the marsh and Watercress thrives in their bubbling waters. Tree species include Western Willow and Black Cottonwood. In the river-mouth area numerous dead stands of cottonwood are the ideal nesting habitat for Wood Ducks.

Through the seasons the year brings different birdwatching scenes to the bay. March through May sees the arrival of the spring migrants; Northern Pintail to the mouth of the Salmon River; Canada Geese and occasional White-fronted and Snow Geese to the river delta; scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Horned and Eared Grebe, American Coot and tight rafts of scoters to the offshore. On the marshes passerine migrants such as wood warblers, American Tree Sparrows, thrushes and icterids move through with determination, all to be encouraged on their way by the first songs of the Song Sparrows. Bald Eagles can be seen already sitting on their nest and Osprey are returning to their traditional sites. Planing over the marshes, Northern Harrier hunt as they migrate northward. The Tree Swallows arrive and are later joined by the whole gamut of field guide swallow species. Later in spring the Swifts (Black, Vaux's and White-throated) enjoy a plundering of the abundant airborne insects but, in turn, are themselves plundered when a Peregrine Falcon dives across the bay.

Towards the end of spring, in April, summer residents begin arriving to stake out their territories. First come Red-winged Blackbird males, their calls filling the dryer upland marsh. Shortly afterwards Yellow-headed Blackbirds are seen out towards the water's edge in the wetter marsh habitat. The marsh also becomes alive with Common Yellowthroat. Their song is everywhere making the occasional trill of Marsh Wrens seem unique. Deep in the marsh the call of the Sora is heard with a singular Virginia Rail adding variety. Overhead the plunging dive of a displaying Snipe takes attention away from the noisy Ring-billed Gull colony who challenge the rising water that continues to flood their island nests. Ducks begin nesting amongst the inshore vegetation. Mallards, and an increasingly large number of Gadwall, will be joined by the odd pair of Northern Shoveler, with Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal replacing the migrating Green-winged Teal. Red-necked Grebe pairs are raucous in their display and nesting at this season.

However, it is out on the waters of the bay that our attention is diverted to note the arrival of the Western Grebes. Building in numbers from early April, approximately sixty breeding pairs will grace the inshore waters. Performing their elaborate pair bonding, they wander through the inshore waters seeking nest sites. When the lake reaches maximum level they build floating nests within the flooded marshes in the security they require to raise their young. At about the time the breeding pairs are nesting they will be joined by a hundred or more non-breeders. Through the long hot days of summer the marsh is alive with busy adults feeding young, two-phase calls of the Western Grebe ever in the background. Occasionally, the singular call of the Clark's Grebe may also be heard. He has been sighted here for the past few years, sometimes elusive, sometimes very easily seen.

Salmon Arm Bay Continued

By the end of August, autumn is making an appearance. The lake water is receding and reveals extensive mud-flats where migrating waders stop over to feed before continuing their migration south. Adults arrive in late August, followed by the juveniles in September. Birdwatchers will probably find a telescope advantageous when they try to spot a rare Hudsonian Godwit, Dunlin or Stilt Sandpiper among the more common Yellowlegs, Dowitchers or Pectoral Sandpipers.

Departure of the Western Grebes for coastal waters at the first hints of frost heralds the arrival of winter. Salmon Arm Bay becomes a quiet place, a place of vast solitude punctuated occasionally by flights of Canada Geese or the graceful glide of a solitary Bald Eagle. The marsh is gripped in an expanse of ice and snow. The solitary Song Sparrow must yearn for the eventual signs of spring and new life.

Signs of danger and problems to this utopia, the Salmon Arm Bay, first came in 1987 when it was reported that the foreshore lands were to be developed for housing and tourist-oriented light industry. Up to this time the area had been designated a "Goose Management Area" and a "No Shooting Area" by the Provincial Ministry of the Environment. Action taken by the Shuswap Naturalists Club through the Federation of BC Naturalists was to lobby both Provincial & Federal Governments to upgrade the area to either a Provincial Wildlife Sanctuary and/or a Federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary. In 1988 the developer approached Nature Trust of BC with an offer of sale of the most easterly part of his land comprising twenty-four acres of marsh. Along with a narrow strip of land to the lake side of his property, this would give Nature Trust riparian rights along the whole lake shore. As upland landowner Nature Trust would control all inshore waters. At this juncture three committees were formed to monitor the developing situation.

First, a Technical Committee was formed by the Ministry of Environment with other Provincial Ministries to advise Nature Trust on the importance of the purchase with regards to wildlife and habitat. The Western Grebe colony played an important role at this stage but the confirming element was the presence of the Clark's Grebe.

After the decision to purchase, the next considerations were changes required in local by-laws, developer's plans and aspirations, and Ministerial problems.

Second, the Mayor of Salmon Arm formed a Mayor's Committee of town businessmen, Rotary members and aldermen to consider the impact on the town & its environs.

Third, the developer formed the Triple S Committee with members from Real Estate, Chamber of Commerce, Regional District and the Naturalists Club; this committee to review input from the other two committees and to advise the developer on meaning and action.

Some of the actions arising from these committees included by-laws to restrict dogs from the Nature Area and a no-boating limit to 500 meters from the high water mark. The developer was to leave all mature trees on the lake side of his property, put in place an animal proof fence along the whole lake side of his property and build a trail going east from the wharf area to the Nature Area. There were also to be building restrictions facing the lake to protect the inshore from human disturbance.

In May of 1989 the purchase was completed. Nature Trust then leased the land to the Ministry of Environment. At the same time the Mayor of Salmon Arm formed the Salmon Arm Bay Nature Enhancement Society (SABNES) to locally manage the purchased land. It is here, in the writer's humble opinion, that the critical decision was made. In formation of the Society six of the twelve directors were to be special interest groups' nominees. Included were nominees from the aldermen, Downtown Improvements Association, Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry of the Environment, the Fish and Game Club and the Shuswap Naturalists Club. A remaining six directors were to be elected by the Society's membership -- a critical decision because it put on the board specialists in finance who could arrange grants that would allow the Society to purchase further foreshore lands. Currently the Society manages land along the full length of the Salmon Arm Bay from the wharf east to Mallard Point, a total of over 100 acres. Further grants were obtained to build trails, boardwalks, and a bird blind; to plant additional indigenous trees and shrubs; and to make the dredged islands into usable wildlife habitat.

Salmon Arm Bay Continued

Since 1991 the local Indian Bands which own the lands to the west around the Salmon River mouth have become interested in what we are doing. They now have a director on the SABNES board. The Band which owns the land to the east of the river became concerned about over-grazing by cattle causing destruction of trees. By allowing SABNES to own the lease, and thus keeping cattle off the sensitive areas, those trees are recovering. The Band which owns the land west of the river, with the assistance of Ducks Unlimited, have recovered twenty-seven hectares of delta and riverine habitat. The Shuswap Naturalists Club have constructed a trail and bird blind on the Old Boat Basin. This year's plans include placement of educational signs and considerations for siting of an Interpretive Centre. Further help has been provided by Duck Unlimited, who nominate a member to the Society's Technical Committee, in the building of viewing ponds and water control devices.

Over the long term design and construction of the Centre will occupy the Society's energies. In this unique environment, a nature area within an urban community, we have progressed as far as we have through the assistance of people from a whole range of business and community members. ◀

Great-tailed Grackle in British Columbia

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On Saturday, December 5, 1993, with the Vernon Christmas Bird Count coming up in only two weeks, I felt it might be a good idea to do a little reconnaissance in and around the Okanagan Landing area, the area I was to cover. It was a rather pleasant morning with the sun breaking through the clouds at brief intervals and practically no wind. At about 9:45 AM, with my son Calvin, I headed west on Okanagan Landing Road past the local airport and into an area of open pasture with a cattail marsh flanking the road on the right. We had barely entered the area of denser cattails when Calvin spotted what appeared to be a Blackbird (there had been large flocks of Red-winged and some Brewer's Blackbirds congregating in the vicinity all fall). Calvin was not totally convinced that this bird was a typical blackbird species; it was too large and appeared to have a longer tail. Only when he stated that the bird was at least thrush-sized, was I persuaded to turn the car around and return to get a better look. Having arrived back at the spot, it was apparent to both of us immediately that we were looking at a Grackle.

We estimated the bird to be about 12 inches in length of which approx two-fifths was the slightly keel-shaped tail. The bill was large & shaped much like a blackbird's, with a somewhat down-curved upper mandible. The eyes were pale yellow. The legs and feet appeared black. The back from the nape down, as well as wings & tail were dark brown to black while the head & breast were a sooty brown. The throat was a paler brown to buff & the chin was paler still. The face had little pattern to it except for a small buffy mark above & to the rear of the left eye. There were narrow dark lines running down each side of the throat area from the base of the bill.

We studied the bird for five or six minutes before dashing home to notify others and to fetch our cameras. On our return, we were able to study the subject at greater length and to make several photographs from a range of 30 feet or so before the bird flew to a nearby power pole and beyond. It was relocated a short time later feeding with some blackbirds in a nearby horse corral.

This find was initially felt to be a Common Grackle, primarily due to my lack of experience with Great-tailed Grackles and the results of the earliest slides taken which showed the bird to be much darker on both the under parts as well as the back, and with very little facial pattern. The error was soon pointed out and the word was spread. Many birders got the opportunity to witness what may be only the second sighting of this species in the province and perhaps the third sighting in Canada.

The Great-tailed Grackle is listed in some Oregon and Washington field guides as either accidental or casual and it is expected that other sightings may occur as the species appears to be expanding it's range to the north.

This bird has wintered in almost the same location in which it was first sighted. ◀

Swainson's Hawk in British Columbia

Chris Siddle
RR 8, Site 10, Comp 56
Vernon, BC V1T 8L6

Introduction

The Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) is a widespread prairie buteo in western North America. Although it suffered some population declines and was Blue-Listed in the United States from 1972 to 1982, it has adapted well to grazing land and "disturbed, partially agriculturalized regions" (Snyder & Snyder *Birds of Prey*, Voyageur, 1991) and seems to be holding its own over much of its breeding range, from northern Mexico to the southern Prairie provinces. Disjunct breeding populations in eastern Alaska, the central Yukon and extreme western North West Territories are poorly known, but likely are very small.

Swainson's Hawks migrate the farthest of all North American raptors. Virtually the entire North American population vacates the continent in early fall¹ in an exodus to the pampas of Argentina and Uruguay, wintering in grasslands similar to their Northern Hemisphere breeding areas. Because the migrant hawks funnelling through the Isthmus of Panama are highly visible, it is possible to estimate the species' population at just under one million birds (Snyder & Snyder 1991).

Distribution in BC

The Swainson's Hawk migrates across the south-central interior, the Rocky Mountain Trench and (rarely) south-eastern Vancouver Island. It breeds in the Nicola Valley, the North Okanagan Valley, the Douglas Lake country and the Thompson River Valley around Kamloops. A small summer population, which may breed, occurs on Anarchist Mountain east of Osoyoos. A tiny population breeds near Smithers.

Swainson's Hawk is a species for which scanty information exists outside of its main southern BC breeding area. Sometimes this absence of data unfortunately feeds into a myth that plenty of Swainson's Hawks still exist, happily breeding somewhere off to the north in the province's hinterland. The legions of "northern" Swainson's Hawks are almost wholly imaginary. Swainson's Hawks occur only as a casual vagrant in the Peace River (I saw two birds in 14 years at Fort St. John), is absent from the extreme north of the province and is at best a rare migrant in the northwest. This means the southern BC populations are our only viable breeding populations.

Status in BC

Swainson's Hawk is on the BC Ministry of Environment's Blue List, meaning that the bird could become endangered or threatened in the future. Observations from the late 1800's indicate that the Swainson's Hawk was once an *abundant* migrant. A northward flight of hundreds of birds took five hours to pass over Chilliwack in the spring of 1889! (Incidentally, the species has not been seen near Chilliwack for decades). A flock of 300 or 400 assembled to feed on grasshoppers near Vernon in late July, 1892. Today a large flock might number 4 or 5 birds. What caused such a precipitous decline around the turn of the century? R.A. Cannings et al. suggest a sudden scarcity of grasshoppers and crickets, favoured food items, on their breeding grounds, an absence of locusts in Argentina, and persistent shooting were important factors in the decline (Campbell et al. *The Birds of British Columbia*, Volume 2, Royal BC Museum, 1990).

Today some populations are under mounting pressure from human development. In the past year I have seen three small grasslands frequented by Swainson's Hawks at Vernon disappear beneath housing developments. Official community plans for the North Okanagan reveal that much larger grasslands will be lost to development in the next decade. Hawk habitat along the Bella Vista-Goose Lake ranges, the west slopes of Kalamalka Lake and north Kelowna could be lost soon. In addition the Swainson's Hawk is easily disturbed at its nest and usually deserts. The bird is often tamish,

¹ A small population winters in southern Florida. These birds may be primarily first year birds that missed their bearings and became trapped in peninsular Florida by the oceans on all sides (Snyder & Snyder 1991).

Swainson's Hawk in British Columbia Continued

an easy target for potshooters. The species may also be affected in ways we have yet to understand by some pesticides and herbicides.

Habitat in BC

In south-central BC Swainson's Hawks frequent two habitats: grasslands and to a lesser extent agricultural fields. Hawks have also occasionally been seen over alpine meadows, burns and clear cuts, perhaps only in migration.

Finding the Swainson's Hawk in BC

BCFO participants to the annual meeting at Kamloops have an excellent opportunity to see Swainson's Hawks. Taking a loop from Kamloops to Vernon via the Douglas Lake country would virtually guarantee birders with several sightings of this species. Drive south from Kamloops about 6 km along Highway 5A to Knutsford. The surrounding rangelands are one of the best spots in BC for the bird. Take the sideroad on the west side of the Highway for a few km. You are almost sure to find a hawk nearby. Back on the highway continue south to Nicola Lake. Take the turn-off to Douglas Lake. This route crosses the Douglas plateau, linking up with Highway 97 between Kamloops and Vernon. While Swainson's Hawks are not abundant along the route, look for a few between Douglas and Chapperon Lakes. Once on Highway 97 continue east through Westwold and Falkland toward Vernon. Just past Round Lake (look for the Treatment Centre signs) the highway begins a descent into the Okanagan Valley. Once on the valley floor look for St. Anne Road to the left. O'Keefe Pond is at the corner of Highway 97 and St. Anne Road. A pair of Swainson's Hawks often nests in the Ponderosa Pines on the far side of the pond.

Swainson's Hawks can be seen at Swan Lake or over Vernon itself, but the single best area is the croplands and grazing lands south of the Vernon Army Camp. I recommend 34th Street which climbs the hill south of 25th Avenue, on the south side of town. Where 34th Street divides take the right fork which magically becomes Commonage Road which, confusingly, is also known as Mission Road. Commonage Road passes a huge Baptist church and divides the Army camp. Look for a short row of cottonwoods along Commonage Road at the south edge of the Camp. A pair of hawks has nested in the first tree in the row recently. The next km of Commonage Road is particularly good with Swainson's Hawks often foraging along the field edges. Other Swainson's can be seen by continuing along Commonage Road to Benchrow Road and taking Benchrow past the cottonwood-poplar tree plantation. A pair is often by the plantation entrance. Swainson's Hawks become scarcer toward Kelowna. Occasionally one or two birds hang around the golf courses, turf farm or airfield on the north edge of town. East of Vernon continue to look for Swainson's Hawks along Highway 6 all the way to Cherryville. Several birds can usually be located in Lavington.

Identifying Swainson's Hawks

Dark morph and "intermediate" birds are most common in BC. Light morph adults as illustrated in most field guides amount to less than 20% of the population. Most adults will look like the flying bird on the left on pg. 195 of the National Geographic Guide (hereafter NGS). Another common plumage, which I cannot find in my field guides resembles the "intermediate" bird on pg. 194 (NGS) but with the orangey underparts replaced by a smokey duskiness not quite as dark as the breast band. The dusky almost, but not quite, obscures dark bars on the flanks and belly. Occasionally one encounters dark morph birds almost as dark as the bird in the top photo on pg. 243 of the Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding Volume 1. Peterson's perched birds on pg. 175 of his Western Field Guide are not up to his usual high standard. They are too big-headed, and far too big beaked.

Swainson's Hawk is a small-headed, small-beaked buteo, contrasting in this regard with the eagle-headed Ferruginous Hawk and the substantially beaked Red-tailed Hawk. The cere (fleshy nostrils) on the Swainson's beak is often unusually bright and colourful. Swainson's Hawk has a mild, almost cat-like expression, far different from the predatory appearing Red-tail. Its small beak, dark eyes and slightly puffy head and chest feathers impart to the Swainson's Hawk a sweet natured appearance that can be a useful field mark up close.

In Western Canada a light morph Swainson's shows a unique underwing pattern for a buteo, one that allows identification from great distance. The underwing coverts are pale and contrast sharply with the dark primaries and secondaries. This field

Swainson's Hawk in British Columbia Continued

mark is very reliable in separating Swainson's Hawks from all buteos. Fortunately many dark morph and intermediate Swainson's also display the two-toned underwing.

Both light and dark morph Ferruginous Hawks show the reverse pattern -- darker underwing coverts and lighter flight feathers. Red-tailed Hawks can show generally uniform coverts and flight feathers, or darker coverts and lighter flight feathers. When Red-tailed Hawks have light underwing coverts they also show the dark patagial bar on the fore edge of the underwing, a field mark diagnostic of Red-tailed Hawks.

Some texts show dark morphs with uniformly dark underwings (including coverts). Such birds will have to be identified by soaring silhouette, narrow tail barring, and the buffy or white undertail coverts. Check Plate 13 of Clark and Wheeler's A Field Guide to the Hawks (1987) for a dark morph and a "rufous morph" in flight.

Silhouette

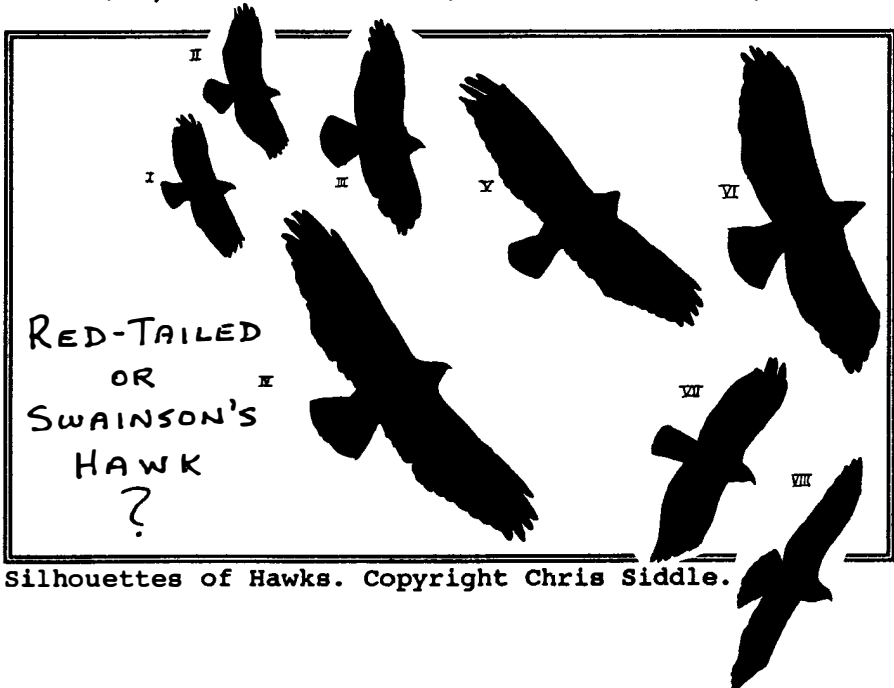
"... long, narrow, pointed wings" says the NGS guide, identifying this species' most obvious flight characteristics. "Swainson's Hawks soar over open plains and prairie with uptilted wings in teetering, vulture-like flight" (NGS). Around Vernon I have found that the teetering is sometimes absent. In a paragraph that both clarifies and confuses Dunne writes:

During a full soar, the wings are long, narrow, and tapered like long candlesticks. They are usually thrust forward well ahead of the body... The wings are usually held in a pronounced dihedral, with the arms stiffly uplifted and the hands curved gently up. Swainson's is very buoyant in flight and rocks back and forth, like a tightrope walker... The glide configuration combines the bold dihedral of a Harrier and the crooked wings of an Osprey. The bird looks as if all of its weight were resting on its hands. (Hawks in Flight, pg. 40)

Beware! Distant Red-tailed Hawks can sometimes display a dihedral. This is not common and may be an artifice of long views only, but on several occasions I have initially identified a distant Swainson's Hawk which, upon closer view, turned out to be a Red-tail.

Postscript

You can help with the preservation of Swainson's Hawks by keeping your distance from all nests, foregoing close approaches for photography and keeping careful notes about your Swainson's Hawk sightings. Your observations can help add detail to an understanding of this species' needs in BC. Send your data to the Conservation Data Centre, c/o Wildlife Branch, 780 Blanshard St., Victoria, BC, V8V 1X5.



Silhouettes of Hawks. Copyright Chris Siddle.

IDENTIFY THE HAWKS

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.
- VI.
- VII.
- VIII.

Answers to be found in next issue AND at the Kamloops AGM

See you there!!

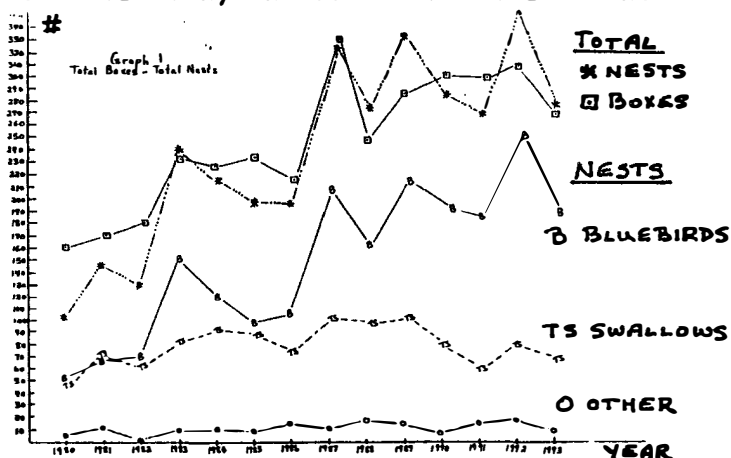
Kamloops Naturalist Club Bluebird Trails

Karen A. McLaren
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The Kamloops Naturalist Club has been striving, since 1974, to increase the Mountain Bluebird population in our area by putting out nest boxes to increase the available nesting sites. Word has spread to us via articles and letters from groups in the United States and other parts of Canada and BC that the bluebird populations in the east and west had declined due to competition in some areas from Starlings and House Sparrows, and also in most areas to a reduction in natural nest sites as trees were cleared for farming, logging and urbanization. Seventy-five boxes were put out in the spring of 1974 and in 1977 another 75 were placed with the cooperation of a ranch owner who was interested in the control bluebirds might have on grasshoppers. These boxes were never monitored. In 1979 the Club decided to make a further 161 boxes. These were put out in February and early March of 1980 on six different "bluebird trails", each trail having a volunteer who had agreed to monitor the boxes on a weekly basis through the nesting season, to summarize the results, and to look after box repairs and the adding of more boxes to the trails. Again the landowners were most cooperative in letting us put nest boxes on their fence posts and trees. By 1993 we had 15 bluebird trails, 336 monitored boxes and 19 volunteers. In 1993 these volunteers travelled 3,435 miles, spent 490 hours on the project, & completed 268 nest record cards in addition to the Club summary sheet.

I have been the bluebird trails chairman since 1990 and have been involved since 1980 in monitoring a trail of 55 boxes plus a small one of six boxes. I have been interested in putting the information we have gathered over the years into tables and graphs so that we can see more clearly what has or has not been achieved by our efforts. Of course this is not a scientific study and there are a few gaps in the records over the years but I still think it gives us some interesting information on our project. For each box that we monitor we record the location, the height of the box from the ground, the species using the box, the dates of inspections, nest materials used, the number of eggs, the number hatched, the number that fledge, a second nesting by the same or a different species in the box, and comments as to weather, food supply, predation, etc.

Over the years that we have been monitoring the nest boxes we have found that the boxes are used 60% by Mountain Bluebirds, 32% by Tree Swallows and 4% by various other species. The "other" bird species that use our boxes are House Wrens, Mountain and Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, Violet-green Swallows, and Western Bluebirds. Other creatures welcome cavity homes too and our boxes have provided nesting quarters for flying squirrels, chipmunks and mice. A less pleasant sight for one monitor was, on lifting a box lid, to see a rattlesnake resting in the bottom of the box. Western Bluebirds are common enough in the Okanagan but are a rare treat for us. Western Bluebirds nested on the Pritchard East trails (east of Kamloops along the South Thompson River) for four years, 1987 through 1990, with a total of seven nests. Then they showed up again on the South Thompson trail (again east of town) in 1993 with two first nests and two second nests.

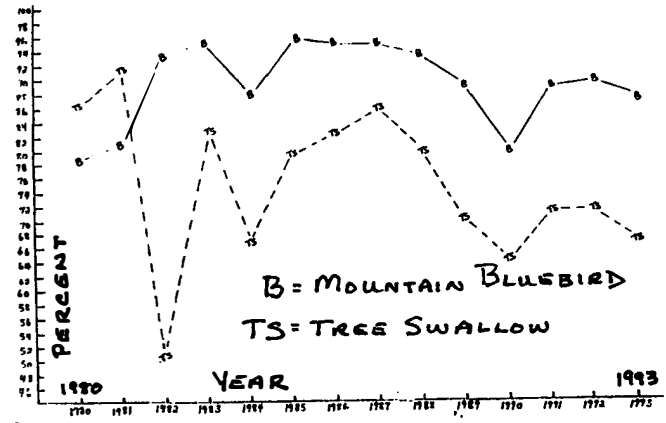


GRAPH 1: Total Boxes -- Total Nests

Graph 1 shows the number of boxes monitored each year, the total number of nests for all species, the number of Mountain Bluebird nests, Tree Swallow nests and other bird species nests. The number of nests is closely correlated with the number of nest boxes available. The more boxes we have put out the more bluebird nests there have been as a result. We don't seem to have reached a levelling off in bluebird population on our nest box trails yet. There has also been an increase in the number of second nestings which accounts for the years where there are more nests than there are boxes.

Bluebird Trails Continued

Graph 2 tracks survival to fledging of Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows as a percentage of hatched eggs. About 80-87% of the bluebird & Tree Swallow eggs hatch and the potential is there for both species to raise all these hatched chicks, however, a variety of factors such as parenting skills, food supply, weather, parasites and predators comes into play. The Mountain Bluebirds are consistently more successful at raising their chicks than are the Tree Swallows. The thirteen year average for Mountain Bluebirds is 90% of chicks hatched fledge, while for Tree Swallows it is 75%. I don't have any hard facts as to why this should be but I have some observations and speculations. Both 1984 & 1990 were poor years for both species and I know in 1990 the month of May nearly broke a rainfall record set in the 1800's so I think the wet, cool weather which may also have affected the food supply was a factor in the reduced nesting success. Only one of our trails seems to experience trouble with bluebird young parasitized with blowfly larvae but several trails have had swallows infested with mites. The bluebirds nest earlier than the swallows and year after year when we hit either scorching hot weather or cool, wet weather I notice that the bluebird chicks are quite well developed and feathered, whereas the swallow chicks are less mature with only a few down feathers. As many of the swallow chicks die in these circumstances I believe that the earlier nesting of the bluebirds is an advantage. The Tree Swallow's food is almost entirely winged insects whereas the bluebird will take quite a variety of insects, often hovering in the air like a little hawk before pouncing on its prey. This greater variety of food may also give the bluebirds an edge over the swallows. House Wrens appear to be very successful nesters. When they lay 7-8 eggs usually 100% hatch & 100% fledge. Chickadees also are very successful.



GRAPH 2: Fledging Survivals

In only 2-3 more weeks, by the end of February & early March, the Mountain Bluebirds will be back, bright flashes of sky blue against winter brown grasses. By April 26 to early May, there will be eggs in the nest and another bluebird season will have begun, with more along the routes to observe than just the nest box users. There will be the spring yellow of buttercups and yellow bells, and later larkspur, lupine and roses, Long-billed Curlews near the end of my route, another family of Killdeer blending with the gravel of the road edge, the Lewis' Woodpecker nest in the old snag and always the chance of something I have not seen before. ◀

Note on a Northern Shrike Harassing a Northern Pygmy Owl

by Jerry Herzig
Princeton, BC

On 10 February 1994, while I was cleaning out Wood Duck boxes at the Princeton sewage ponds I could hear high-pitched, nasal alarm calls coming from a group of willow trees approximately 100 yards away. Closer examination revealed a Northern Pygmy Owl being harassed by a Northern Shrike. The owl was perched in plain view five yards above the ground and the shrike would perch in the top of the tree and hop through the branches to within about one foot of the owl, fluttering its wings and tail while calling loudly. As I approached closer the shrike flew to some nearby cottonwoods from where it made flying passes at the owl, calling only when near the owl. Through all this the owl did not move and only made snapping noises with its bill. This confrontation was observed for over 20 minutes and continued as I left the area.

Northern Pygmy Owls are common in this area in the winter and Northern Shrikes have been recorded on several occasions but this is the first time that I have ever observed this reaction between two similar predators. Further, no small birds were seen in the area despite the alarm calls of the shrike. ◀

Beaver Ranch Flats -- Building A Place for the Birds

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Ducks Unlimited is an international conservation organization whose main objectives are to preserve, secure and/or enhance waterfowl & wetland habitat. Ducks Unlimited commenced its activities in the Canadian Prairies in the late 1930's and moved to BC in 1968 at the request of the provincial government. Since then, Ducks Unlimited has invested almost \$55 million in 850 projects to secure over 160,000 hectares of important BC wetlands. These projects range in size and scope from the expansive Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area in the Kootenays to roadside interpretation programs in various parts of the province. Projects of provincial note include: Cowichan Estuary on Vancouver Island; Reifel Bird Sanctuary and Pitt Polder Marshes on the Lower Mainland; Tommy's Meadow on Douglas Lake Ranch and Beaver Ranch Flats on the Guichon Ranch near Merritt; Salmon Arm Bay, Swan Lake, and the north ends of Vaseaux Lake and Osoyoos Lake in the Okanagan-Shuswap; portions of the Columbia Marshes near Golden, Bummer Flats at Cranbrook and the Creston Marshes all in the Kootenays; the 70, 108 and 145 Mile House marshes along the Cariboo Highway; Chilanko Marsh, Chilcotin Marshes and Chilko Ranch Marshes in the Chilcotin; and McQueen Slough, Fort St John Potholes, Boundary Lake and Cecil Lake in the Peace River country. For many years the focus was upon securing water sources for high quality breeding marshes, but over the past 15 years there has been additional emphasis upon staging/migration and wintering values for waterfowl as well as broader wetland species values and adjacent upland habitat conditions.

There are numerous Ducks unlimited projects in the Kamloops area which provide excellent opportunities to watch birds. The most prolific wetland in terms of waterbirds is located on the Gerard Guichon Ranch alongside the old Merritt-Kamloops Highway 5A, approximately two km north of Nicola Lake. The Beaver Ranch Flats, or Guichon Flats, was created in 1990 after five years of planning. Historically, the area was an ephemeral, alkaline marsh until it was ditched to facilitate haying and cattle grazing. The Guichons, by virtue of an old dam, and only in moist years, would hold back spring runoff to flood irrigate the meadows as early in spring as possible. They would then release the water in April, which would deter any waterbirds from nesting. This was a necessary evil, as according to the ranchers, the water would dry up in May-June, thereby stranding young and flightless birds. During the brief "sheetwater" conditions in spring the meadow was a haven for migrating waterbirds. Annual spring census results would frequently yield over 3000 waterfowl, of particular note were flocks of 500+ Northern Pintail and Canvasback which appeared at the first evidence of open water. They were followed shortly by American Wigeon, Mallard, Common & Barrow's Goldeneye, Lesser & Greater Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Redhead, Bufflehead, Green-winged Teal, Canada Geese and Tundra Swans. As the spring progressed, later migrants such as Ruddy Duck, Northern Shoveler, Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal would appear.

The remarkable bird use which these "Flats" received for these short periods, and the strong interest of the Guichon family in conservation, led to extensive project planning. The main focus was to assess potential water sources and, after exhausting all surface water possibilities, groundwater options were explored. The result was the drilling of a 262 foot industrial well which would supply enough water to offset high evapo-transpiration losses. The groundwater was then piped to a newly created lower wetland, Canal Meadow, and after filling this area the water would back into the upper Flat Meadow. The annual water management plan at the project is to maintain a permanent 70 hectare wetland at Canal Meadow, while holding water over 50 hectares in Flat Meadow until late June.

The response to the creation of a permanent wetland area by birds was rapid. While Canal Meadow was not flooded until late May its first year of operation, duck broods were produced that summer. In addition to providing the previous early spring resting and feeding opportunities, the project is used extensively by a great variety of breeding, molting, and fall migration waterfowl. The colonial-nesting Eared Grebe have moved into the marshes, as well as Pied-billed Grebe and, of course, the American Coot. The bulrush stands are dominated by the cantankerous Yellow-headed Blackbird, Song Sparrow, Marsh Wren and Common Yellowthroat with Virginia Rail and Sora also present. Other wetland dependent birds common at the

Beaver Ranch Flats Continued

area include Killdeer, Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs, Brewer's & Red-winged Blackbird, Common Snipe and Northern Harrier. Many other avian species have been observed at Beaver Ranch Flats. Sandhill Cranes feed in the wetland shallows and adjacent uplands in April. American Avocet, White-fronted & Snow Geese have been observed in spring while Spotted Sandpiper and Wilson's Phalarope have become regular breeders. Locally nesting Bald Eagles regularly visit the marsh to hunt for prey throughout the year and large numbers of both Bald & Golden Eagles are present during spring calving. In spring and summer, Long-billed Curlew utilize the uplands as well as Savannah & Vesper Sparrow, Mountain Bluebird, Western Meadowlark, Red-tailed & Swainson's Hawk, Black-billed Magpie, American Robin, Horned Lark, Water Pipit, Northern Flicker and the five common swallow species. In late summer and fall the moist edges of Canal Meadow and the remnant mudflats of Flat Meadow can be very attractive to migrating shorebirds. Semipalmated Plover; Black-bellied & Lesser Golden Plover; Long-billed Dowitcher; Solitary, Semipalmated, Western, Least, Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers have all been observed, and sharp-eyed birders will undoubtedly discover other rarer vagrants. These shorebird visitors also attract the Peregrine Falcon and occasionally the Prairie Falcon.

The Beaver Ranch Flats are a great attraction for birds not only because they are so rich in nutrients, but because they are located on a natural migration corridor. The Douglas Lake and Thompson Plateaus are full of large staging lakes and complementary pothole mosaics which serve to funnel most waterbirds northward while steering others into available, local breeding areas. A drive along the old Merritt-Kamloops highway will provide the natural history enthusiast with not only abundant birding and wildlife viewing opportunities, but also very unique and visible geological and cultural history. The roadside pullout at Beaver Flats presently provides the traveller with a snapshot of these tremendous values, and plans are being formulated to create a kiosk which will further detail the flora, fauna, geomorphology and settlement in the area. ↩

AUTHORS IN THIS ISSUE

Ian Barnett

A Registered Professional Biologist, Ian is currently Kamloops Area Manager for Ducks Unlimited and an enthusiastic birder.

Phil Gehlen

Phil has been actively birding for the past twelve years, primarily in the Pacific Northwest and although he does not consider himself a photographer, has amassed a large number of slides and prints of birds as well as other wildlife and nature subjects.

Margo Hearne

Margo is an active birder and an enthusiastic supporter of the Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary in Masset, BC.

Rick Howie

Rick, a naturalist with many years of birding experience, has contributed to much of our knowledge about the Flammulated Owl in BC. He is a knowledgeable and ardent birder and finds the most interesting roads for his field trips.

Frank Kime

Frank, a birdwatcher for over 40 years, has an occupation which took him around the world. He has taken every opportunity to enjoy his hobby and has birded in Britain, Egypt, Malaya, Maldiv Islands, Belize and the USA.

Dave Low

David is a senior wildlife biologist with BC Environment. He has for many years been responsible for deer management programs. He is presently working with non-game, and rare & endangered species within the Thompson/ Nicola region.

Karen McLaren

Karen, a naturalist with a UBC degree in agriculture (wildlife option) and an interest in plants, birds, mammals, etc., is also a dog obedience competitor with an obedience trial champion standard poodle. ↩