



# BC BIRDING

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Check Out BCFO Website at <http://www.birding.bc.ca/bcfo>. Site courtesy of Kevin Slagboom.

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of membership in the society.

Members will also receive a copy of the annual  
journal, **British Columbia Birds**.

Membership in BCFO is open to anyone interested  
in the study and 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.

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Send material for publication in any format to  
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finding information for our "Site Guide"  
series and any articles about birding  
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**EDITORS' NOTES & NOTIONS**

For those who went, this is an historic record issue. For those who could not go, share the trip and the birds with us. Not only did we get great birds and birding, but we had people who were willing to document the events. Thanks to all who made the 11<sup>th</sup> AGC and extension trip such a fun and memorable occasion. Mark Phinney sent us a tally of 122 species seen during the AGC. On page 16 is included the compiled listings of AGC and extension which is "...composed from the field notes of Jack Bowling, Bryan Gates, Mark Phinney, Tony Greenfield and Russ Tkachuk. Thanks also to Jo Ann MacKenzie for additional comments."-RTK

Jack took article production to 'high tech' levels by writing up summaries each day on his lap top computer and e-mailing those summaries to us and others. Those extension trip summaries were waiting for us by the time we got home. Mark, Jamie and Bruce were not far behind with their articles from the AGC trips. Great work people!

Alan MacLeod, who was birding just a bit further north, sent us an article which was a great complement to the BCFO items. Martin, who is still regaining his sea legs, sent us his regular meetings and news items, one of which was a note on heron stewardship. Ross Vennesland's heron article was sent to us in May so we have included it in this issue. See the back page for an offering from Lens & Shutter. Jo Ann provided us with the minutes of the AGM. You may note in them that your newsletter editors have tendered their resignation effective June 2002. Directors are accepting applications from interested members.

We had hoped to include a number of photos in this issue but we ran out of space - a most unusual state of affairs for us. We will try to get some into the next issue but we thank Bruce Bennett for sending us the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow photos and Marie O'Shaughnessy for the group photo on the cover of this issue and for additional photos which we hope to use in the future. If members have photos from the AGC or extension trip which they feel would be suitable to record the events please send them to us before the first of November (we will return them).

Remember that the next issue is the CBC issue so we would appreciate all members sending us CBC dates and contacts as soon as possible. It is never too early - Guy Monty provided us with the Nanaimo CBC date (30 Dec. 2001) while he was still at the AGC in June! Gold Star again Guy.

Thanks to all members who responded to our e-mailout where we requested updates / corrections for the **BCFO Membership List 2001**. Please continue to keep your membership director up-to-date with ongoing changes. That way your copies will not get delayed or migrate to an incorrect address. Remember that the BCFO Membership List must not be used for any commercial purpose. It is meant primarily as a venue to keep BCFO members in touch when they go birding around this great province of ours.

Good Birding, Andy and Marilyn Buhler.

## SOCIETY NEWS

## UPCOMING MEETINGS &amp; EVENTS

compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

- Sept. 14-15 2001 **ANNUAL MEETING, ASSOCIATION OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS**, Cape May, New Jersey. Contact: Scott Sutcliffe, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850, USA.
- Sept. 21-23 2001 **2001 WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION 76<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**, Spokane, Washington. Contact: Gary Blevins, Spokane Falls Community College, 5925 W. Excell, Spokane, WA 99208, USA. phone (509) 326-2399
- Sept. 27-30 2001 **WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS 26<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**, Reno, Nevada. Contact: Lucie Clark, 335 Ski Way #300, Incline Village, NV 89451, USA; phone (775) 831-2909.
- Oct. 18-21 2001 **FEDERATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA NATURALISTS FALL GENERAL MEETING**, Camp Alexandra, Crescent Beach, BC. Contacts: Alvin or Rosemary Kimmel phone (604) 541-2452; fax (604) 541-2458.
- Oct. 24-28 2001 **RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION 2001 ANNUAL MEETING**, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Contact: Manitoba Conservation, Wildlife Branch, Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent, Winnipeg, MB R3J 3W3; phone (204) 945-7775.
- Nov. 5-8 2001 **PRAIRIE GROUSE TECHNICAL COUNCIL BIENNIAL MEETING**, Woodward, Oklahoma. Contact: Russ Horton (405) 364-7142 or Stephanie Harmon (918) 581-7458 extension 229.
- Nov. 7-11 2001 **WATERBIRD SOCIETY 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**, Niagara Falls, Ontario. Contact: Dr. D. V. (Chip) Weseloh, 4905 Dufferin Street, Downsview, ON M3H 5T4; phone (416) 739-5846.
- Feb. 20-24 2002 **PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP 29<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**, Santa Barbara, California, including field trips to the Channel Islands. Contact: Harry Carter, U.S. Geological Survey, 6924 Tremont Road, Dixon, CA 95620; phone (707) 678-0682 OR Sarah Fangman, Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary, 113 Harbor Way, Santa Barbara, CA 93109; phone (805) 884-1473.
- March 2002 **BIRDS OF TWO WORLDS: ADVANCES IN THE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION OF TEMPERATE-TROPICAL MIGRATION SYSTEMS**, Washington, DC. Exact date yet to be determined. Contact: Peter P. Marra, Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, National Zoological Park, Washington, DC 20008, USA; phone (202) 673-4908 or Russell S. Greenberg, 7500 Flower Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912, USA; phone (202) 673-4908.
- March 6-8 2002 **9<sup>TH</sup> ALASKA BIRD CONFERENCE**, Fairbanks, Alaska. Contact: Nancy Dewitt, Alaska Bird Observatory, Box 80505, Fairbanks, Alaska 99706; phone (907) 451-7059.
- Aug. 11-17 2002 **23<sup>RD</sup> INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS**, Beijing, China. Contact: Professor Xu Weishu, Secretary-General of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress, Beijing Natural History Museum, 1-1-302, Beijing Science and Technology Commission Apt., Balizhuang, Haidian District, Beijing 100037, China; phone +86-10-6846-5605.



**BC BIRDING NEWS BRIEFS**

compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

**Okanagan Bluebirds** - The Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society succeeded in having their 5,125 bluebird boxes fledge 5,682 Tree Swallows, 420 House Wrens, 1,580 Western Bluebirds and 6,538 Mountain Bluebirds during 2000 in spite of problems one local bluebirder, **Jack Link**, faced with rattlesnakes and bears. (Anonymous. 2001. *Bluebird* 23(3):6).

**Vancouver Birders Awarded**

The Vancouver Natural History Society recently awarded four of its six Garibaldi Awards for services to the society to prominent birders. **Meg Brown** was recognized for her work in arranging speakers for the monthly Birding Section meetings for several years and other contributions to the Birding Section Committee. **Marian Coope** shared an award with her husband, **John**, for several contributions to habitat restoration, society publications and summer camp activities. **Kyle Elliott** was recognized for several contributions, including leading field trips, editing the *Wandering Tattler* for several years, and editing (with Wayne Gardner) a book on bird records in the Vancouver area in 1995. Not mentioned in the citation were his contributions to the new birdfinding guide to the Vancouver area, his membership on the board of the Birding Section, and his work with Wayne Gardner in compiling Vancouver area bird records for 1996-2000. **Dr. Rex Kenner** was awarded for his entomological (especially dragonfly) contributions, but is also an active participant in ornithological activities in the lower mainland. (based primarily on J. McCall. 2001. *Vancouver Nat.* (2):10).

**Heron Stewardship** - Increasing Bald Eagle populations and human intrusion appear to be the two main causes of declines in the non-migratory race of the Great Blue Heron that inhabits coastal B.C. This situation is being monitored by volunteers through a joint stewardship program of the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Environment Canada and Wild Bird Trust of B.C. Surveys in this program indicated that nest abandonment occurred in 58% of the colonies monitored in 1999. - based on R. G. Vennesland. 2001. *Bird Watch Canada* No. 16:17).

[EDITORS' NOTE: see article page 8 this issue]

**Journal Editor Recovering** - When I woke up from about two and a half weeks in a coma in Burnaby General Hospital this June, one of my first reactions was to wonder whether I could still get to the BCFO annual meeting in Dawson Creek. Kevin Young answered that by handing me a heap of cards, two of which were from the annual meetings of BCFO and the Langley Field Naturalists. Other cards received in the hospital or later were from Andy and Marilyn Buhler, Bryan Gates, Hue and Jo Ann MacKenzie, Laurie Rockwell, Bernie and Prue Spitmann, and the board of the Vancouver Natural History Society (via Jeremy McCall). Al Grass dropped by the hospital with a card and *Bird Watcher's Digest* issue from him and Jude, the magazine providing material for my next compilation of literature for *North American Bird Bander*. Also greatly appreciated were phone calls from several of the people mentioned above, as well as Fred Cooke, Adrian Grant-Duff, Annabel and Rhys Griffiths, and Ian Robertson. Many thanks to all for your kind best wishes.

**Goshawk Review** - The Wildlife Society and Raptor Research Foundation have formed a joint committee to review the status of the Northern Goshawk in the western U.S. (Anonymous. 2001. *Newsletter of the World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls* 29-32:68).

**Solecki Receives Anderson Award** - **Daphne Solecki**, a former President of both the Federation of B.C. Naturalists and the Vancouver Natural History Society, received the Federation's premier award, the Elton Anderson Award at their 2001 annual meeting (Anonymous. 2001. *Vancouver Nat.* 3(2):1). Daphne has spent much of her time recently developing the federation's Young Naturalists' Club.



**BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS  
MINUTES OF THE 11<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 23 JUNE 2001  
GEORGE DAWSON INN, DAWSON CREEK, B.C.**

**1. Call to Order**

President Bryan Gates called to order the Annual General Meeting of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists (BCFO) at 4:15 p.m., and welcomed those present.

**2. Minutes of the 2000 Annual General Meeting**

The meeting was held 12 August 2000, in Vancouver. Secretary Jo Ann MacKenzie read out the Minutes, which had been published in the September, 2000 issue of *BC Birding*.

*Motion: To approve the Minutes; by Dick Cannings, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Robyn Abear. CARRIED.*

**3. Business Arising from the Minutes**

None.

**4. Treasurer's Report**

Jim Fliczuk served as Treasurer for two years, but stepped down from that position last month, before embarking on an extended period of travel. Acting Treasurer Bryan Gates presented the Statement of Revenues and Expenditures. There was a modest deficit of \$185 last year, primarily due to cost overruns associated with the Vancouver Annual Conference.

The Balance Sheet, at 31 December 2000, shows a balance of \$21,674.

*Motion: To accept the Treasurer's Report; by Marilyn Buhler, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Fred Simpson. CARRIED.*

**5. Membership Report**

Russ Tkachuk presented his report. Memberships vary during the year, with maximum numbers usually occurring during the time of the Annual General Meeting. Renewal procedures were modified, and sent out three times during the year (instead of twice), with the September, December, and March newsletters. Those who had not renewed by the end of March were contacted by telephone or e-mail, and response was excellent.

As of 18 Jun 2001, there were 249 members, which compares with 214 members at the time of the Vancouver meeting in 2000, and 185 at the Oliver meeting in 1999. While the current membership total seems healthy, the directors are aware that there are a number of active ornithologists in this province who are not BCFO members.

A Membership List was distributed with the September 2000 newsletter; another distribution is planned for September 2001. A "Welcome" list of new members who joined during 1999 and 2000 was published in the June 2001 newsletter.

Our website, is used by more people every year. We are indebted to Kevin Slagboom of KS Design for providing this site, at no cost to BCFO. We are also indebted to Andy and Marilyn Buhler for help with printing/formatting tasks for various membership procedures.

*Motion: To accept the Membership Report, by John Sprague, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Tony Greenfield. CARRIED.*

Further, Tony Greenfield expressed thanks to Andy and Marilyn Buhler, and Martin McNicholl *in absentia*, for keeping up with timely publication of the newsletter and journal, respectively, pointing out that the precipitous drop in membership in 1993 (down to about 166) resulted from significant delays of these publications reaching the members.

**6. Newsletter Report**

**BC BIRDING** co-editor Marilyn Buhler presented the editors' report. She thanked those who have contributed material to the newsletter, FotoPrint in Victoria for service, Allan Wiseley (postage stamps), Russ Tkachuk, (mailing labels), Hank VanderPol, and Sheila Mosher (mailing). Marilyn also announced that she and Andy, having edited the newsletter for the past nine years, will give up their editorship next year, at the 2002 Annual General Meeting, and expressed willingness to provide assistance to a new editor. She thanked the members for their support.

**7. Journal Report**

Due to the sudden illness of **BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS** editor Martin McNicholl, there was no report. Bryan Gates asked that someone among the membership consider taking over the editor's duties until Martin is able and willing to continue. John Sprague volunteered for the task.

## 8. President's Report

Bryan Gates outlined some of the goals and achievements of the board this year. Directors continue to consider some form of affiliation with the Wild Bird Trust of BC regarding bird data, and continue our co-operative working relationship with Bird Studies Canada and with Dick Cannings, the BC Program Manager. Members were urged to commit to participating in a bird inventory program at each Annual Conference.

The board has considered the matter of liability of the society and its directors in case of injury during a field trip. We now require participants to sign a waiver form, and will consider obtaining liability insurance.

The board has drafted a Safety Plan, established a promotions committee, adopted a policy for honoraria to trip organizers or leaders, reduced costs by conducting much business by e-mail, and continues to develop a Policy Manual. Pelagic 2000, out of Ucluelet, was very successful; there is a sizable waiting list for Pelagic 2001, in September, out of Port McNeill.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to assemble the key people for discussing protocols for bird data storage and exchange in BC. We must avoid becoming just a "birders group", rather than an integrated and co-operative group of professionals and amateurs, which was the original objective of the organization.

Bryan thanked the current board members, Jo Ann MacKenzie (Secretary), Hank VanderPol (Annual Conference), Laurie Rockwell (Extension 2001), Russ Tkachuk (Membership), Ian Robertson (Promotions), Sandra Kinsey, Brian Scott, and former Treasurer Jim Fliczuk. Archivist Hue MacKenzie was thanked for assembling records, and preparing documents on what our society does, a list of past board members and executive officers, guidelines for improving the planning process for annual conferences, a policy for voting rights within BCFO, and a lengthy list of BCFO contributions to other organizations and individuals. Ian Robertson's family was thanked, also, as our meetings have been held in their home.

Further, Bryan thanked Dr. Martin McNicholl, editor of our technical journal, *British Columbia Birds*, Andy and Marilyn Buhler, editors of our newsletter, *BC Birding*, and Gary Davidson, past chair of the BCFO Bird Records Committee. Finally, all those present were thanked for supporting the society's activities.

## 9. Election of Directors

Ian Robertson presented the slate of nominees for 2001-2003. Glen Moores (Sidney) was nominated for the position of director, and has agreed to serve as Treasurer if elected, although he was not present at this meeting. Standing for re-election for a 2-year term were Jo Ann MacKenzie (Surrey), Ian Robertson (Langley), and Hank VanderPol (Kelowna). There were no other nominations.

*Motion to Acclaim; by Ian Robertson, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Marilyn Buhler. CARRIED.*

Bryan Gates (Victoria), Sandra Kinsey (Prince George), Laurie Rockwell (Summerland), Brian Scott (Langley), and Russ Tkachuk (Roberts Creek), will be completing the second year of a 2-year term, and are not candidates for re-election at this time. Bryan Gates and Russ Tkachuk have served 5 of a maximum 6 consecutive years as Directors.

## 10. Other Business

**Motions** (Notices of Motion were published in the June issue of *BC Birding*.)

(a) Re Directors' Expenses: This Motion would allow Directors and members of working committees to recover a little more of their travel expenses, and would take effect in 2002. After brief discussion there was a *Motion: That the Board members claim their expenses in the form of a tax deduction when carrying out BCFO duties; by Gwynneth Wilson, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Larry Cowan. CARRIED.* The Payment of Expenses policy will be amended to read:

"4. Directors and members of the Society's working committees, who the Directors request be in attendance, shall be reimbursed for travel expenses to attend Directors' meetings and the Annual General Meeting upon the Treasurer receiving equivalent cash donations from the Directors or working committee members making the travel claims. The cash donations shall be made payable to the Society. Tax receipts will be issued to claimants together with payments of their claims."

(b) Motion: That the BC Field Ornithologists dissolve its Bird Records Committee; by Ian Robertson, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Robyn Abear. Discussion: British Columbia does not have a functioning Bird Records Committee at present. In general, it was felt that (1) BCFO should sponsor a Bird

Records Committee; (2) there should be only one provincial checklist; and (3) a provincial checklist produced by a working group is preferable to one produced by an individual. It was suggested that perhaps we might work with Wild Bird Trust, to deal with bird records for the purpose of producing a checklist. However, our jurisdictional differences with Wayne Campbell and the Wild Bird Trust should be resolved before attempting to re-activate our Bird Records Committee. Further, we should seek co-operation with the Victoria and Vancouver Bird Records Committees. A vote was taken, and the above Motion was *DEFEATED*.

The Board will query other agencies to determine how best to set up a Bird Records Committee. Anyone wishing to serve on a BCFO Bird Records Committee was asked to contact the President.

(c) Annual Conference 2002: Williams Lake has been investigated and is being considered.

## 11. Adjournment

*Motion to adjourn; by Peter Blokker, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Mary Paul. CARRIED.*

The meeting was adjourned by Bryan Gates at 5:45 p.m.

Jo Ann MacKenzie  
Secretary  
3 July 2001



## The Final Tally....

by Mark Phinney

By all accounts the BCFO 11<sup>th</sup> Annual General Conference was a success. The weather cooperated for two of three days and even Sunday wasn't a total bust. Unfortunately, bird singing activity had tailed off a bit by this time making some species difficult to track down. This was perhaps a bit unusual since some birds had only returned to the area a few weeks prior. Hopefully everyone got to knock off at least a couple birds from their 'wish list'. Overall (field trips both days, Friday morning red/blue searches, and incidental observations) 122 species were tallied. The field trip routes were selected to maximise the diversity of NE BC 'specialty' birds likely to be encountered within a reasonably short distance from Dawson Creek. No doubt we could have tracked down a few more species and cooperative birds if we had gone on specific excursions but there simply isn't time in one weekend to see everything...as I'm sure you know!

On behalf of the Timberline Trail and Nature Club, and the people of Dawson Creek, I would like to thank the BCFO for choosing our city to host the AGC. I hope you all enjoyed your stay and have pleasant memories of your brief time here. Whether you found all of your target species or not, I hope you will all consider returning to the area for another visit in the future.

p.s. Veronica Violet Phinney was born a week later, on June 29



**EDITORS' NOTE:** In addition to the note of thanks on page 15 of this issue we would like to extend thanks to Timberline Trail and Nature Club members (Roy, Jean, Ken, Walter, Ellen and Meredith) for all of their assistance. Thanks also to Monica (George Dawson Inn); Marilyn Croutch for the info packages; Ducks Unlimited Canada, Partners-in-Flight Canada, and Muskwa-Kechika Management Area for displays; businesses in the Dawson Creek area who generously donated door prizes; Louisiana-Pacific Canada Ltd. for sponsoring the Friday night social; Nav Air terminal staff for their cooperation and understanding; the Toochins, Mike and Sharon for having 'ears extra ordinaire'; Laurie Rockwell for handling extension registration; Bryan, Rand and Tony for driving with care, skill and courtesy; Veronica Violet for waiting until *after* the weekend to arrive so her dad had some time to assist and enjoy the AGC; and to Hank and the Directors for making the 11<sup>th</sup> AGC and Fort Nelson extension trip such a success. We had a great time and we are certain that all attendees did too. Well done all!

## A Conservation Challenge

### Great Blue Herons in the Strait of Georgia, British Columbia

by Ross G. Vennesland

c/o Simon Fraser University

The Pacific Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias fannini*) is a familiar sight to almost everyone who spends time along the coast of British Columbia. Herons are found lurking in fields and dotting our beaches and bays - standing by the water's edge like sentinels of the seashore. Unlike many of the other Canadian heron populations who migrate during the winter, those on the coast of British Columbia are year-round residents. This sub-species has a restricted range and a relatively small population size and as such, is flagged as a potential conservation concern.

Concern for the Pacific Great Blue Heron population was raised thanks in large part to the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data from Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast. These volunteer-collected data show population declines and are corroborated by an increase in the frequency of heron breeding abandonment through the past three decades. As a result, the Pacific Great Blue Heron is listed as 'vulnerable' by the British Columbia government and of Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

Surveys of breeding herons in colonies over the past decades do not show the same declines as the volunteer surveys of herons away from colonies. However, due to the complex nature of colonies and limited resources and coverage in some years these data are less reliable. Heron colony size is extremely variable, ranging in size from two to 400 breeding pairs. Eighty per cent of coastal herons breed in several large colonies concentrated around the Fraser River estuary. Heron colonies are most often located in secluded woodlots but can also be found in developed areas such as urban parks. Colonies are dynamic in nature and have shifted locations from time to time. Current data show that many colonies are used for decades, while others are only used for only a few years - making heronry habitat a challenge to manage and conserve.

The Heron Stewardship Program, a joint initiative of Environment Canada, the BC Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks and the Wild Bird Trust of BC, has met this challenge. All colonies greater than 100 breeding pairs are protected in regional parks. One gleaming example of heron habitat protection, thanks to the help and dedication of numerous non-governmental organizations and volunteer citizens, is the securement and protection of the McFadden Creek heronry on Saltspring Island.

The heron conservation challenge is also being met through research. I investigated, with the help of Rob Butler of the Canadian Wildlife Service, the effects of predator and human disturbance on breeding herons in coastal BC. My research suggests that the observed population decline and increase in breeding failure are likely due to increased disturbance from Bald Eagles and humans. In 1999, nest abandonment occurred in 58% of nesting attempts, and colony abandonment occurred at 42% of the 31 colonies studied. Nest abandonment was due mostly to Bald Eagle disturbance and, to a lesser degree, human disturbance. Abandonment will likely increase as the populations of Bald Eagles and other predators continue to expand but as raptor populations stabilize so should heron productivity. In the short-term, as disturbance at breeding colonies increases, it is possible that herons will be forced to change breeding locations more frequently to stay one step ahead of their antagonists.

We have learned that herons rarely return to old breeding locations, so what can we do to meet this conservation challenge? In addition to currently used habitat, we should also protect potential heron breeding habitat, providing herons with alternate breeding sites. Also, continued population monitoring through programs like the BBS, CBC and the BC Coastal Waterbird Survey is key to detecting further declines in the number of herons, or hopefully, revealing a stable or increasing population - evidence of successful conservation efforts!



EDITORS' NOTE: Article submitted by Stephanie Hazlitt, Bird Studies Canada. This article has appeared previously in BirdWatch Canada, Bird Studies Canada's newsletter.



**Brassey Creek Field Trips - 23-24 June 2001**

Report thanks to

Jamie Fenneman / Mark Phinney

The field trips to the Brassey Creek area, which is located approximately 45 minutes southwest of Dawson Creek, were summed up nicely by one participant: "jungle birding - lots of birds heard, few seen." Saturday's field trip, like the other two trips, got off to a later start than would have been desirable, particularly when there was such a lengthy drive to the birding area. Nevertheless, the 6:00 start was still early enough to catch the tail end of the morning serenade of bird song, which can be awe-inspiring in this region during the peak breeding season. The first stop was only about two kilometres south along the Heritage Highway, where a singing Le Conte's sparrow had been located several days before. Unfortunately, the bird did not reveal its presence (setting a premise for much of the rest of the trip), but there were many other birds singing including Black-and-white Warbler, Fox Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and American Redstart. A medium-sized, long-legged shorebird on a post in a field across the road gave several birders a quick adrenaline rush before they realized that it was only a Lesser Yellowlegs and not an Upland Sandpiper.

Following this rather productive stop, the group proceeded to Brassey Creek Road, another 15 minutes south. An eastern kingbird en route was nice, as were a mother and calf moose alongside the highway. The lower reaches of Brassey Creek Road are pure aspen forest and this habitat was worked hard for the specialties that were there. The Connecticut Warbler was incredibly elusive, sitting in the foliage and singing repeatedly above our heads, the only visual clues to its presence being a quick flash as it flew through the leaves. Further down the road, the staked-out Philadelphia Vireo was taking lessons from the LeConte's Sparrow, frustrating many. The signature stop of this trip was a short section of road that was mainly included for the Canada Warbler that had been seen there on several occasions prior to the trip. Of course, it did not show, but many other warblers such as Mourning, Black-throated Green, Magnolia, and Black-and-white were singing (but not showing themselves). The final stop was at the top of the road where a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher had a territory and was usually easy to find. The group was busy admiring a singing male Blackpoll Warbler when the leader heard the flycatcher sing across the road. By the time he had called people over to hear the bird it was no longer singing. A fitting end to the day, which was plagued by windy conditions, a late start, and just plain uncooperative birds.

Sunday's field trip was certain to be better, as the trip started an hour earlier. Unfortunately, the weather had deteriorated considerably and the low, thick clouds threatened us repeatedly throughout the day. Our higher elevation stops felt like cloud-forest birding in Costa Rica, although MUCH cooler. The itinerary was mainly the same as the day before, with many of the same results. The LeConte's Sparrow, however, did decide to sing for us and many birders enjoyed the strange insect-like buzz which was quite close. The Connecticut Warbler played its same old tricks, taunting us by singing from right above our heads. Despite 25 pairs of intently-searching eyes, no one could see the bird and the search was eventually called off. Later on, good looks were had of Alder Flycatcher and Mourning Warbler, while some birders glimpsed the beautiful Black-throated Green Warbler. In a similar tale as the day before, the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher gave two quick, well-spaced calls which were picked up by the leader and two or three other birders, but the vast majority missed this cloud-forest inhabitant. A day-end stop at a feeder for Blue Jay produced one shy bird which was seen by only a few birders. Perhaps the most unusual sight of the day, however, was a lone Ring-billed Gull which flew by us while we were near the top of the road, far from any significant body of water. Another nice sight was a nest of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers which was watched through a scope for several minutes. All in all, despite the weather, when the days totals were added up at the end of the day they were not particularly dismal considering the conditions, it just would have been nice to see a few more of the birds we heard singing.



**McQueen's Slough and Bear Mountain - 23-24 June 2001**

Report thanks to

Mark Phinney

Saturday morning brought perfect birding weather...clear, sunny skies and no wind. We headed for McQueen Slough in hopes of finding the often elusive Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. A variety of birds greeted us as we piled out of the vehicles...most notable for western birders was the Baltimore Oriole. As we reached the boardwalk, a good variety of waterbirds became visible. We meandered patiently along the boardwalk to the spot where the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow was seen a couple days earlier. A long quiet wait revealed nothing, so we continued past an uncooperative Swamp Sparrow along the edge of a field to a spot where a LeConte's Sparrow had been staked out. As we gathered together, the bird sang from the tall grass. I went in to find it, and it flushed back to the bushline and began to scold. Although it wasn't obvious, the bird was eventually found with spotting scopes, and nearly everyone had a reasonable view before it disappeared further into the bushes. Buoyed by our success, we headed back towards the boardwalk. We had almost reached it when a Sharp-tailed Sparrow sang. It was quickly found in the top of a willow bush, very close at hand. After a few minutes the bird flew to another bush, where visibility was even better. EVERYONE had a good look at this little guy, along with the Clay-colored, Savannah, and Lincoln's Sparrows that also occupied the bushes. We followed the trail to the far side of the slough, encountering some more cooperative Swamp Sparrows and a number of other species. Time was going by quickly, so we headed for the vehicles and drove to Radar Lake. A few more waterbirds were at the lake, but the adjacent forest was fairly quiet. Eventually we ran into a pair of juncos and a Red-breasted Nuthatch that were annoyed by our presence - their scolding brought in a handful of passerines, including Black-throated Green Warbler and Magnolia Warbler. After this, we tried in vain to get a look at a couple of very secretive Mourning Warblers, then drove down the hill to check places where Canada Warblers had been seen the previous day. No luck of course, but we ended up with a Philadelphia Vireo in the scope, and a decent look at a Black-and-White Warbler.

Sunday brought overcast skies and drizzle, so I was a bit apprehensive about repeating the success of the day before, despite the earlier start. I needn't have worried. A cooperative Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow was quickly pinned down, allowing great views by all. The LeConte's Sparrow was initially shy, but gave itself away with a song, then scold notes. It was eventually located, and again, EVERYONE had fantastic views of the bird as it sat barely 15 feet away...offering even the most subtle field marks. Other birds encountered at the slough were generally the same as the previous day, but upon reaching the far side, we encountered a large mixed flock of swallows, many perched on dead willows and providing a nice comparison. As we watched the Black Terns fly past, it became apparent that there were five white terns mixed in. They were cooperative, and wheeled about over the marsh before flying right past us. There was some discussion of Common vs Forster's, but the birds that were seen well were definitely Forster's (can't discount the possibility of a mixed flock, however). Both are rare in this area. We then headed up to Bear Mountain and Radar Lake where things were even quieter than the day before. A smattering of songbirds paid us a visit, including the Black-throated Green Warbler again. The final stop 'hotspot' of the previous day yielded only some Redstarts and Yellow Warblers. The Canada Warblers continued to elude us.

Overall, most of the 'key' species were found, and were seen well. Over both days, 83 species were tallied on this field trip. Forest birds had definitely quieted down from the previous weekend...the earlier start on Sunday may have paid off, if not for the ugly weather. On these longest days of the year, even a 4:00 am start is not too early. I guess the moral is: you can't see everything in two days!



**Swan Lake Field Trips - 23-24 June 2001**

Report thanks to  
Bruce Harrison

Nobody left empty-handed from either of the Swan Lake field trips - at least one of the advertised 'stars' made an appearance each day. Of course, each birder had his or her personal 'must-see or -hear' birds, but there were four species of more-or-less unanimous interest: Canada Warbler, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Connecticut Warbler, and Yellow Rail. Saturday's group were fortunate enough to spot the first two species, and were led on a bit of a chase by the warbler. Sunday's group found only the sparrow, but were favoured with a very up-close singing performance. Despite our best efforts with an improvised call-playback, the Connecticut Warbler didn't show on either day, and the Yellow Rail, while shy during the tours, lived up to it's reputation as a late riser - its distinctive click-click was heard on at least one nocturnal venture to the site.

No real surprises, but there was a sighting of a rare Broad-winged Hawk, and a couple of Western Wood Peewee nests were spotted by our eagle-eyed crew. Of all the sites, Swan Lake Provincial Park proved to be the real biodiversity hotspot, thanks to the lively interface of park, lake and forest. And thankfully, none of the campers seemed too disturbed by the sight of 25 people with binoculars creeping through their campsites at 6AM. We never made it to the last stop on the tour, on either day, but maybe that's a good reason to come back some day. (And maybe that's where the Connecticut Warbler was...?)

**BCFO AGC Extension Trip Reports 2001**

by Jack Bowling

**Day 1 - Monday, June 25**

Left Dawson Creek after a fantastic weekend of birding and fun. North to... Fort Nelson!! First stop was Charlie Lake at Fort St. John where we were astounded to find about 600 Franklin's Gulls hawking midges rising on the thermals. Also there were four Common Terns and two Forster's Terns.

We continued on to Mae's Kitchen just north of the "town" of Pink Mountain where we filled our bellies with homemade pie and ice cream. We then bit the bullet and headed up Pink Mt. itself in search of ptarmigan and anything else. After a somewhat tortuous ascent, we were at the summit in beautiful weather. A bit cool but enough sunny breaks to warm it up now and then, and some wind to sweep the bugs away. Myself, Trevor Forder and Brent Beach were walking along the ridge when suddenly a pair of Rock Ptarmigan rose in front of Trevor and walked leisurely away. Everybody had great looks over the next 20 minutes or so and then we left them alone. Some very ruddy Horned Larks, American Pipits, and a pair of huge Hoary Marmots were also seen. We arrived at Fort Nelson about 8:15 pm and settled in for the night.

**Day 2 - Tuesday, June 26**

Hello from rainy Fort Nelson! Lots of showers but lots of birds, too. Started off the day at the Community Forest here. Highlights included a stunning male Bay-breasted Warbler and an adult Blue Jay, as well as a gazillion Tennessee Warblers and a smattering of other "eastern" warblers. Also a female Pileated Woodpecker defending her two chicks in the cavity from a dashing but villainous Pine Marten.

Next was the Ft. Nelson Airport for the Upland Sandpiper. Got there and spied a pair of Sandhill Cranes on the north end of the airport attending a young one. Looked to be the same age as the ones we saw at Dawson Creek last Friday, with the "chick" about 3 weeks to a month old. We were watching the cranes when I heard the Quip-ipipipip flight call of the Upland. A male Harrier was touring over the sandpiper's meadow and spooked it into flight. The Upland took to the air and flew around for a bit before settling back down on the fenceposts. We got good scope views and there were a couple of lifer jigs danced on the road.

Then we headed downslope to the confluence of the Muskwa and Fort Nelson Rivers. Things had already started to get a bit quiet since it was about 11 am by then but there were some good views of Canada Warbler and Philadelphia Vireo.

After lunch we went west to Parker Lake. The recent rains had rendered the access road a slimy mess so we walked in the 1.3 km. And boy was it worth it! In addition to the usual suspects of ducks, Black Terns, and sundry Swamp Sparrows, etc., was a beautiful adult Sabine's Gull flying with the Bonaparte's Gulls! No Palm Warbler or Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in the spruce bog.

We headed farther west to Kledo Creek in hopes of rustling up a Cape May Warbler. Alas, a thunderstorm delayed our scouting by about an hour and we came up empty on the Cape May.

Back to town for a late dinner and who pops in the door of the Bluebell but Mike and Sharon Toochin. They had been out to the airport looking for the Upland Sandpiper when they were shocked out of their socks by the discovery of a skylarking Sprague's Pipit near the terminal building! Needless to say the whole BCFO gang will be out the door to the airport to see this first thing tomorrow.

The weather doesn't look great for tomorrow so we may have to cancel the Stone Mountain trip. But I'm sure we will have some great birds to see anyway. Mike and Sharon told us where some easy Cape Mays are on Airport Road which will please a few people who need them.

Addendum to previous post: Mike and Sharon Toochin report that they had 2,000-3,000 Franklin's Gulls at Charlie Lake, Fort St. John, June 26, 2001; and Guy Monty observed about 1500 at the Fort St. John sewage lagoons the same day.

### Day 3 - Wednesday, June 27

Today was an itinerary change as we all headed out to the airport to start the day here in Fort Nelson, eager to see the Sprague's Pipit that Mike and Sharon had found the previous day. And we weren't disappointed. We cursed the Nav Can crew a few times which was idling its Challenger engines all the time we were there from a position not too far from the spot where the pipit was calling home. This made it difficult to hear the bird when it roared aloft to sing. However, we were able to hear it by putting buildings between ourselves and the jet. And then we finally locked our bins on the little speck in the sky. The morning low cloud and fog was breaking up slowly but surely and the sight of the skylarking pipit was impressive, especially when it dove to ground like a rock. It soon became apparent to me that when a Sprague's sings, it stops flapping its wings and hovers on set wings. Very cool. We had a battery of scopes scouring the section of the cross runway apron where it landed for quite some time before somebody finally locked onto it. The visual confirmed what we already knew - a Sprague's Pipit. The very curious Nav Can Flight Services staff were kind enough to invite us up to the tower catwalk for a better angled vantage point and soon we all had decent looks at the grass skulker. At the end of its last song flight, some observers with an unobstructed view reported that they saw another pipit take flight just before the airborne bird touched down. This could not be confirmed but I will be up here in another couple of weeks and hopefully will be able to check it out. And the Challenger crew ended up apologizing for idling their engines....

Next stop was the sewage lagoons. A new gate had been installed since I was there last year so we had to walk the one km or so in to the ponds. And boy was it lucky that we did! Halfway along, Bryan Gate's sharp eyes picked out a little warbler from the spruces which turned out to be a Cape May Warbler. We spished it down to a close view at the top of a willow accompanied by many "oohs" and "ahhs" from the audience. First sightings for the extension at the lagoons included: one Mew and three Herring Gulls, and a few Common Grackles.

After a leisurely lunch at the Museum picnic benches, we decided to give Parker Lake another shot before heading up the Liard Highway. We really wanted to turn up Palm Warbler and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher today since we will be heading up into the Rockies tomorrow and would have little time to find them before we leave Friday. Alas, we came up empty on the target species but waiting for us on the lake was the pair of Common Loons which we had missed yesterday AND a Pacific Loon! Very nice. The Sabine's Gull was nowhere to be found but the Bonaparte's were all thermalling very high above the south shore of the lake so we just may have missed it, or it could have moved to nearby, but inaccessible, Evie Lake.

The journey up the Liard Highway to the Fort Nelson River Bridge was a stop and go affair. First stop was Beaver Lake a few kilometers up the road where we found quite a few puddle and diving ducks with broods. And Bucky was living up to his name with at least two lodges still being maintained on the shore. Continuing onward, we checked out every likely looking beaver pond for Rusty Blackbird, and every muskeg bog for Palm Warblers and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers... but to no avail. We did manage to score our first Bohemian Waxwings, though, and a single Woodchuck. And the weather actually became warm for a while, too, in the late afternoon between spotty showers. We crossed the bridge to the forest rec site on the other side where we stopped for a breather before returning home for a welcome dinner.

#### Day 4 - Thursday, June 28

The weather gods were against us with moist easterly upslope winds ensuring low ceilings and occasional rain. Despite the gloomy morning, we headed west to Stone Mountain Provincial Park at the summit of the Northern Rockies with the hopes of the clouds parting. However, there had been no change by the time we arrived. As had been relayed to us earlier, we found that a gate had been installed at the base of the repeater tower road. Tony finally got a hold of NorthwestTel who told him that the gate had been erected by B.C. Parks, not NWTel and we would have to contact them to request access. We drove to the nearest phone down the road and Tony was told by B.C. Parks that it would not be possible for the gate to be opened. But Tony got a tip that there was a road to another repeater tower farther west that did not have restricted access. We owe the person who gave us this tip a great deal.

The repeater tower we were headed for was atop Mt. MacLearn which is in the Sentinel Range of the Rocky Mts. The 25 km long access road leads north from Mile 428 of the Alaska Highway just inside the boundary of Muncho Lake Provincial Park, and climbs some 1624 meters to the base of the tower (Peter Sherrington take note...) . The drive up was easy and the view from on high was spectacular with mountains surrounding us on all sides. We were about 100 meters above treeline here and we spread out to investigate the downslope areas.

I had found a Townsend's Solitaire on the southwest flank and parked myself for a while enjoying his unfettered joyful song flights over the slopes of his stunted spruce territory. Suddenly, I heard a commotion from the summit. Seeing as how we were after Willow Ptarmigan - a lifer for me - I hightailed it back upslope with everybody else.

And there on the very tip top of the mountain were three male Willow Ptarmigan, resplendent in their chestnut mantles and white eyerings. The good news is that everybody managed to see them before they rocketed downslope on arched wings. A good many photos were taken for posterity. Also seen there were Golden-crowned Sparrows, Mountain Bluebirds, and American Robin. We decided to go slow on the descent in hopes of picking up "Timberline" Sparrow and American Tree Sparrow, as well as whatever else. We had picked up a few more Golden-crowned and a Lincoln's Sparrow and were past the base of the mountain when we stopped to investigate a swampy area for Rusty Blackbird. We were the penultimate vehicle in the convoy and had noticed that Russ Tchachuk, Arnold Skei, and John Vooys had been missing from their rear position for a while. All of sudden they reappeared and Arnold excitedly told us of a thrush song they had heard back up the road that sounded like a Veery.

Whoosh!!! This could only be one thing in the subalpine so we turned tail back up the road and assumed the position behind a phalanx of scopes and binoculars hoping to relocate the bird. And finally at about 1700 PDT, the bird started singing again. Soon it was located on its stunted spruce perch and the scopes were locked on. There was little doubt that we were viewing a Gray-cheeked Thrush. Some observers managed to see the gray lores, although all field guides seemed to have overstated the breast spotting. The song was the clincher for me - much like a Veery but thinner, slightly higher pitched and with a faster delivery. Occasionally the thrush would stick in an ascending part near or at the end, and once it sang this ascending part on its own.

The initial surprise of finding the bird at this location was soon tempered by the realization that there are many untraveled hectares of this stunted spruce/willow habitat stretching across the mountain ranges of northernmost B.C. It is likely that this species is more common than is known in this ecozone north of 57 N latitude and we just stumbled onto one of the uncensused population's individuals.

And just to keep the ball rolling, a male American Tree Sparrow decided to grace us with its presence, delighting with its sweet and spritely song delivered from a willow top. Then just as we were packing up, a Blackpoll Warbler zoomed into the top of a spruce where it revealed itself long enough to offer good scope views. Although not uncommon in appropriate habitat, this species can be hard to detect due to its soft song and retiring habits.

Giddy with our good fortune, we finally headed it back down the road at 1800 PDT finding our own ways to dinner. Brent, Trevor and I took our time heading back to Fort Nelson. The easterly winds of the morning has become westerlies and the Rockies summit ranges were now in full splendid view. From the Steamboat Mountain viewpoint overlooking the vast, virtually untouched vista toward the headwaters of the Muskwa River, it was easy to see how the Fort Nelson Lowlands could be renamed the "Boreal Rainforest". Continuing onward, we were rewarded with two Great Gray Owls mousing from low perches on the highway north verge, one 40 km west of town and the next 15 km out. These big bags of feathers never cease to impress.

Although there were some muskeg species misses such as Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Palm Warbler, and beaver pond denizens such as Rusty Blackbird, we did exceptionally well overall and everyone was sporting big wide smiles by the end of the day. The journey back home begins tomorrow when many of us retrace our tire tracks back to Dawson Creek. Some will be heading west or north instead, taking the opportunity to explore more of the north country. I am sure it will be another day full of great birds.

Addendum: Big wild mammals seen today included - three black bear, one woodland caribou, five moose, eight or nine stone sheep (including some drop-dead cute lambs), two wapiti, two mule deer, and one white-tailed deer.

To all those who have never been to the Northeast - DO IT!!!

Regards,

Jack Bowling



**Thanks to all of you!**

from Hank VanderPol, Conference Coordinator

An Annual Conference cannot occur successfully without the involvement of many people. I would therefore like to acknowledge those who assisted so ably in making the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference such a success.

**Mark Phinney**, for developing the bird checklist; laying out the field trips and getting leaders for those; leading one of the field trips; for MCing the Banquet, and for many other little things that need to be done for a conference. Mark and **Louisiana-Pacific Canada Ltd.** for sponsoring the Friday night reception.

**Meredith Thornton and some of the members of the Timberline Trail and Nature Club**, for managing the registration desk, and obtaining many of the door prizes.

**Jamie Fenneman and Bruce Harrison** for leading some of the field trips.

**Ian Robertson** for getting the afternoon speakers and the banquet speaker, and for MCing the afternoon sessions.

**Peter Sherrington, Art Lance, Stephen Bennett, Andra Bismanis and Mark Phinney** for their very informative presentations.

**Ev Miyasaki** for arranging the hotel, meeting room, Friday social, and the banquet, including the menu.

**Russ Tkachuk** for making the name tag labels, and the labels for the registration envelopes.

**Brian Scott** for taking overall responsibility for the registration desk.

**Marilyn and Andy Buhler** for keeping us well informed about the conference in the Newsletter.

**Jo Ann and Hue MacKenzie** who always see the small holes that need to be filled, including the raffle and collecting the name tag holders.

**To all of you who attended** so the conference WAS a success.

And last but not least, **Bryan Gates** for ALWAYS responding to my e-mails about this, that or the other.

Thanks to all of you.

Now onto next year's conference. As you were informed in Dawson Creek, the 12th annual conference will be held in Williams lake. Dates have not been confirmed, but will likely be in early June as bird activity occurs earlier there than it does in Dawson Creek. Your Board will be meeting in early September to decide on dates, and what other activities we might become engaged in.

I will again be the conference coordinator, BUT I WILL NEED LOTS OF HELP FROM YOU. I am looking for volunteers to assist me in this venture. Believe me, most tasks are not large and do not require a lot of your time. The local naturalist club has agreed to provide the bird checklists, develop the field trips, and arrange for field trip leaders. Ev Miyasaki has agreed to do what he did so well for the Dawson Creek conference. So let me know if you are interested and can spare some time for this.

In the meantime, enjoy the birds as they wing their way back south, or settle in your part of the province to spend the winter.



## Birds Seen June 2001

AGC = Ann. General Conference		
EXT = Extension Trip		
Species	AGC	EXT
Common Loon	x	x
Pacific Loon		x
Horned Grebe	x	x
Red-necked Grebe	x	
Eared Grebe	x	x
Canada Goose	x	x
Trumpeter Swan	x	x
Gadwall	x	
American Wigeon	x	x
Mallard	x	x
Blue-winged Teal	x	x
Cinnamon Teal	x	x
Northern Shoveler	x	x
Northern Pintail	x	x
Green-winged Teal	x	x
Canvasback	x	
Redhead	x	
Ring-necked Duck	x	x
Greater Scaup	x	x
Lesser Scaup	x	x
Bufflehead	x	x
Common Goldeneye	x	x
Barrow's Goldeneye		x
Hooded Merganser		x
Ruddy Duck	x	x
Bald Eagle	x	x
Northern Harrier	x	x
Sharp-shinned Hawk		x
Broad-winged Hawk	x	
Red-tailed Hawk	x	x
American Kestrel	x	x
Merlin	x	x
Peregrine Falcon		x
Ruffed Grouse	x	
Willow Ptarmigan		x
Rock Ptarmigan		x
Yellow Rail	x	
Sora	x	x
American Coot	x	x
Sandhill Crane	x	x
Semipalmated Plover	x	
Killdeer	x	x
Greater Yellowlegs		x
Lesser Yellowlegs	x	x
Solitary Sandpiper	x	x
Spotted Sandpiper	x	x
Upland Sandpiper		x
Hudsonian Godwit	x	
Least Sandpiper	x	
Common Snipe	x	x
Wilson's Phalarope	x	x

Species	AGC	EXT
Franklin's Gull	x	x
Bonaparte's Gull		x
Mew Gull		x
Ring-billed Gull	x	x
California Gull	x	x
Herring Gull	x	x
Sabine's Gull		x
Common Tern		x
Forster's Tern	x	x
Black Tern	x	x
Rock Dove	x	x
Great Horned Owl	x	
Great Gray Owl		x
Common Night Hawk	x	x
Belted Kingfisher	x	x
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	x	x
Downy Woodpecker	x	
Hairy Woodpecker	x	x
Northern Flicker	x	x
Pileated Woodpecker	x	x
Olive-sided Flycatcher	x	
Western Wood-Pewee	x	x
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	x	
Alder Flycatcher	x	x
Least Flycatcher	x	x
Eastern Phoebe	x	x
Say's Phoebe	x	
Eastern Kingbird	x	x
Blue-headed Vireo	x	x
Warbling Vireo	x	x
Philadelphia Vireo	x	x
Red-eyed Vireo	x	x
Gray Jay	x	x
Blue Jay	x	x
Black-billed Magpie	x	x
American Crow	x	x
Common Raven	x	x
Horned Lark	x	x
Tree Swallow	x	x
Violet-green Swallow		x
Bank Swallow	x	
Cliff Swallow	x	x
Barn Swallow	x	x
Black-capped Chickadee	x	x
Boreal Chickadee	x	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	x	x
House Wren	x	x
Winter Wren		x
Marsh Wren	x	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	x	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	x	x
Mountain Bluebird		x
Townsend's Solitaire		x
Gray-cheeked Thrush		x
Swainson's Thrush	x	x

Species	AGC	EXT
Hermit Thrush	x	x
American Robin	x	x
Varied Thrush		x
European Starling	x	x
American Pipit	x	x
Sprague's Pipit		x
Bohemian Waxwing		x
Cedar Waxwing	x	x
Tennessee Warbler	x	x
Orange-crowned Warbler	x	x
Yellow Warbler	x	x
Magnolia Warbler	x	x
Cape May Warbler		x
Yellow-rumped Warbler	x	x
Black-throated Green Warbler	x	
Bay-breasted Warbler		x
Blackpoll Warbler	x	x
Black-and-White Warbler	x	x
American Redstart	x	x
Ovenbird	x	x
Northern Waterthrush	x	x
Connecticut Warbler	x	x
Mourning Warbler	x	x
MacGillivray's Warbler		x
Common Yellowthroat	x	x
Canada Warbler	x	x
Western Tanager	x	x
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	x	x
American Tree Sparrow		x
Chipping Sparrow	x	x
Clay-colored Sparrow	x	x
Vesper Sparrow	x	x
Savannah Sparrow	x	x
LeConte's Sparrow	x	
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow	x	
Fox Sparrow	x	x
Song Sparrow	x	x
Lincoln's Sparrow	x	x
Swamp Sparrow	x	x
White-throated Sparrow	x	x
Golden-crowned Sparrow		x
Dark-eyed Junco	x	x
Rose-breasted Grosbeak		x
Red-winged Blackbird	x	x
Yellow-headed Blackbird	x	x
Brewer's Blackbird	x	x
Common Grackle	x	x
Brown-headed Cowbird	x	x
Baltimore Oriole	x	
Purple Finch	x	x
Red Crossbill	x	x
White-winged Crossbill		x
Pine Siskin	x	x
Evening Grosbeak	x	
House Sparrow	x	x



## Birding Yukon's Dempster Highway

Alan MacLeod  
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Victoria BC V8V 1N1

Yukon's Dempster Highway runs 736 km from the Klondike Highway southeast of Dawson across the Arctic Circle to Inuvik at the Mackenzie River delta on the Beaufort Sea, from the 64<sup>th</sup> latitude to nearly the 68<sup>th</sup>. Apart from its abundant and magnificent scenic splendors this highway holds a particular allure for birders because of the number of birds seldom seen in lower Canadian latitudes that may be observed in their sub-Arctic breeding grounds: Gyrfalcon, three species of ptarmigan, American Golden-Plover, Long-tailed Jaeger, Northern Wheatear, Smith's Longspur among others.

Two indispensable source books for making the most of a Dempster experience are *Birds of the Dempster Highway* first published in 1982 by the late Robert Frisch (revised and reprinted several times since) and *Yukon's Tombstone Range and Blackstone Uplands* published by the Yukon Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. In under 100 pages the Frisch book answers just about any question a birder might have about the Dempster's birding possibilities, including a description of each of 14 habitat zones traversed by the Dempster and an annotated list of all the birds with tips on where to find them.

The second book, published in 2000, is a mother lode of information related to the natural and human history of one of the key regions crossed by the highway, with a guide to special natural features along the Tombstone-Blackstone section of the highway and advice on the best hiking routes into areas beyond the road.

*Yukon's Wildlife Viewing Guide* is a very useful 54-page compendium of good wildlife-viewing spots along Yukon highways. *Checklist of Yukon Birds*, a joint production of the Yukon Bird Club and Yukon Renewable Resources, was updated in March 2001. Both of these helpful resources are available free of charge from Yukon Renewable Resources, Government of the Yukon, Box 2703, Whitehorse YK Y1A 2C6.

My spouse Jan Brown and I spent a week birding the Dempster, May 18 to 26, 2001. We selected that time based on Robert Frisch's advice that one should come to the Dempster between mid-May and late June "to gain a fair impression of local birdlife in full flush". Since we wanted to be on hand for the main wave of spring migration we chose to come sooner rather than later but we learned quickly that whatever time one chooses the Dempster demands tradeoffs.

Mid-late May is too early for some of the species we hoped to see from the side of the road (and too late for a few others). It was also too early in terms of enjoying easy access to most of the off-highway alpine areas we were eager to see. We *did* explore alpine areas but sometimes had to slog through stretches of waist-high snow in order to access the particular alpine slopes we wanted to explore for those target birds that can be seen no other way, birds such as White-tailed Ptarmigan, Surfbird, Baird's Sandpiper, Wheatear and Rosy Finch.

In the alpine areas we enjoyed the early spring wildflower show but May pales in comparison to what one would behold at the end of June. The trouble is, the birding is slower by then, and of course there are the bugs to consider. One thing we were *not* sorry to be too early for were the biting insects. By mid-June, we're reliably told, one pays a heavy blood toll for invading the mountain-and-tundra homeland of the Dempster's mosquitoes, black flies and sandflies. All things considered, if we knew then what we know now we might be inclined to move our schedule back by ten days, to an early June window.

Whether or not the timing was perfect we were very pleased with our Dempster experience. Robert Frisch lists 36 'Birds of Interest' to look for along the highway, including 15 'Dempster Specials' - birds regularly observable on their breeding grounds in Canada *only* from the Dempster. We missed only nine of the 36 species. In some cases (Pacific Loon, Red-throated Loon) we either blamed the timing - we were a bit too early - or the snow - there was simply too much of the white stuff for us to access the habitat preferred by alpine breeders (Surfbird, Northern Shrike). Not being able to cover the ground from the Peel River to Inuvik cost us Glaucous Gull and Harris' Sparrow. In two instances (Northern Hawk Owl, Smith's Longspur) we faulted plain bad luck. Still, we managed to see most of our priority birds, scored several 'lifers' and had 83 species in all.

As a general indication of the likelihood of seeing the listed species in a week-long visit during mid-late May, here is the list of birds we observed May 18-26, 2001, coded as follows:

A - *Scarce*: Fewer than 5 individuals seen during the period

B - *Uncommon to Fairly Common*: Between 5 and 20 individuals

C - *Common*: Between 20 and 50

D - *Abundant*: Over 50

Footnotes indicate where we found some of the top Dempster specialties and rarities we encountered along the highway.

Homed Grebe B	Golden Eagle B	Pectoral Sandpiper B	Swainson's Thrush B
Canada Goose B	American Kestrel A	Long-billed Dowitcher B	American Robin D
Trumpeter Swan A <sup>1</sup>	Merlin A	Common Snipe C	Varied Thrush C
Tundra Swan B	Gyr Falcon A <sup>2</sup>	Red-necked Phalarope B	American Pipit D
American Wigeon D	Peregrine Falcon A <sup>3</sup>	Long-tailed Jaeger B <sup>5</sup>	Orange-crowned Warbler C
Mallard D	Spruce Grouse A	Bonaparte's Gull B	Yellow-rumped Warbler D
Blue-winged Teal A	Willow Ptarmigan D	Mew Gull C	Blackpoll Warbler A
Northern Shoveler D	Rock Ptarmigan C	Herring Gull B	Wilson's Warbler B
Northern Pintail D	Sharp-tailed Grouse A	Short-eared Owl A	American Tree Sparrow D
Green-winged Teal D	American Coot A	Northern Flicker B	Fox Sparrow C
Canvasback C	Sandhill Crane A	Say's Phoebe A	Lincoln's Sparrow A
Ring-necked Duck C	American Golden-Plover D	Gray Jay B	White-crowned Sparrow D
Lesser Scaup D	Semi-palmated Plover B	Common Raven C	Dark-eyed Junco C
Harlequin Duck B	Lesser Yellowlegs D	Horned Lark C	Lapland Longspur D
Bufflehead B	Solitary Sandpiper B	Tree Swallow B	Snow Bunting A
Common Goldeneye B	Wandering Tattler A <sup>4</sup>	Violet-Green Swallow B	Rusty Blackbird B
Barrow's Goldeneye B	Upland Sandpiper B	Barn Swallow A	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch A
Common Merganser B	Whimbrel D	Ruby-crowned Kinglet C	Pine Grosbeak A
Red-breasted Merganser B	Semi-palmated Sandpiper B	Northern Wheatear A <sup>6</sup>	Common Redpoll D
Bald Eagle A	Least Sandpiper C	Townsend's Solitaire A	Hoary Redpoll C
Northern Harrier B	Baird's Sandpiper A	Gray-cheeked Thrush B	

<sup>1</sup>May 23, a single individual bugling in flight over Engineer Creek campground, Km 194. (According to Frisch Trumpeter Swan is not known to occur along the highway.)

<sup>2</sup>May 23, adult sitting on cliff face nest, Km 158, just 4 km north of Windy Pass.

<sup>3</sup>May 20, on Sapper Hill, opposite Engineer Creek campground, Km 194.

<sup>4</sup>May 25, single individual at gravel bar of Blackstone Forks, just north of Km 115.

<sup>5</sup>Observed on several occasions in Blackstone Uplands and Richardsons, cruising over snowy lower mountain slopes.

<sup>6</sup>May 24, at mid-elevation Angelcomb Mountain near North Fork Pass, Km 74.

Birds of course are not the whole Dempster story. Other attractions include the remoteness of the area, its substantial physical beauty, its geological and botanical interest, its abundant unfeathered wildlife and the intriguing human history attached to the area.

The Dempster traverses a very sparsely populated part of Canada. During our week we felt we had the road to ourselves: hours could go by without our passing another vehicle or seeing another person. The North Yukon is a wilderness through which a highway happens to cross. That highway runs through two extensive mountain ranges: the Ogilvies and the Richardsons both of which afford alpine vistas and experiences to rival any we have seen in our North American birding travels. Much of the highway runs through 'Beringia', the land mass in the northwestern corner of the continent that was connected to present-day Siberia and was not glaciated during recent 'Ice Ages'. Because much of the terrain crossed by the Dempster was never glaciated there are any number of geological and botanical anomalies to intrigue those interested in such matters.

In the Dempster country wild animals still outnumber the human ones by a healthy margin. Never in all my birding travel have I seen wildlife in such numbers and variety as I did in May of 2001 along the Dempster: from the small to the large: Arctic ground squirrels, snowshoe hares, hoary marmots, porcupine, red fox, Dall sheep, woodland caribou, 'tundra' moose and, yes, grizzly bears too.

Despite the extremes of climate generated by non-stop daylight in June and non-stop darkness in December, the region has been home to native persons for millennia. Their history is fascinating as is later history of the European-stock Canadians and Americans who came north to search for Klondike gold and those who followed to make a life in the North. The foot of the Dempster is only 40 Km from Dawson where the Klondikers - some of them - struck it rich more than a hundred years ago. The highway follows the path of the North West Mounted Police 'Lost Patrol' that came to grief in the frigid winter of 1910, and crosses the area in which the Mounties pursued their greatest-ever manhunt for Albert 'The Mad Trapper' Johnson.

Those tempted to mount a Dempster expedition should know this: come prepared. The highway is a long, lonely road with precious few services. From Km 0 there are no lodgings, no restaurants, no fuel until Km 369 at Eagle Plains. Beyond Eagle Plains services are available only at Fort McPherson (Km 550) in the North West Territories, and at the end of the road, Inuvik at Km 734. The highway is gravel-surface-only almost the entire distance; given that, we felt the road was generally good. We took along a second spare 'just in case' but didn't need it.

In May of 2001 there were rough stretches on the run to Eagle Plains, and we exercised caution on the black slate surface through the South Richardsons. Note too that the road crosses two mighty rivers - the Peel at Km 550 and the great Mackenzie at Km 608. For seven months of the year traffic crosses these rivers by an 'ice road'. For four summer months vehicles are ferried across the rivers compliments of a Yukon Highways ferry. That leaves one month - give or take a week or so - when one doesn't cross the rivers at all. Unfortunately for birders that time is invariably spans parts of May and June. For us in May of 2001 the end of the road was Km 550 at Fort McPherson.

Luckily those 550 km include pretty much all the country one needs to see the vast majority of the 'Dempster Specials'. Indeed if one is cowed by the prospect of a 550 km adventure - or simply hasn't the time to do it all - it is possible to see most of the Dempster's special birds in the stretch of highway traversing the Tombstone Mountains and Blackstone Uplands, from Km 72 to Km 132 of the highway. Kilometre-for-kilometre this stretch provides the best birding of the highway - and perhaps its most beautiful terrain. Fortunately for all of us much of this area was recently set aside by the territorial government as Tombstone Territorial Park.

Good Yukon government campgrounds are established at Km 71 (Tombstone), Km 194 (Engineer Creek) and Km 447 (Rock River). NWT government campgrounds are established at Km 541 (Nitainlaili) and at the end of the line, Km 736, in Inuvik (Happy Valley); privately-operated camping is available at Km 731 and in Inuvik. Hotel accommodation is available only at Eagle Plains (Km 369), Fort McPherson (Km 550), Tsiigehtchic (Km 608) and Inuvik (Km 736). Those traveling in self-contained recreational vehicles have additional opportunities to camp informally at pull-offs along the route.



## AUTHORS IN THIS ISSUE

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Now in his third delirious year of retirement, Alan chases winter birds in Victoria BC and summer ones in Big Bras d'Or, Cape Breton. Between times he and his better half, Jan Brown, have nothing better to do than drive their truck and camper all over the continent, pushing their life list ever higher.

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