

BC BIRDING

Newsletter of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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A plethora of pelicans.



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Wind, Sand and Birds

[With apologies to Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Wind, Sand and Stars*.]

In a remote corner of northwest Africa, the Senegal River, separating Senegal from Mauritania, creates a wide estuary before disappearing into the Atlantic Ocean. Much of the bottom land has been converted to sugar cane and rice but there are some marshes and tidal flats left. One such place is the *Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj*, an oasis of water, mud and marsh on the fringe of the Sahel, where goats accumulate and the environment decays.

The Djoudj is an important wintering home for Palearctic waterfowl and waders. It is a place of multitudes. Ducks! Hectares of Garganay, Northern pintails, Northern Shovelers, Wigeon and Whistling Ducks, both Fulvous and White-faced. Whistling ducks are flighty. At any given time there is a flock like a swarm of gnats on the horizon or covering the sky over head. When settled on a mud flat they crowd together in a tight

please see Wind, Sand and Birds, page 10

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BC Birding, ISSN 1206-1611, is published four times a year by British Columbia Field Ornithologists (BCFO), P.O. Box 8059 Victoria, B.C. V8W 3R7

A subscription to this quarterly is a benefit 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.

BCFO 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.

Since November, 2003, BCFO has maintained an official partnership with the Changhwa Wild Bird Society, Changhwa, Taiwan.

Membership Dues

Please send membership requests, or requests for further information, to

Membership

British Columbia Field Ornithologists

P.O. Box 8059, Victoria, BC V8W 3R7

Membership Dues:

Individual memberships\$25.00

Library subscriptions.....\$25.00

Junior memberships (age under 18).....\$18.00

U.S. and foreign memberships.....\$25.00 (\$US)

Memberships are for the calendar year.

Newsletter Submissions

Send material for publication in any format to the editor. Submissions may include bird finding information for our "Site Guide" series and any articles about birding experiences, preferably but not necessarily in British Columbia. A brief biographical sketch (5--100 words) should accompany the article if the editor does not have a recent version or you wish to change it.

Please send newsletter submissions to

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Deadline for the receipt of material for publication is the 15th of the month preceding the March, June, September, and December issues.

Advertising

Advertising rates are available upon request.

BCFO Website

<http://www.bcfo.ca>



Wind Pirates

The low slant of autumn's sun
burns gleaming whitecaps as they froth the lake.
Like dazzling smiles-appearing-disappearing,
persistent patterns stitched by an invisible hand,
born by a burly, north gale.

Through the windshield, I watch snowy gulls
rise and fall in buoyant flight.
Sleek acrobats swoop low to skim the breakers;
momentarily merging with a wave
to pick out a confused shrimp that has tumbled to the surface.
Beachcombers stagger over the sand;
backs bent to meet blustery force,
jackets puffed, hairdos animated, grinning madly as tipsy travelers.
Out of their element in a wind-whipped world,
invigorated by a zest of nature's passion.

Everything's in motion-
bobbing ducks, frenzied leaves,
flags snap at the mast.
scudding clouds, swirling dust,
fat raindrops flung on glass .
I sit cozy in the car, rocked by shudders of air.
Searching dark skies for a darker jaeger-
the gull pirate that rides a wild wind-
blown over coast mountains from the sea.
Waiting for a rare bird
that will not come... today.

Laure W.Neish Oct.13, 2002



BCFO RESEARCH GRANTS

BCFO encourages submissions of proposals for financial assistance for bird surveys and other ornithological research. It also wishes to foster greater connection between applicants and the society. Potential applicants are reminded that

1. requests for funding must be for planned, rather than completed, projects.
2. under normal circumstances, applicants should be, or be willing to become, members of BCFO.
3. projects and their results are to be reported in either BCFO's journal, *BC Birds*, or the BCFO Newsletter.
4. in order for BCFO directors to give a timely response to project proposals, deadlines for submission are January 1 and July 1.
5. all reasonable requests will be considered within the limits of the society's financial strength.

BCFO NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST ISSUE

Allan Jensen
Vancouver

Peter Davidson
Delta

Jill Hawkins-French
North Saanich

George & Sandra Garden
Canmore, AB

Internet Sources

BCFO

<http://www.bcfo.ca>

Alaska Bird Observatory

<http://www.alaskabird.org/>

Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies

<http://www.wildlifebc.org>

Bird Studies Canada / Long Point Bird Observatory

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/bscmain.html>

Birding in British Columbia

General interest information including bulletin board, checklists, rare bird alerts, book reviews, etc.

<http://www.birding.bc.ca/>

BIRDNET

Site of the Ornithological Council.

<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/>

Bird Source

Audobon's and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's' interactive bird information site, featuring "eBird"

<http://www.birdsource.com/>

British Columbia Conservation Data Centre

Information on plants, animals and ecosystems at risk in British Columbia.

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/cdc/>

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/birds/>

Point Reyes Bird Observatory

<http://www.prbo.org/cms/index.php>

Rocky Point Bird Observatory

<http://www.islandnet.com/~rpbo/index.html>

The A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds, Seventh Edition

<http://www.aou.org/checklist/index.php3>

SORA: Searchable Ornithological Research Archive

Search and retrieve online publications from The Auk (1884-1999), The Condor (1899-2000), Journal of Field Ornithology (1930-1999), North American Bird Bander (1976-2000), Pacific Coast Avifauna (1900-1974), Studies in Avian Biology (1978-1999), Wilson Bulletin (1889-1999). All articles are available as DjVu's and PDF's.

<http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/>



Editor's Notes and Notions

A September newsletter in October isn't all bad. Consider the following:

- it's getting cold outside, so you will feel less guilty about staying inside to read *BC Birding*;
- many birds have headed south for the winter so you can feel less guilty about staying inside to read *BC Birding*;
- you have a shorter wait until the next newsletter.

David Stirling kicks off this issue with inspired descriptions of a place few of us will likely visit. His impressions might change this. Also in this issue are a few reminders of last summer's AGM that will rekindle good memories and lift you from the winter descending. Ken Wright recounts a productive trip to the Vernon Commonage and Silver Star, Dick Cannings presents highlights from the apré AGM extension trip to Cathedral Park, and Martin McNicholl explains a recent name change and offers identification tips for a bird seen on an AGM field trip. He reminded me that I requested, some time ago, identification tips from readers; his contribution is the inaugural piece, the piece that will spark a gentle wave of thoughtful and inciteful contributions on identification. Of course, Martin also contributed his notes on upcoming meetings and events and news briefs. John Sprague alerted me to Rick Wright's editorial from the American Birding Association's newsletter, *Winging It*, and Rick kindly granted us permission to print it, an apposite reminder of technological trappings and intellectual resignation. Laure Neish, a new Director, offers poetic ornithological reflections, this in the regular place of the President's message, temporarily missing.

There are various other items of interest, requests, reminders and cartoons, not all of which are bird-oriented.

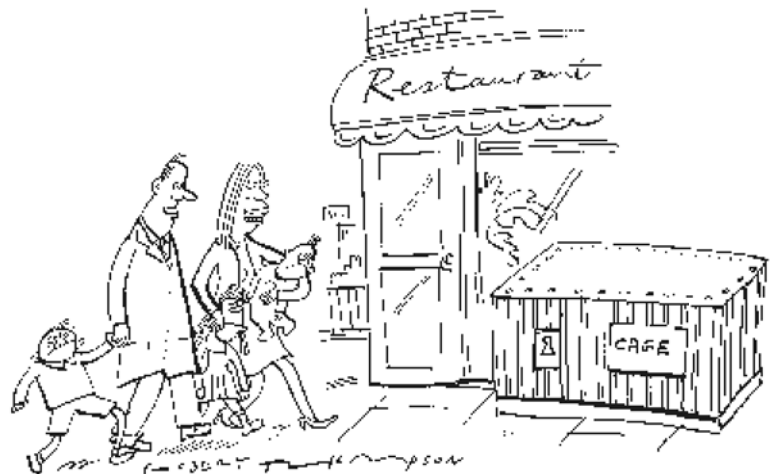
Thanks to all those who contributed to the newsletter, and a special thanks to Rita Wege who handles membership, compiles the membership list and produces mailing labels for Ted (and Jennifer) Goshulak who

packages and mails all the envelopes, and is the other much deserving recipient of our thanks.

I would also like to thank Wayne Diakow and the other members who contributed much time and effort to organize another enjoyable AGM, but I should temper that thanks with a note that Wayne Diakow was the only member to insult my fashion sensibility, or complete lack of fashion sensibility: Isn't that a birdwatcher's mark of distinction? What about the Blue-footed Booby? Birdwatchers adore it!

Happy fall birdwatching.

Phil Henderson, Editor



"Look, darling, they even have a special area for children."

From The Spectator, London; Courtesy CanWest News Service.



Changing of the Guard

At our annual meeting in Kelowna this year we saw three members retire from our Board of Directors. **Sandra Kinsey**, our president for the past 2 years, stepped down after completing her maximum 6-year term. We owe Sandra a great debt of gratitude for her dedication and long-term contribution to the society. Sandra was a regular participant at our board meetings - no easy feat due to the (out-of-pocket) travel required from her home in Prince George to attend our "southern" meetings.

Dick Cannings also stepped down in July, after serving 4 years on the board. Dick's ever growing commitments unfortunately required him to give his notice. However, he has assured us he will return to the board at some future time. The board will miss Dick's input as well as his encyclopedic knowledge of birds.

And finally, **Brian Self** also resigned after serving one year on our board. Brian filled the role of Treasurer but quickly came to the conclusion that his frequent traveling was going to make it nearly impossible to attend to his board duties.

At the Kelowna meeting we elected two new members to the Board of Directors – both of whom reside in the Okanagan valley. Below are brief biographies from our 2 new directors. Welcome Laure and Les!

Andy Stewart

Laure Wilson Neish, Penticton

Blame it on a chickadee. In 1988, I was asked to teach a lesson on birds as part of my outdoor ed. teacher's training. I knew nothing about birds at the time but had the opportunity to hold a live chickadee. Having that beady, little eye regard me with such curiosity and bravery was the beginning of a love affair with all of its kind. Since then, my career goal as marine biologist (M.Sc. in seaweeds) fell by the wayside, although I did use the education degree as a nature interpreter for BC Parks, a nature centre in Alberta and currently with a program called ECOstudies. Birds were an invitation to spend hours in the field looking for lifers and getting to know species in four provinces as we moved around the country. I participated in Bird-a-thons, Christmas Bird Counts and finally got to hold live birds again as banding assistant for the Vaseux Lake Migration Monitoring Station. It has been a joy to share some of my favourite local birding hotspots as a tour guide with Penticton's Meadowlark Festival. My latest birding passion has been photography. It has provided great opportunities for more hours of observation and understanding behaviour has been an aid to getting good photos. So, if you phone my home and get the answering machine, chances are I'm out in the field looking for an awesome photo opp.! As a new director of BCFO, I anticipate meeting birders from around the province and expanding my knowledge of habitats and hotspots that are home to our diverse avian life.

Les Gyug, Westbank

Raised and schooled in Ontario, a love of skiing and mountains brought a young and underemployed biologist out west. My first real job (25 years ago) was with CWS on the wildlife portion of the mountain national park biophysical inventories. During the spring there was extra time for the other members of the team to teach this mammal biologist how to count and census the mountain, forest and wetland birds. It was one of those opportunities that comes rarely, and something I didn't want to squander. After 5 more summers in the mountains with Parks Canada, and winters working in the Okanagan, I've been a self-employed biologist for the past 15 years. I currently specialize in designing and conducting wildlife research and inventories for all manner of wildlife from mice to moose and birds to bears. This includes planning, assessing, and integrating wildlife needs into forestry activities at all levels from the field assessment stage right through to integrated GIS solutions, but also in environmental impact assessments and Species-at-Risk assessments. I've been active in the Central Okanagan Naturalists Club for many years, and have been on the Central Okanagan Regional District Environmental Advisory Committee for the past 6 years.



BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS

If you have an interesting observation on birds, please write it up and submit to our journal. The editor hopes to put out a special issue devoted to a bunch of short notes on rarities, unusual behaviour, etc. Publication in the journal gets your observation recorded for posterity and the world will find it on the web at www.bcfo.ca. Follow the format in recent issues. If in doubt, send a rough draft and the editor will help.

Professionals should be submitting more papers; some of your publications deserve to be in the journal. And we really need offers to review books and CDs, which you get to keep. Finally, if you have a photo or drawing of birds which could be published, please send it/them in. Contact John Sprague at the address shown near the front of newsletter.

JOURNAL NOTICE

There were problems with the printing of the latest issue of *BC Birds*. If anyone receives a copy with extra pages, too few pages, or misordered pages, please let us Andy and Marilyn Buhler know. They will try to eventually send a replacement copy. Send requests to Andy and Marilyn Buhler at brdrs@shaw.ca.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE

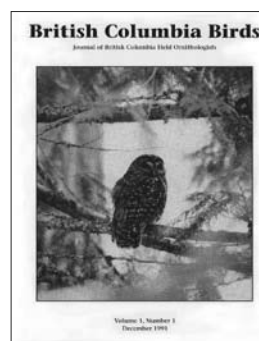
Please check your expiry dates on mailing labels before sending payments and remember that you can renew for more than one year.

BACK ISSUES OF BCFO NEWSLETTERS AND JOURNALS AVAILABLE

If you are missing past issues of BC Birding or British Columbia Birds you can purchase most volumes by contacting the people listed below. Back issues of the journal British Columbia Birds can be acquired for \$5.00/ea or the BC Birding newsletter for \$2.00/ea (prices include postage) from the following people.

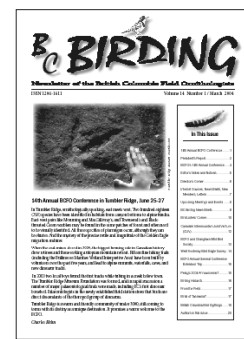
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For newsletters contact:

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All journal back issues are currently available, except for Volume 8 of British Columbia Birds which is out of print. Please pre-pay your order by check or money order made out to BC Field Ornithologists.

Journal Articles On-line All feature articles and notes published in Volumes 1 – 13 of British Columbia Birds are available from our website www.bcfo.ca. Articles can be down-loaded individually as PDF files using Adobe Reader, version 5 or greater.



From The Spectator, London; Courtesy CanWest News Service.



Upcoming Meetings & Events

compiled by *Martin K. McNicholl*

- early September 2006 BIODIVERSITY CENTRE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, location, exact date and contact details not yet announced.
- September 14-17 2006 WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Contact: Steve Cox, 4426 San Isidro, NM 87107, e-mail: swcox@spinn.net.
- September 28- FEDERATION OF B.C. NATURALISTS FALL GENERAL MEETING, October 1 2006 Coquitlam. Contact: Jude Grass, FBCN FGM 2006, 17375 27A Ave., Surrey, B.C. V3S 0E9; phone (604) 538-8774; e-mail judegrass@shaw.ca.
- October 3-7 2006 4TH NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS –JOINT MEETING OF AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, ASSOCIATION OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION, SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS, WATERBIRD SOCIETY & WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY WITH MEXICAN HOSTS, Veracruz, Mexico. Additional ornithological societies may also participate. Contact: Charles M. Francis, National Wildlife Research Centre, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0H3; phone (613) 998-0332; e-mail charles.francis@ec.gc.ca OR Jose Luis Alcantara e-mail jlalcant@colpos.mx.
- October 13-17 2006 INTERNATIONAL WADER STUDY GROUP ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Hollviken, Falsterbo peninsula, Sweden. Contact: Dept. of Animal Ecology, Ecology Building, S-223 62 Lund, Sweden, phone Ake Lindstrom +46-46-2224968, Juliana Danhardt +46-46-2223795 OR Johanna Gronroos +46-46-2220574; e-mail Ake.lindstrom@zooekol.lu.se, Juliana.danhardt@zookeol.lu.se OR Johann a.gronroos@zookeol.lu.se.
- November 12-19 2006 CARNIVORES 2006, St. Petersburg, Florida. Contact [no person named] phone (202) 789-2844 extension 315.
- February 21-24 2007 SOCIETY FOR NORTHWESTERN VERTEBRATE BIOLOGY ANNUAL MEETING, Victoria, B.C. Contact: Elke Wind, [no address indicated]; phone (250)716-1119; e-mail ewind@telus.net.



B.C. Birding News Briefs

Compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

FBCN Awards to Prominent Birders –As usual, work on or on behalf of birds featured prominently in the work of most of the recipients of Federation of B.C. Naturalists awards this spring. G. Allen Poynter of Parksville was a founding member of B.C.F.O., has chaired the ornithological sections of both the Vancouver and Victoria Natural History Societies, has participated extensively in Brant and raptor studies and published extensively on birds, including a note in the first issue of *B.C. Birds*. The Federation recognized his many contributions with a Regional Award. Birds also figured prominently in the Club Service Awards presented to Nancy Braithwaite and John MacKenzie and in the Nature Education Award presented to Jack Hammonds. –based primarily on Anonymous. 2006. *B.C. Nat.* 44(2):14-15.

Smith Memorialized –The Society of Canadian Ornithologists recently launched The Jamie Smith Memorial Award for Mentoring in Ornithology to “honour established ornithologists ...who have displayed excellence in mentoring a new generation of professional or amateur biologists.” The award, named for U.B.C.’s late James N. M. Smith, will be presented during the society’s annual meetings. –based on an e-mail of 22 June 2006 to S.C.O. members from Jamie Smith Memorial Mentoring Award Chair Ken Otter.

Kamloops Loses Birder –Sydney Roberts, a British-born prominent Kamloops area birder passed away on 5 May 2006 after a brief illness. –based on D. Roberts. 2006. *B.C. Nat.* 44(2):24.

Major Brooks Wins Eighty Years Later: The Latest Changes to the AOU Check-list –In the 47th Supplement to the American Ornithologists’ Union’s *Check-list of North American Birds*, the check-list committee has added at least one “tick” to the lists of many B.C. birders. If you have seen Blue Grouse on both the coast and in the interior, you have probably seen both species: the Sooty Grouse of Vancouver Island and the Dusky Grouse of interior parts of the province (R. C. Banks *et al.* 2006. *Auk* 123:929-936). Males in full display are easiest to distinguish, as Sooty Grouse open a bright yellow patch of bare skin on their necks, fringed by white feathers, whereas this apterium [often referred to as an “air sac”] is a dull purplish colour in Dusky Grouse. The yellow patches of the Sooty are also considerably corrugated, whereas the purplish patches of the Dusky are much smoother. Differences between the females are more subtle.

Other changes that affect B.C. are the shuffling of the order of several sandpipers to: Terek Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Wandering Tattler, Spotted Redshank, Greater Yellowlegs, Willet, Lesser Yellowlegs and Wood Sandpiper, merging of the genera *Heteroscelus* and *Catoptrophorus* into *Tringa* so that Wandering Tattler changes from *Heteroscelus incanus* to *Tringa incana* and Willet from *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus* to *Tringa semipalmata*, the elevation of jaegers and skuas from a sub-family of gulls and terns to a full family, Stercorariidae, the resurrection of old tern genera so that Aleutian Tern is changed from *Sterna aleutica* to *Onychoprion aleuticus*, Least Tern is changed from *Sterna antillarum* to *Sternula antillarum*, Caspian Tern from *Sterna caspia* to *Hydroprogne caspia* and Elegant Tern from *Sterna elegans* to *Thalasseus elegans*, and the order of B.C. tern species is shuffled to Aleutian Tern, Least Tern, Caspian Tern, Black Tern, Common Tern, Arctic Tern, Forster’s Tern, Elegant Tern.



B.C. Birding News Briefs cont.

Speedy Recovery, Laurie & Rick –One of the lowlights of the 2006 B.C.F.O. annual conference in Kelowna was the absence of Kamloops' Rick Howie, scheduled to speak on "Birds in reclaimed sites." A 20 August e-mail from Laurie Rockwell explains that Rick recently underwent major surgery and painful radiation treatments. Rick is a former B.C.F.O. board member, who has organized Christmas bird and swan counts, conducted Breeding Bird Survey routes, and prepared status reports on several bird species considered at risk in B.C. He was the senior author of a paper on Flammulated Owls at an international conference on northern owls. When I was editor of *B.C. Birds*, he provided thoughtful assessments on owl manuscripts, as well as helpful comments on my journal guidelines.

Laurie's e-mail brought news that he, too, is recovering, in his case from a heart attack. Laurie is another former B.C.F.O. director, who has conducted noteworthy studies on Gray Flycatchers and participated in various co-operative bird projects. During the Oliver meeting of the B.C.F.O., he was a very enjoyable field companion during the post-conference Yellow-breasted Chat survey. He was also the most prompt of any of the book reviewers that I assigned during my tenure as journal editor, supplying a thorough and informative review.

I am sure that all B.C.F.O. members will join me in wishing both these outstanding naturalists speedy and complete recoveries!

Wind, Sand and Birds (continued from page 1)

mass giving the impression of just another chunk of humpy mud. When startled, a thousand white faces rise from the ground presenting a strange sight.

A small group of birders, some wearing sand veils, bracing themselves and their tripods against the fierce Harmattan [a strong, steady gale sweeping down over the Sahara in the winter months carrying a load of dust] and drifting sand, search the bobbing multitudes for strays and vagrants. We find Marbled Ducks and Ferruginous Ducks. Eagle eye Max assisted by his powerful scope cries out, "American Wigeon!" "Two American Wigeon, male and female!" Watering eyes are

pressed to shaky scopes. Soon there are sounds of ecstasy from the watchers. They see the American Wigeon. I am not impressed by American Wigeon.

Pelicans everywhere. A large island is host to, perhaps, the world's largest breeding colony of Eurasian White Pelicans. The sight is awesome, the smell crippling. A number ten spectacle. Egrets, spoonbills, herons, stilts, peeps, terns and cormorants are all around. Thousands of flamingos frame the far shores. We find a huge Arabian Bustard lurking in patch of tall grass and Cream-coloured Coursers standing upright on mosaics of wind blown earth. There is a Barn Owl's nest in the rickety *petit*

mirador tower. Larks and wagtails find sustenance on the barren soil; harriers patrol the reed beds and those difficult-to-name Eurasian warblers shelter in the prickly shrubbery.

The Djoudj is truly a paradise for birds and a place of spectacles for birders.

David Stirling



Birdshot: Pixels and Lead

"Whatcha seein'?" The universal greeting of birders; but this early morning in Madera Canyon, my formulaic question drew an unexpected answer. Never mind what the bird was; what was interesting was the conversation that ensued. Our interlocutor informed us that he would not be reporting his putative rarity. You see, he'd had dealings with records committees before, and each time his description had been rejected "because the bird wasn't documented." I'm not good at hiding puzzlement, and my bemused look drew a clarification: "You know, documented, photographed."

Birders (and ornithologists, too, for that matter) spent the first decades of the 20th century fighting for the value of the sight record, arguing that verbal documentation by a careful observer could, for most species, be as credible as a specimen. And for 70 years, from, say, 1934 to, say, 2004, it was true: thorough, precise descriptions of rarities were treated with seriousness by birders and records committees alike, sometimes accepted, sometimes rejected, but in any event considered a reasonable way to document an unusual bird.

That has changed, and birding today runs the risk of becoming so heavily technologized that we abandon the artifact our hobby was founded upon nearly 100 years ago: the well-described sight record. The miracles of digital cameras and easily portable recording equipment have made it possible to secure "tangible," "objective"—choose your adjective—documentation of rarities that just a decade ago would have been captured only in the careful observer's notes. This is a fine thing, of course, and I am glad that so many birders submit photographic support for

their unusual reports. But I am not glad at all that documentation of an exclusively audiovisual sort is pushing verbal description aside, returning us surely and not so slowly to the same place we were in the early 20th century. Just replace "shotgun" with "digital camera."

The triumph of the pixel over the pen is clearest in the controversy over the reports of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Arkansas in 2004 and 2005. The debate about those detections has focused almost exclusively on a few famous seconds of video showing a black-and-white something flying away from a canoe. Meanwhile, there has been precious little attention paid to the sight records made by normally credible observers: they have been neither rigorously criticized nor held up as evidence of the bird's survival, and all eyes have turned instead unto a couple of frames of inscrutable digital video.

A spectacular image may well be worth a thousand, but sometimes it takes more words than that to tell the whole story. Let's continue to photograph and record our birds, ordinary and rare, but let's also step away from the computer monitor and remember, at least occasionally, to share our excitement and our experiences in words.

Rick Wright, *Winging It* Editor

(*Winging It* is the newsletter of The American Birding Association (www.americanbirding.org). This editorial was presented in Vol. 18, no. 4: Jul/Aug 2006 and is reprinted here with permission of the Editor.



BCFO Field Trip - Vernon Commonage and Silver Star: July 16, 2006

At our meeting place – UBC Kelowna Campus, only two of us joined leader Bill Cutfield for birding in the Vernon area. Red Crossbill, Mountain Chickadee, and Chipping Sparrow were singing from the Ponderosa Pine woodlands on campus. A flock of 250 or more gulls were overhead making their morning trek from lake roost to dump. Dick Cannings glanced up and commented “mostly *California* with some *Ring-billed*.”

After wolfing down a couple of high-caloric Tim Horton’s muffins, we drove to Predator Ridge on the Vernon Commonage. Our target was the Clay-coloured Sparrow, noted for its song that resembles more of an insect than bird. Within a minute one sang vigorously on the shrub-dotted grassy slope above and several more were heard over the course of the morning. A lovely Lazuli Bunting sang — the first of many to come! A few hundred meters up the road in a young aspen grove we were treated to the songs or views of a Least Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Cedar Waxwings, Violet-green Swallows, Western Meadowlark and a Black-capped Chickadee. A nearby small pond yielded Mallard, Red-winged Blackbird, American Coots (both adults and gray chicks), Yellow-headed Blackbird, Mourning Dove, Song Sparrow, and Spotted Sandpiper.

At McKay Reservoir, where a flotilla of cryptically-plumaged waterfowl caused us some ID frustration, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, American Wigeon, Ruddy Ducks and Common Goldeneyes were recognizable in the mix. A few passerines, Bullock’s Oriole, House Finch and Vesper Sparrow, were added to the list. Fearing an imminent end to songbird vocalizing on this warm summer morning we hastened on. Beside a small wetland

on Commonage Road, three Hooded Mergansers blasted right over our heads.

At Rose’s Pond a Great Blue Heron, Cliff Swallow, Belted Kingfisher and Lesser Yellowlegs awaited us. We quickly headed on only to screech to a halt for two fledgling Great Horned Owls perched right up against one another on a roadside fence post—a wonderful treat, especially during broad daylight. Bill heard a Yellow Warbler, and White-breasted Nuthatch, Swainson’s Thrush, and Downy Woodpecker were also added to the roster. At the junction of Bench Row Road one of the local specialties — Swainson’s Hawk — soared effortlessly on invisible thermals. A Gray Catbird “mewed” from an adjacent Saskatoon bush. Wandering through the wastewater treatment poplar stand produced our first Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos as well as a distant Golden Eagle. Of particular note was the preponderance of American Goldfinches on the Commonage—they were present at every stop. This was not to be the case at Silver Star where they were conspicuously absent.

We stopped on Wildwood and Hitchcock Roads on the lower slopes of Silver Star to listen. It was pretty quiet initially and all we saw were flocks of fledged and adult Chipping Sparrow’s. A Cassin’s Finch blurted out a couple of songs from a big Douglas-fir and then we heard our last expected member of the vireo family—Cassin’s no less! Further up Hitchcock Road we heard our second member of the nuthatch fraternity—a Red-breasted. In the midst of a big hay field, Jim spotted a couple of Say’s Phoebe’s on the fence.

On Sovereign Lake Road in the high-elevation forests of Silver Star we first stopped just beyond the Silver Star

Road junction—this proved to be our most “warblery” place where several Townsend’s, Yellow-rumped and a single MacGillivray’s Warbler were tallied. A Winter Wren sang in the distance. Around the bend four Pine Grosbeaks were on the road. From the car Ken heard the familiar ring of a Golden-crowned Kinglet and a Gray Jay glided across the road in its’ distinctive fashion. At our last stop, the cross-country ski area parking lot, we were serenaded by the musical tones of Hermit Thrushes. Several Dark-eyed Juncos flitted about and Bill showed us a Rufous Hummingbird feeding in a patch of lupine. About 10:45 we headed back down the mountain with a respectable 82 species.

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Great Horned Owl

Ian Routley



Species List

Vernon Commonage & Silver Star, 16 July 2006.

American Coot	Northern Flicker
American Crow	Orange-crowned Warbler
American Goldfinch	Osprey
American Robin	Pine Grosbeak
American Wigeon	Red Crossbill
Barn Swallow	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Black-billed Magpie	Red-eyed Vireo
Black-capped Chickadee	Red-tailed Hawk
Brewer's Blackbird	Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-Headed Cowbird	Ring-billed Gull
Bufflehead	Ring-necked Duck
Bullock's Oriole	Rock Pigeon
California Gull	Ruddy Duck
California Quail	Rufous Hummingbird
Canada Goose	Say's Phoebe
Cassin's Finch	Song Sparrow
Cassin's Vireo	Spotted Sandpiper
Cedar Waxwing	Spotted Towhee
Chipping Sparrow	Swainson's Hawk
Clay-coloured Sparrow	Swainson's Thrush
Cliff Swallow	Townsend's Warbler
Common Goldeneye	Tree Swallow
Common Raven	Turkey Vulture
Dark-eyed Junco	Vesper Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	Violet-green Swallow
Dusky Flycatcher	Warbling Vireo
European Starling	Western Kingbird
Golden Eagle	Western Meadowlark
Golden-crowned Kinglet	Western Wood-Pewee
Gray Catbird	White-breasted Nuthatch
Gray Jay	Winter Wren
Great Blue Heron	Yellow Warbler
Great Horned Owl	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Greater Yellowlegs	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Hermit Thrush	
Hooded Merganser	Total 82 species
House Finch	
House Sparrow	
House Wren	
Killdeer	
Lazuli Bunting	
Least Flycatcher	
Lesser Scaup	
Lesser Yellowlegs	
MacGillivray's Warbler	
Mallard	
Mountain Chickadee	
Mourning Dove	



Rose's Pond, Vernon Commonage

Ken Wright



Leader Bill Cutfield and Jim Ginns at McKay Reservoir, Vernon Commonage

Ken Wright



Cathedral Lakes Extension Trip

Cathedral Provincial Park is a spectacular alpine area in the north Cascades southwest of Keremeos. About 30 birders took part in the extension trip to Cathedral Lakes Lodge, and all enjoyed sunny weather, invigorating hikes and great birding. Most of us took the four-wheel-drive “bus” up to the lodge on the afternoon of Sunday, July 16. After settling in to the lodge we hiked up to Glacier Lake to get a taste of the scenery and alpine birding. Pipits chipped from the hillsides and Boreal Chickadees called from the alpine larches. Another group hiked around Quiniscoe Lake and found an obliging American Dipper at the beautiful waterfall at the west end of the lake.

After a wonderful roast lamb dinner (the lodge does not stint on good food!) we were all ready for bed when Leslie Robertson reminded me that I had promised to take the group owling. So we put on our long pants to deflect the mosquitoes and chilly evening air and hiked a short ways past the Quiniscoe Lake campground. I was not very hopeful that any owls would answer my whistles and hoots this time of year, but soon we heard a couple of strange calls coming from the steep hillside to the west. We bushwhacked up the hill, over logs and rocks and finally got close to the sounds. I turned on my flashlight and there on the lower branches of a big spruce was a juvenile Boreal Owl! After a few minutes the adult flew in. From its size in comparison to the juvenile (the adult was smaller) I assume it was a male while the juvenile was a female. The other young bird calling had a slightly deeper voice, so I’m guessing that it was a brother to the one we saw. Elated, we headed back to our beds for a well-deserved sleep.

The next morning, after a light breakfast of granola, toast, fruit salad,

scrambled eggs, sausages and pancakes, we set off in small groups to ascend to the Rim Trail. The groups soon reverted into a single mass as we watched several American Three-toed Woodpeckers feeding on spruce beetles that have been at high population levels around Cathedral Lakes for the past few years. The long climb quickly spread out the group again. Above Glacier Lake we had good looks at Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches and a brief fly-by of a flock of White-winged Crossbills. We reached the Rim Trail at about 10 a.m. and regrouped for the main quest of the day—White-tailed Ptarmigan.

Turning north, we ascended the ridge of Mount Quiniscoe, then fanned out from the peak (2551 m/ 8370 ft) to search for these elusive small grouse. A few minutes later there were simultaneous shouts of “Ptarmigan!” from two adjacent spots and we all gathered to look at two pairs of the birds. Several people celebrated lifer experiences there! Another surprise at the peak was a singing Rock Wren. Most of us then hiked south to Stone City, enjoying a remarkably close encounter with a herd of a dozen mountain goats and another pair of ptarmigan, then descended down the steep, slippery, shaly slopes to Ladyslipper Lake. Most of us were exhausted (there was talk of producing T-shirts with “I survived the Cannings marathon” on the front) but all were happy when we got back to the lodge that day. In the evening I went back to the owl site for a quick look with a few people who had missed them the previous day and found them right where we’d left them.

On the third and final day, most of the group hiked the Diamond Trail loop, enjoying the sweeping vistas and big flower meadows, as well as

stumbling onto a couple of broods of Spruce Grouse and watching a male Mountain Bluebird vigorously attack a squirrel. After lunch we climbed into the Unimog bus and bounced down the extraordinarily steep road to the Ashnola River, all vowing to return one day to Cathedral.

Dick Cannings

Bird List

Spruce Grouse
White-tailed Ptarmigan
Dusky Grouse
Osprey
Red-tailed Hawk
Spotted Sandpiper
Boreal Owl
Rufous Hummingbird
Hairy Woodpecker
Am. Three-toed Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
Hammond's Flycatcher
Gray Jay
Clark's Nutcracker
Common Raven
Horned Lark
Mountain Chickadee
Boreal Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Rock Wren
Winter Wren
American Dipper
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Townsend's Solitaire
Mountain Bluebird
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Varied Thrush
American Pipit
Yellow-rumped Warbler
MacGillivray's Warbler
Chipping Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Fox Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch
White-winged Crossbill
Pine Siskin





Glacier Lake



Meadow below Quiniscoe Mtountain - Red Mountain

Art Martell



White-tailed Ptarmigan

Art Martell



Darkened Grouse – Dusky or Sooty?

In a paper describing display behaviour of “Richardson’s” [now part of Dusky] Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*), Major Allan Brooks (1926), compared this behaviour with that of Sooty Grouse (*D. fuliginosus*) and added to earlier speculations that these may be separate species. After examining several more specimens and corresponding with naturalists in various parts of the range of “Blue Grouse,” Brooks (1929) recommended that the seven subspecies recognized at that time be grouped into two species *Dendragapus obscurus* and *D. fuliginosus* in an arrangement proposed earlier by his colleague Harry S. Swarth. The 2006 decision of the American Ornithologists’ Union (Banks *et al.* 2006) to separate “Blue” Grouse into Dusky and Sooty grouse was based partly on mitochondrial DNA sequence data published in 2004 by George F. Barrowclough and colleagues in a genetics journal and partly on the differences in behaviour, plumage and song summarized by Brooks in 1929. My Ph.D. supervisor, Fred C. Zwickel and his Ph.D. supervisor, James F. Bendell recently published a book on “Blue” Grouse in which they provide a succinct summary of the differences between the “coastal” group of races [now Sooty Grouse] and the “interior” group of races [now Dusky Grouse] (Zwickel and Bendell 2004:20-21). The following notes on distinguishing the two species are based primarily on their summary.

The first clue as to which species you are observing is the simplest –location. In B.C., any “Blue Grouse” seen in the Coast Mountains and farther west, including the Sunshine Coast, “lower mainland” (Greater Vancouver), Vancouver Island, Haida Gwaii [Queen Charlotte Islands] and those Gulf Islands that have natural populations is

almost certainly a Sooty Grouse, while most interior birds are Dusky Grouse (Zwickel and Bendell 2004: Fig. 4.2, p. 21 and text on p. 21). “Blue Grouse” east of the Coast Range are virtually all Dusky. Birders can help define their ranges more precisely by paying particularly close attention to birds in such border areas as Lillooet and Manning Park. Keep the possibility of hybrids in mind.

Adult males in full display are the simplest to identify. Both species open bare patches of skin on their necks (cervical apteria) [often called “air sacs” colloquially] when they display to females, other males or sometimes human observers. These are purplish or reddish with relatively few folds or grooves in Dusky Grouse, whereas they are bright yellow and strongly tuberculate, appearing considerably furrowed, in Sooty. They are also underlain by considerable fat in Sooty, giving them a more robust appearance. When these these colourful bare skin patches are visible, they are bordered by a fringe of white feathers in both species.

Although females are less colourful, the brownish grey of Dusky hens is noticeably different from the brown to reddish-brown of Sooty hens. When Dick Cannings’ field trip to the White Lake area on 15 July during this summer’s AGM was stopped by a Dusky brood and her chicks, I was impressed by how obviously darker and greyer this hen was than any of the many Sooty hens that I had seen during my four summers of studying these birds on “Comox Burn” near Courtenay in the early 1970s.

Tails of adults of both genders are also distinctive. Those of Dusky Grouse are more truncate [squarish], those of Sooty Grouse more rounded. This applies to both the tail as a whole and to individual tail feathers [rectrices].

There are also differences in numbers of rectrices [tail feathers] and in the colour and widths of the tail bands, but these vary more among races of Dusky and to a lesser extent within Sooty than between the two species.

The downy young are also distinguishable in the field –those of Sooty Grouse are yellowish, while those of Dusky Grouse are greyish. As downy young are generally in close proximity to brood hens, this difference may also aid in identifying the hen.

Behaviour also provides identity clues. In areas with plenty of large trees, Sooty Grouse males usually sing from trees, whereas Dusky Grouse usually sing on the ground (Zwickel and Bendell 2004:20). While studying Sooty Grouse on Zwickel’s “Comox Burn” study area from 1970 to 1974 (McNicholl 1978b), I hardly ever saw one in a tree, let alone singing there, but that was because most of the trees on the study area were still small after a major forest fire. I did see them singing in trees in Lighthouse Park, West Vancouver during those years. Even on Comox Burn, however, males often sang from a stump, log, rock or other slightly elevated perch, although some sang from the ground routinely. Sooty males also usually sing louder than Dusky (Zwickel and Bendell (2004), although they sometimes lower their volume in response to observers or other disturbances (McNicholl 1978b). Another behavioural clue is the number of syllables per song (“Hooting”). Most male Dusky Grouse sing five syllables per song, while most male Sooty Grouse sing six syllables per song (Zwickel and Bendell 2004). Individual songs of Sooty Grouse on Comox Burn during my four-year study there varied from one to seven syllables, but songs shorter than five syllables were either at the



beginning of a singing bout, near the beginning or end of the singing season or interrupted by the intrusion of another grouse or an observer during the song (McNicholl 1978b). Individual birds there consistently sang five to seven syllables per song, with six-syllable songs by far the most common (McNicholl 1978b). A complex “flutter flight” is also fairly common in Dusky Grouse, but seldom performed by Sooty Grouse (Zwickel and Bendell 2004). In my four-year study, I never saw this display and heard only two flights which may have been this behaviour (McNicholl 1978a). Although these behavioural differences do not provide definitive identification, they do provide helpful clues that can help identify which species is being observed.

Martin K. McNicholl

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more photos from the Cathedral Lake extension trip



Humans

Art Martell



Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch

Art Martell



Spruce Grouse

Art Martell



Authors in this Issue

Dick Cannings

Dick Cannings was born and raised in the Okanagan, in a family keenly interested in natural history. This early involvement in birds, bugs and plants led him to a university education in zoology, including a BSc degree from the University of British Columbia and a MSc from Memorial University of Newfoundland. Dick was Curator of the Cowan Vertebrate Museum at the University of British Columbia and now works half-time for Bird Studies Canada, coordinating eBird Canada, Canadian Christmas Bird Counts and the British Columbia-Yukon Owl Survey. He has written a number of books and is also the bird co-chair of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

Jim Ginns

After working as a research scientist for 30 years and retiring from Agriculture & AgriFood Canada (Ottawa) in 1997 Jim moved to the Okanagan. He has been a BCFO director for three years and is a director for the South Okanagan Naturalists' Club. He leads the Club's Thursday birding group, as well as field trips for the Meadowlark Festival, and participates in several local Christmas Bird Counts.

Martin K. McNicholl

Martin's interest in grouse was kindled during the 1950s, when he found Sharp-tailed Grouse and Western Meadowlark nests in fields near his home in Winnipeg. During his Ph.D. studies on Vancouver Island, he enjoyed several months each year wandering up and down the hills of "Comox Burn" listening to and watching Fred Zwickel's population of colour-banded Sooty Grouse, often eating lunch on one end of a log while a particularly "tame" male "hooted" his six-syllable song on the other. After nine years of editing B.C. Birds, he is returning to preparing his own manuscripts on his grouse studies, as well as the avian neighbours of the grouse and numerous other bird species at other sites in B.C., the three prairie provinces, Ontario, Cuba and elsewhere.

Laure Wilson Neish

Blame it on a chickadee. In 1988, I was asked to teach a lesson on birds as part of my outdoor ed. teacher's training. I knew nothing about birds at the time but had the opportunity to hold a live chickadee. Having that beady, little eye regard me with such curiosity and bravery was the beginning of a love affair with all of its kind. Since then, my career goal as marine biologist (M.Sc. in seaweeds) fell by the wayside, although I did use the education degree as a nature interpreter for BC Parks, a nature centre in Alberta and currently with a program called ECOstudies in Penticton. Birds were an invitation to spend hours in the field looking for lifers and getting to know species in four provinces as we moved around the country. I participated in Bird-a-thons, Christmas Bird Counts and finally got to hold live birds again as banding assistant for the Vaseux Lake Migration Monitoring Station. It has been a joy to share some of my favorite local birding hotspots as a tour guide with Penticton's Meadowlark Festival. My latest birding passion has been photography. It has provided great opportunities for more hours of observation and understanding behaviour has been an aid to getting good photos. So, if you phone my home and get the answering machine, chances are I'm out in the field looking for an awesome photo opp.!

David Stirling

My interest in natural history, particularly birds, began in earnest at age twelve. I was with Nature Interpretation and Research, British Columbia Parks from the beginning to privatization. I have been involved in leading and co-leading world-wide nature and birding tours since the 1970s.

Ken Wright

Ken has enjoyed watching birds since early childhood and remembers various species seen on a his very first birdwatching trip to the Sunshine Coast at age 8. He now is a freelance consultant involved in bird, lichen and other field research. Ken has recently been involved in a study of the Emperor Goose in western Alaska dealing with Avian Influenza Virus. In the "off season" he migrates to the Southern Hemisphere and is found mingling with penguins and albatrosses in the Falklands, South Georgia, and the Antarctic Peninsula.

Rick Wright

A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick attended the University of Nebraska and Harvard Law School, and holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Princeton University. As an undergraduate, he taught laboratory courses in ornithology with Paul Johnsgard and worked as a collections assistant at the Nebraska State Museum. In 1985, he was a founding member of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Bird Records Committee. Before moving to southeast Arizona to become a professional guide, Rick taught at Princeton, Rutgers, Fordham, and the University of Illinois, where his teaching was recognized with numerous awards. A frequent lecturer at birding festivals and conventions, Rick enjoys all kinds of birding, from the frantic pace of the World Series to quiet puddle-watching. His broad knowledge, clear and witty presentation, and teaching experience make him the ideal field companion for beginners and experts alike.



"Can you get the lid off this. Your wrists are stronger than mine."

From The Spectator, London; Courtesy CanWest News Service.



Warren Clements' *The Challenge* featured some interesting ornithological variations on popular books, poems, plays, movies and songs in the February 11, 2006 edition of the *Globe and Mail*. His challenge to readers was to come up with titles that would be more bird-friendly to birdwatchers. Some of the titles suggested are given below. (Thanks to John Sprague for passing the article along.)

Never Give a Sapsucker an Uneven Beak
 Ptarmageddon
 The Guineas' Book of Records
 Egret Expectations
 Ten Jays that Shook the World
 Tickle a Mockingbird
 Easy Eider
 Gease
 Dove Finch E-Code
 Gone with the Wind, Back Next Spring
 Richard the Bird
 Eggsodus
 A Flock of Swifts Now
 The Legend of Sleepy Swallow

Murder of Crows, She Wrote
 Audubonjour, Tristesse
 Waiting for Dodo
 All Quiet on the Nest in Front
 The Migrate Escape
 Get me to the Perch on Time
 Greylag Archipeligo
 Wrent
 Far from the Madding Crows
 Someone to Hatch Over Me
 Birder Most Fowl
 Gull Lover's Travels
 Cockatiels for Two
 Natural Born Killdeer

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Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse	Mountain Plover

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Collared Bush Robin, Formosan Whistling-Thrush, Steere's Liocichla, Taiwan Barwing, White-eared Sibia, Taiwan Yuhina, Yellow Tit, Flamecrest, Formosan Magpie, White-whiskered Laughingthrush, and the elegant Swinhoe's and Mikado Pheasants are 12 of Taiwan's 15 generally recognized endemics. There are also many endemic sub-species such as Black-browed Barbet and [Taiwan] Hwamei. Other birds include Malayan Night-Heron, Pheasant-tailed Jacana and Collared Finch-bill. On our November trips, we see the globally threatened **Black-faced Spoonbill**. **Fairy Pitta** is present only during the breeding season. We also visit Lanyu Island, with 6 bird specialties of its own, including an endemic subspecies of Ryukyu Scops-Owl.

NEXT TRIPS:

2006 : November 6–19; for endemics, Black-faced Spoonbill and Lanyu Island

2007 : May 7–20; for endemics, Fairy Pitta and Lanyu Island

Price: 14 days : From Vancouver: \$5100 (sharing); \$5600 (single)

From Taipei, Taiwan: \$4000 (sharing); \$4500 (single)

Group Size : 6–10, with 2 leaders



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