

# B<sub>C</sub> BIRDING

Newsletter of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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## British Columbia Field Ornithologists

P.O. Box 8059  
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### IMPORTANT NOTICE

#### BCFO has a new address

**B.C. Field Ornithologists**  
**PO Box 45507,**  
**Westside RPO,**  
**Vancouver, B.C.,**  
**V6S 2N5**

*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

#### Annual Membership Dues:

Canadian General Membership	\$30
Canadian Junior Membership	\$20
U.S. & International Membership	\$35

#### 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

#### *Please send newsletter submissions to*

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Parksville, B.C. V9P 1P2  
250-586-3838 / [guylmonty@gmail.com](mailto:guylmonty@gmail.com)

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

#### Advertising

Advertising rates are available upon request

#### BCFO Website

<http://www.bcfo.ca/>



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## Cover Story

### Prairie Warbler In Tofino

Cover photo © Guy L. Monty



Orchard Oriole photo © by Rich Mooney

Long time Tofino resident, Adrian Dorst, got a welcome surprise on September 28, 2009, when he looked out the window of his second story apartment, and glimpsed a Prairie Warbler! The bird was gleaning insects in a maple tree, just a few feet from the apartment window. On October first, Donna and I were treated to point blank views of this BC rarity, and I managed to get several decent photos (see cover) thanks to Adrian inviting us in to view the bird from his office.

Two days later, the fabled Patagonia Picnic Table effect was noted, when Rich Mooney and Lori Lynch spotted and photographed, an Orchard Oriole (left) in the same tree, along with the Prairie Warbler!

## INTERNET SOURCES

### BCFO

<http://www.bcfo.ca/>

### BC Breeding Bird Atlas

<http://www.birdatlas.bc.ca/english/index.jsp>

### Biodiversity BC

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

### Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies

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

### Birding in British Columbia (General Information)

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

### BIRDNET (Ornithological Council)

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

### Bird Source (Audubon & Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

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

### eBird Canada

<http://www.ebird.org/content/ebird/>

### Bird Studies Canada / Long Point Bird Observatory

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

### Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

[http://www/\[wrc/isgs/gpv/birds/](http://www/[wrc/isgs/gpv/birds/)

### Point Reyes Bird Observatory

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

### Rocky Point Bird Observatory

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

### AOU Check-list of North American Birds, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition

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

### Bird Wing Image Database

<http://www.pugetsound.edu/x5662.xml>

### Michael Shephard's Bird Information Site

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

### Mike Yip's Vancouver Island Bird Photos Site

<http://vancouverislandbirds.com/>

### SORA: Searchable Ornithological Research Archive

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

### ABA Rare Bird Blog

<http://birding.typepad.com/peeps/>

### BC Interior Bird Chat Group

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bcintbird/>

### Sunshine Coast Bird Chat Group

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sunshinecoastbirding/>

### Vancouver and Lower Mainland Bird Chat Group

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bcvanbirds/>

### Vancouver Island Bird Chat Group

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BCVIBIRDS/>

### West Kootenay Bird Chat Group

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wkbirds/>



## BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS NEEDS SUBMISSIONS

... of original manuscripts on wild birds in British Columbia. This is the

journal of record for reporting rarities or range expansions, the general status of species, avian ecology and behaviour. We publish new observations on birds, or even a single bird. Suitable topics include distribution, abundance, extralimital occurrence or range expansion, reviews of status, banding, identification, plumage variation, moult, behaviour, feeding, breeding, habitat, ecological relationships, reviews, or history and biography of ornithology. Information for authors is available on the BCFO website at:

[www.bcfo.ca/journal-author-invitation.php](http://www.bcfo.ca/journal-author-invitation.php)

## 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 BCFO's Journal **British Columbia Birds**.
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 up to a \$1000 limit and within the financial strength of the organization will be considered, with any larger requests requiring approval at the AGM.
6. Applicants should obtain a copy of the grant policy and the application guidelines from a member of the executive before any submission.

## Editor's Notes

Well, here we are, gearing up for a new year again already! Where does the time go? The Xmas count season is past us, and all that remains now is to get that data entered. I don't know about the interior of the province, but on the coast, the many counts I participated in couldn't have been more different from the counts in the winter of 2008-2009. No snow or ice this year, just wet, warm(ish) and windy.

Although upland birds seemed to be hard to find, numbers of marine birds were up on some counts, for the first time in awhile. We had a thrilling day on the Little River – Powell River Ferry CBC, with huge numbers of Ancient Murrelets giving us great looks as they dove under the ferry as we approached, then popping up like tiny corks right alongside the ship. Our final count of 1424 Ancient Murrelets was so far above our previous counts, that if I hadn't been there to witness it, I would not have believed it. Absolutely amazing! I look forward to seeing the results from all the BC CBC's soon.

The end of December often brings reflection on the years past memories, and changes coming in the new year. This issue mirrors this, with sad news of dear birding compatriots passing on, long-serving volunteers stepping down, and the possibility of a functioning bird records committee being resurrected by the BCFO. December also brings the return of the Listers Corner Checklist report form, for those who wish to report on their current list totals. You will all enjoy an article by our Secretary, Laure Neish, documenting the nesting habits of a common species, which many of us rarely observe as a nesting bird. Laure's photo documentation of these birds is amazing! We also have an article on a new type of big year, designed to lower one's carbon emissions.

Extreme disappointment with the results of the Copenhagen talks, points to the fact that we are all going to have to pull together and solve this one on at a grassroots level. There simply is no leadership at the top when it comes to solutions to climate change. But, that doesn't mean we have to be discouraged. And what better way to show your peers that you are excited about change and solutions, than by radically altering your use of internal combustion engines in birding!

Also, please note that the BCFO's postal address has changed. Our new address is;  
B.C. Field Ornithologists  
PO Box 45507  
Westside RPO  
Vancouver, B.C  
V6S 2N5  
Safe and productive birding in 2010 all!



## President's Report



BCFO members were saddened to hear of the death of Hue MacKenzie after a long illness. I did not know Hue well, but we did regularly meet informally at meetings or more often on dykes, by marshes and ponds, etc. during those times when rare bird sightings bring bird watchers together. There was one day I remember in particular. Hue had stepped down from his role as BCFO Archivist and I went out to his house to collect the archives, which he had so carefully looked after and kept up to date. He took me out to lunch and afterwards we went birding at several local natural parks. We talked of chestnut-backed and black-capped chickadees, pileated woodpeckers, purple martins and "The 3 Amigos". Conservation of wild bird habitat also featured high on the agenda. I cannot re-call the birds we saw, but we spent some time admiring some very large second growth Sitka spruce.

Hue was a founding member of BCFO and over the years was instrumental in helping the organization grow through his role as Archivist from 1999 to 2007 and as Publications Distributions Manager from 1991 to 1993. Together with Jo-Anne, Hue attended most of our AGM's, giving us the benefit of his expertise, advice and support. His commitment to wild birds over the years, along with his dedication, diplomatic skills and enthusiasm will be greatly missed by the birding community.

The BCFO Directors have decided that the BCFO should resign from The Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies' "B.C. Wildlife Records Committee (Ornithology sub-committee)" effective October 2009. The aforementioned sub-committee has been moribund for over a year and has not received the support of the B.C. birding and naturalist community for a number of reasons. The BCFO Directors have asked Guy Monty to draw up a draft proposal for a new B.C. Birds Committee to be organized along democratic lines, with representation from leading B.C. naturalist and ornithological organizations. In my opinion it is important that this committee, made up of one representative from each organization, is not operated by any specific organization. It would be an independent committee and all member organizations would have the right to use the information submitted. We would hope that the committee would have representatives from the F.B.C.N, Bird Studies Canada, B.C.F.W.S., B.C.F.O., the Editor for the B.C. Section of American Birds, V.N.H.S., Victoria N.H.S., and at least one or two of the larger interior naturalist groups. Once established the B.C. Birds Committee would be independent of all other organizations, but must continue to have appointed representatives from the organizations that wish to be on the committee. The directors look forward to your input on this proposed committee, its rules, etc,

The Directors are considering a Sept/Oct '2010 weekend Field Trip Meeting of the membership in a good birding location. This would be a chance for us to get together for a day or two of field trips and for the directors to have a face-to-face fall meeting. This would be in addition to the AGM gathering and field trips in late spring or early summer. We will keep you up-dated on this.

Enjoy the winter birds, and watch out for that Asian thrush mixed in with the robins.

Kevin M. Bell.



## **B.C. BIRDING NEWS BRIEFS**

*Compiled by Martin K. McNicholl*

### **Sealy Awarded**

Dr. Spenceer G. Sealy of the University of Manitoba received the 2009 Jamie Smith Memorial Award for Mentoring in Ornithology. Spencer's Ph.D. thesis from the University of Michigan was based on research on alcids breeding in Alaska and on Haida Gwaii. Many of his long list of publications on birds are based on that research and on incidental observations of other bird species seen while conducting it. He was the founding President of the Society of Canadian Ornithology, has just completed his term as editor of *The Auk*, and has published many papers and notes on other bird species in Manitoba, his native Saskatchewan, and elsewhere. The award was based on 24 nomination letters. –based partly on Anonymous. 2009. *Wandering Tattler* 33(3):9.

### **Acanthis and Spinus Resurrected**

A highlight of the 50th supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union's check-list of North American birds is the restoration of the genera *Acanthis* for redpolls and *Spinus* for goldfinches and siskins, both of which were lumped into *Carduelis* in 1983. Ever since chickadees were split out of *Parus* into their own genus *Poecile* several years ago, the experts seem baffled on the spelling. The latest version changes *P. cincta* (Gray-headed Chickadee) to *P. cinctus* and *P. hudsonica* to *P. hudsonicus* (Boreal Chickadee) in recognition of the masculinity of *Poecile*. The English names of the two Sharp-tailed Sparrow species have been shortened from Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow to Nelson's and Saltmarsh sparrows respectively. Three "tanager" genera have been split from tanagers into the cardinal/grosbeak family *Cardinalidae*. These include *Piranga*, the genus of both tanagers (Scarlet and Western) on the B.C. checklist. –based initially on a pre-publication summary by David J. Ringer given to me by Jude Grass 19 July 2009 and verified by published supplement in *Auk* 126:705-714, 2009. Proposed changes discussed during 2008 but not yet accepted included the possible splitting of Savannah Sparrow into up to four species.

### **B.C. Nature Fall Awards**

Salmon Arm area conservation concerns and data gathering were included in the contributions of Ed McDonald for which he was awarded a Regional Award by B.C. Nature at their fall 2009 meeting in Pender Harbour. Counts of shorebirds in support of a proposal for Important Bird Area designation at Salmon Arm and organization of a festival to observe the courtship "dance" of Western Grebes were avian aspects of his nomination. B.C. F.O. member Ron Walker's newspaper bird column in the Kootenays and other ornithological activities in the "Boundary" area were included with botanical and meteorological contributions in his nomination for another Regional Award. –based on Anonymous. 2009. *Nature B.C.* 47(3):15-16.

### **Kathy Klimkiewicz**

Although not a direct contributor to ornithology in B.C., M. Kathleen Klimkiewicz, long-time official of the U.S. Bird Banding Laboratory, had a profound influence on data collection, when she and Chandler S. Robbins proposed using four-letter alpha codes for recording English names of bird species in the field (*North Amer. Bird Bander* 3:16-25, 1978). These eventually replaced the AOU



numbers long used by the U.S. and Canadian banding authorities. Modified versions are used for the North American Breeding Bird Survey and in various provincial and state breeding bird atlas and other bird data projects. Kathy also initiated the first breeding bird atlas project, in Montgomery County, Maryland. She passed away on 6 November 2008. –based primarily on S. Droege. 2009. North Amer. Bird Bander 34:64 & C. S. Robbins. 2009. Auk 126:534-535.

### **Shorebird Stamp Winner**

A recent survey of shorebirds depicted on postage stamps revealed that Ruddy Turnstones are featured on the most stamps (41 of 29 countries), although Northern Lapwings were featured on the stamps of the most countries (39 stamps of 31 countries). Interestingly, Ruddy Turnstone is labeled *Porzana carolina* [the Latin name of Sora] on a Cuban stamp. –based on N. Davidson. 2007. Wader Study group Bulletin 113:5, 2007.

### **Robert Cannings Honoured**

Dr. Robert A. Cannings of the Royal B.C. Museum in Victoria is the recipient of the 2009 Bruce Naylor Award of the Alliance of Natural History Museums of Canada. His award is in recognition of his 29-year curatorship in Entomology and his many books, scientific papers and “popular” articles, primarily on insects, but also on various other aspects of natural history, including birds. His best known ornithological work is “Birds of the Okanagan” co-authored with his younger brothers, Richard and Sydney, in 1987. –based on 22 October/09 press release by Diane Dakers forwarded by Robert Puls in an e-mail of 28 October/09.



### **Hubert Hue Norman Mackenzie**

Peter Candido brought the sad news to the October meeting of the Birding Section that Hubert (Hue) N. MacKenzie was terminally ill. When I visited him in his hospice in Surrey on the 15th, he was fairly cheerful in spite of being in considerable discomfort. An e-mail from Jo Ann MacKenzie on 4 November 2009 brought the sad news that he had passed away that morning. Hue was a founding member of B.C.F.O., who attended annual meetings regularly and served for several years as Archivist. During Jo Ann’s terms on the board (including as President), he also attended board meetings and contributed positively to them. Many B.C. birders will remember him as a long-time co-ordinator of the White Rock Christmas Bird Count. He also published notes in B.C. Birding and the Canadian Field-Naturalist on birds in B.C. and co-ordinated a Spotted Owl survey. Prior to retirement, he was one of the leading naturalists in the Ottawa area, serving in several positions, including President, on the board of the Ottawa Field-Naturalist Club and co-ordinating a significant orchid survey. His contributions led to his becoming an Honorary Life Member of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists Club. A photo of him with Roger Foxall, Peter Hamel and Jo Ann at the Oliver AGM of B.C.F.O. appeared in B.C. Birding 9(3):7, 1999 and another of him with others on a field trip near Pinks Lake in the Ottawa area in 1965 on p. 23 of an account by Dan Brunton on the history of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists’ Club (Canadian Field-Naturalist 118:1-38, 2004). Brunton (p. 24) referred to his Presidency of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists Club and that of his predecessor as “an inspiration to a whole generation of new Ottawa-area naturalists.” Hue and Jo Ann were profiled by Marian Coope in Discovery 31(1):6-10, 2001.



# UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

*Compiled by Martin K. McNicholl and Wayne C. Weber*



The following meetings and other events are those that take place in B.C. and immediately adjacent areas or that potentially include information on birds that occur in B.C. Information on additional meetings is listed in the bimonthly Ornithological Newsletter and, for readers with inter-net access, on BIRDNET at [www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/ornith/birdmeet.html](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/ornith/birdmeet.html). Thanks to Ken H. Morgan for contributing to this compilation.

## EVENTS IN 2010 & 2012:

**February 7-11 2010 128TH STATED MEETING, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, 80TH COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEETING & 28TH SOCIETY FOR CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGY MEETING**, San Diego, Calif. Contact: Conference co-chair Barbara E. Kus, U.S.G.S. Western Ecological Research Center, San Diego Field Station, Suite 200, 4165 Spruance Road, San Diego, Calif. 92101; phone (619) 225-6421; website: <http://www.werc.usgs.gov/sandiego/>.

**February 12-15 2010 GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**, all North American back yards volunteered. Contact details not yet announced; website: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>.

**February 23-26 2010 2010 SOCIETY FOR NORTHWEST VERTEBRATE BIOLOGY MEETING**, Medford, Oregon. Contact: Doug Degross [no address or phone number indicated]: e-mail [ddegross@comcast.net](mailto:ddegross@comcast.net).

**March through April 2010 BRANT WILDLIFE FESTIVAL** Vancouver Island, B.C. Contact: The Nature Trust of B.C., 260 - 1000 Roosevelt Crescent, North Vancouver BC V7P 3R4; phone: 604 924 9771; website [www.brantfestival.bc.ca](http://www.brantfestival.bc.ca) or [www.naturetrust.bc.ca](http://www.naturetrust.bc.ca)

**April 10, 2010 BIG DAY BIRDING COMPETITION** Parksville-Qualicum, Vancouver Island, B.C. Contact: The Nature Trust of B.C., 260 - 1000 Roosevelt Crescent, North Vancouver BC V7P 3R4; phone: 604 924 9771; website [www.brantfestival.bc.ca](http://www.brantfestival.bc.ca) or [www.naturetrust.bc.ca](http://www.naturetrust.bc.ca)

**April 15-18, 2010 HAWK MIGRATION ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA CONFERENCE**, Duluth, MN. Contact: HMANA Conference, Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, Box 3006, Duluth, MN 55803; phone (218) 428-6209; e-mail: [mail@hawkridge.org](mailto:mail@hawkridge.org).

**May 10-16 2010 B.C. NATURE 2010 AGM**, Kamloops, B.C. Contact details to be announced in future issue of B.C. Nature.

**May 28-30 2010 20TH ANNUAL B.C.F.O. CONFERENCE**, Revelstoke, B.C. Contact details elsewhere in this issue.

**August 22-28 2010 25TH INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS**, Campos do Jordao, Brazil. Contact: Prof. Dr. Cristina Yumi Miyaki [no address or phone number announced]. e-mail: [ioc2010@acquaviva.com.br](mailto:ioc2010@acquaviva.com.br).

**September 7-11 2010 FIRST WORLD SEABIRD CONFERENCE**: Pacific Seabird Group hosting over 25 professional seabird and research organizations, Victoria, B.C. Contact details not yet announced. Information to be announced on the inter-net at [www.WorldSeabirdConference.com](http://www.WorldSeabirdConference.com).

**August 14-18 2012 5TH NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS**, Vancouver, B.C. Precise dates to be confirmed; contact information and participating organizations not yet announced.

# Life of Red-necked Grebes

by Laure Neish



How many days does it take for a Red-necked Grebe to hatch? Not a trick question but one I asked myself on the morning of June 8, 2007 as I drove to the Penticton marina for the 7<sup>th</sup> day in a row. I thought I knew the answer because I had read in *The Birder's Handbook*<sup>1</sup> that incubation period for *Podiceps grisegena* is 22-23 days. Counting back from Mother's Day when the first two eggs appeared in the nest, we were now on to Day 27 of incubation.

As I turned onto the marina road and checked ahead to the viewing spot, I noticed a small cluster of people. Some were holding morning coffee cups and one was sitting in a wheelchair smoking, but all had their attention turned to the water as they chatted. Slowly I pulled up alongside and asked, "So... any eggs hatched yet?" "Well, I can't be sure, but I think so!" responded a woman. None of the viewers had binoculars, but mine were handy, so I parked the car and joined the group. I aimed my focus onto the adult grebe sitting on her soggy nest. Nothing seemed to be happening until a rustle moved across her back and out popped a tiny, zebra striped head from its feather bed. "Oh wow - there it is!" I passed the binoculars and we all exclaimed with excitement over this new arrival into the world. Those of us "watchers" who had been making repeat visits felt as proud and relieved as the bird parents must have 30 feet away. But there were two more eggs in the nest, would any more hatch?

My joy was well founded because over the past few years, I had watched several Red-necked Grebe fail in their nesting attempts at the same location. In 2005, a pair constructed a nest under one of the marina docks and had even laid two eggs before the mound was swamped by boat wakes. In 2006, during the last week of May, a pair busily dragged sticks and weed stems to build their platform—right in the *middle* of the boat lane way. Needless to say, that nest did not survive long either. However, in late July, I was pleasantly surprised to see 4 older chicks swimming with their parents just outside the marina. A pair will re-nest up to five times in a season, so the pair must have found a successful site somewhere nearby. I learned from one of the other grebe watchers that this year, a thoughtful person at the marina had actually dragged

the existing nest platform out of the active waterway and had anchored it in a calmer backwater close to shore. This was the nest we were watching now.

A Red-necked Grebe nest is a messy-looking collection of bent cattails, sticks and decayed black muck dredged up from the shallow bottom. This particular floating mat had the added embellishment of orange twine and a chunk of styrofoam. Some grebe nests are anchored to nearby vegetation; this one was out in the open. During the month of incubation, it was shared with a basking Painted Turtle and a Spotted Sandpiper.



Two weeks prior to egg laying, on May 1<sup>st</sup>, the pair culminated their pair bond with a showy mating at the nest site. Unlike other grebe species such as Western Grebe, “Red-necks” don’t rise off the water and display in a rushing dance. Instead they swim side by side with bills tipped up towards each other. In season, you can often hear their raucous whinny calls from a distance. It helps in locating a breeding pair. They sound more like a braying donkey than a waterbird. They were shamelessly noisy! The female lowered her head in the water as an invitation to the male who suddenly developed a crest of “teddy bear ears” and mounted her. The nest was in its early stages of construction and served as a semi-submerged mating platform. After copulation, the male exited over her head and churned the water vigorously with his feet.

The parents spent many hours creating and maintaining their nursery. Both male and female grebes incubated the eggs, so the bird not on egg duty gathered and delivered construction materials to fortify nest edges. The parent in the nest spread the plant material around in an encompassing rim without even getting up. Decaying vegetation gives off heat, like a compost pile, so the black muck was layered near the bird’s body and served as a warm substrate for the eggs. Over time, the nest had a tendency to sink, so it was a daily chore to keep it high enough to prevent flooding.



After the female laid her first 2 eggs on May 13<sup>th</sup>, another appeared in the nest the next day, another on May 16<sup>th</sup> and the last on May 19<sup>th</sup> for a total of five. This is within the usual range of two to six. I could only see the chalk white eggs when she awkwardly stood up and used her bill to rearrange their position or when she and the male traded off egg duty. Occasionally, one of the pair returned to take over egg duty but its mate refused to budge. Towards the final days of incubation, I noticed the “off-duty” adult in the water visited the nest frequently, positioned nearby in waiting mode. It would ponder the nest and seemed to be thinking the same thing I was. When?

Two interesting behaviors occurred during the month, one of which I witnessed and the second was reported by another grebe watcher. On the morning of June 4<sup>th</sup>, after 23 days on eggs, I arrived anticipating the sight of a hatched chick, but instead, the female moved just off the nest, lowered her head and the pair mated again. I worried that this meant the eggs were moribund, but the pair continued incubating for four more days. On June 7<sup>th</sup>, other watchers were startled to see the pair dump two of the five eggs out of the nest accompanied by much vocalizing. To human ears, it sounded like wails of anguish. So after a month of trials and tribulations, that bright-eyed, pink-billed chick was a welcome sight to all. It was joined in successive days by chicks number 2 and 3.

On June 10<sup>th</sup>, the ranks of grebe watchers had grown to a crowd of fifteen. Viewing was easy as the nest was located next to the road and a parking lot. Word of mouth had turned city residents out for a stroll into novice birders. Some who had been unfamiliar with the word “grebe” were now showing others who wandered by. The birds seemed accustomed to the presence of human beings and tolerated talking, pointing, people hiding in the shoreline shrubs and setting up tripods on the beach. They got very nervous, however, when a dog walked by, even on a leash. Dogs elicited the same alert escape posture as a Bald Eagle flying overhead.



On the first hatch day, the father grebe brought a small minnow to the nest and offered it to his new offspring with a grunt. However, the youngster wouldn't open its bill as if to indicate “Nope, too big”. So dad went off in search of smaller fare and baby was fed...for a few minutes anyway. Within days, after all chicks had hatched, the new family had abandoned their temporary home and moved stealthily into the maze of boats and docks to find more minnows to feed the hungry mouths. The chicks rode nestled in first class aboard the backs of mom and dad for a few weeks, better protected from predators and cold water.

About two months later, in late July, the new family emerged closer to the entrance of the marina and the babies now looked like teenagers. Their bodies nearly matched the size of the parents, but were covered in slate-colored down and their heads were still adorned with a faint zebra mask. The large youngsters continued to pester their parents for food. One in particular seemed to beg incessantly, cozying up to the parent and pipping repetitively in a high pitched tone. The

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adult bird turned and touched bills with the juvenile as if to say, “See I don’t have any fish. I’m just babysitting.” A few weeks later and the pipping youngster received an aggressive lunge instead. “Time to find your own fish.”

The species account of Red-necked Grebe in *Birds of North America* states that “While populations appear stable, status is not well known”. Currently, in Canada the species is not considered at risk. However, in some U.S. states, they are listed as a threatened species, vulnerable to habitat destruction and degradation. Our south Okanagan Red-neck family is a surprising success story in light of the fact that they are making up their own rules for grebe behavior. They have persistently selected to raise a family in an unusual location; a large, deep lake (Okanagan) with limited protective wetland vegetation, subject to repeated disturbance by boats and cheek-by-jowl with humans . Despite their many thwarted attempts, perhaps the marina offers an abundant supply of food for young grebes. Perhaps there is a lack of suitable sites elsewhere in the region. I can only guess at the reasons.



In Penticton, the red-necks have become avian ambassadors. I’m sure I’m not the only watcher who smiles as they pass by the marina and spies that stray chunk of styrofoam—the remaining marker of last year’s nest. We were fortunate to witness the drama of a critical facet in grebe life history. However, little is known about the survival of this species in winter. *Birds of North America* states that “Major wintering areas for North American birds need to be identified. Basic information on habitat use and requirements is lacking.”. This sounds

like an invitation to grebe watchers in coastal areas as well as along the Great Lakes and marine bays to get out in the field and help fill in some of these knowledge gaps. The future of family life for Red-necks looks hopeful...for now.

**\*\*Note:** In 2008, a basking Painted Turtle became a particular nuisance for the grebes, who had hatched one chick but were still incubating more eggs. I was concerned that the turtle would actually crush the eggs as it tried to muscle its way around the platform. The parent tried several methods of eviction, including standing on the turtle and biting its foot. The confused grebe chick also attempted to climb up on its shell. I couldn’t stand the suspense any longer so after explaining the situation to a chatty fellow on the marina dock, he hopped into a dinghy and slowly paddled over towards the nest. “Plop”, the turtle was off in an instant and even the adult grebe made a few aggressive poses and noises before the boatman-to-the-rescue turned around.

<sup>1</sup> Erlich, Paul R., David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye, *The Birder’s Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*, 1988, 785 pp.

## North Pacific Albatrosses added to ACAP

06 November 2009



The Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) have added the three North Pacific species of albatross, Short-tailed Albatross *Phoebastria albatrus*, Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis* and Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes* to Annex 1 of the Agreement.

ACAP is a legally binding international treaty which requires signatory governments to take action to reduce albatross and petrel bycatch in fisheries, and to protect breeding colonies. Annex 1, which lists the species covered by the agreement, previously included only albatross species occurring in the southern hemisphere, together with seven southern hemisphere petrel species.

Government agencies in the USA and Japan already work with their North Pacific longline fishing fleets to ensure that seabird bycatch mitigation measures are adopted. US and Japanese delegates to the third session of the meeting of parties to ACAP in Bergen, Norway, gave a presentation demonstrating how close the objectives of those currently working to conserve these three albatrosses were to those of ACAP, and how mutual benefits would derive from the addition of these species to Annex 1. The decision to add the three species to Annex 1 was unanimous.

For more information go to [www.iucnredlist.org/](http://www.iucnredlist.org/)

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## Highway Mortalities

by Guy L. Monty

On the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of October, 2009, I rode my bicycle along Hwy 16 on Vancouver Island from Parksville to Victoria, covering a distance of app. 160 kms. As I was traveling fairly slowly, I had an opportunity to see and identify dead birds along the highway. I was appalled by what I saw. Many of these birds looked like they had been killed only very recently. Having done carcass searches in the past, I know that mortality numbers are often undercounted because of scavengers carrying carcasses away before they are detected. The fresh state of many of these carcasses made me wonder what a proper survey of highway mortalities would reveal. A quick search of papers available online, showed a fairly wide range of estimates as to how many birds are killed by vehicle collisions in North America each year, and to be honest, I doubt anyone really knows for sure. However, everything I was able to read on the subject, mentioned tens of millions of birds killed by cars in North America each year as being a minimum estimate! Although I'm sure we have all had the unhappy experience of having a thrush, sparrow, or warbler, bounce off the windshield now and then, how many of us really give much thought as to what cumulative effect the personal automobile is having on wildlife? And that's before we even get into oil spills or climate change!

In a little over 20 hours of riding, I observed carcasses of the following species, along the highway:

Mallard: 1	Northwestern Crow: 1	Spotted Towhee: 3
California Quail: 2	Chestnut-backed Chickadee: 1	Savannah Sparrow: 1
Glaucous-winged Gull (and associated hybrids): 5	Bushtit: 2	Song Sparrow: 1
Rock Pigeon: 1	Bewick's Wren: 4	Lincoln's Sparrow: 1
Barred Owl: 11	American Robin: 1	
Northern Flicker: 1	European Starling: 1	<b>Total:</b>
	Yellow-rumped Warbler: 2	<b>39 individuals of 17 species</b>



## In Search of Nesting Dippers along the Bridge River

*Story and photo © by Ken Wright (Region 12 Atlasser)*

On a warm evening in late May, I drove to the lower reach of the Bridge River just north of Lillooet to do some atlassing in one of my neglected squares. Chipping Sparrows and Spotted Towhees were singing below the canopy and a freshly arrived Veery could be heard uttering its distinctive call. I soon heard an American Dipper chatting away below. Adults tend to call frequently when feeding their nestlings, so feeling the urge to find the nest, I was compelled to descend the precipitous treed slope to the river.

With minimal searching, I found a steep animal/fisherman path down the slope. Just as I approached a dense stand of birch and red-osier dogwood that delineated the riparian zone, I heard a loud *psseeet* at point blank range. Pacific Slope Flycatcher!!! This is a rather scarce bird in our area, so I was quite excited by this find. The dipper had gone silent now and in spite of my close proximity to the Bridge River, I could not see any of it owing to the dense wall of riparian foliage. So I clambered through the woody tangle and emerged on the riverbank. No dipper.

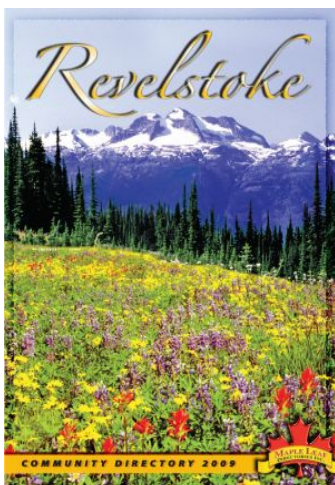
I had last heard it upriver, so I started walking in that direction. And then an outburst of dipper banter erupted on the opposite bank about 75 meters upriver! Having conducted numerous Harlequin Duck surveys in the past, I was well acquainted with the begging calls of young dippers. Given the time of year (end of May), I expected adults to be feeding nest-bound youngsters. But I soon realized there was no nest when I glimpsed a dipper fly right at another dipper! It was a fledged juvenile and I watched it intensively for 20 minutes. Periodically, it would harass the parent. But after a while, the adult seemed like it wanted "space" from the hungry one, so it flew upstream to feed quietly.



The hungry fledgling occasionally took short dips from the canyon wall looking for aquatic grubs (larval insects attached to the boulders), but did not appear to be successful. I was still determined to continue searching for the nest and knowing that dippers tend to remain in small territories, especially just after fledging, I had high hopes of finding the nest. So I rolled up my pant legs and waded along the shore. The river quickly narrowed from a steep-banked river bottom with an easily traversable shoreline to an entrenched canyon with near-vertical bedrock walls on both sides forcing the water to a higher velocity and depth.

I picked out a route that looked fairly easy to climb along the shore, however, I was wearing my Chaco sandals and was not exactly well-equipped should I slip into the fast, deep and relatively cold water. So with curiosity overriding any logical sense of practicality, I stuffed my field book in the back of my pants and with binoculars dangling from my neck, I began carefully scaling the rock upriver, keeping within meter of water level.

I soon realized that this piece of geology was seriously lacking integrity and most handholds failed on the first test. I thought to myself, now if I fall there is only a short distance to the water, but then what would happen to my poorly secured field book. And would my binoculars remain around my neck if I flailed in the water to regain my vertical composure? So I reluctantly decided to abort this mission and head back downriver without the nest. But I was successful in confirming breeding status for this lovely aquatic songbird.



## 20<sup>th</sup> Annual BCFO Conference May 28 - May 30 2010

**Location:** Revelstoke  
**Hosted by:** Friends of Mt Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks  
(<http://www.friendsrevglacier.com/home.html>).

**Post-conference Extension Tour with  
renowned bird guide Chris Charlesworth**

Rocky Mountain Trench, Mountain National Parks, Prairie foothills  
Embark from Revelstoke May 30<sup>th</sup> Return to Revelstoke June 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Registration forms for both the conference and extension will be  
available in the December BC Birding newsletter, so stay tuned  
for more information.**





Photo © by Ian Routley

## Autumn birding at its best in Lillooet!

*Story by Kenneth G. Wright, Lillooet Naturalist Society*

As the days become shorter and colourful leaves are torn from their arboreal origins in strong autumn winds, it is hard to get excited about birds. I had just returned to my home town of Lillooet after a 3-week stint in New England expecting an autumnal low in bird numbers. Was I ever wrong. A combination of favourable weather conditions (northerly winds), timing and just luck-of-the-draw karma lead to an astonishing migration fallout. I thought it was fitting to craft a little summary to chronicle what had to be the most impressive autumn migration fallout in nearly a decade of birding in the Lillooet area.

My day began with birding friend Maria Mascher along. We were driving north up Hwy 99 alongside green irrigated fields on the east side of the Fraser River. These fields often support a large flock of Canada Geese. But today I made out a white blob in the distance which soon became Lillooet's first Snow Goose! A long overdue but most welcome addition to our checklist. If that wasn't enough to satisfy the seasoned Lillooet birder, there was a Greater White-front and Cackling Goose feeding right alongside the Snow Goose(see photo)

Our destination was Fountain Valley, with its three very birdy lakes perched between Fountain Ridge to the west and the Clear Range to the east. Fountain Lake had many of the usual suspects, teaming with Ring-necked Ducks, Barrow's Goldeneye, American Wigeon and those ever-boisterous American Coots. A couple of loons mystically broke the surface between long dives. A Western and Red-necked Grebe were highlights. Onto Chilhil Lake where waterbird numbers were much lower than anticipated. Though quiet, we managed to find a female Surf Scoter in attendance. Cinquefoil Lake, the southern-most and shallowest of the 3 lakes was full of dabblers, especially American Wigeon, Mallard and Green-winged Teal. A pair of Trumpeter Swans was also in attendance.

During migration, there are often numerous birds milling in the big eddy that forms where the Seton River confluences with the Fraser. Mallards and American Wigeon were in great preponderance, as were Canada Geese. A couple of Bonaparte's Gulls, Horned Grebes and even a Western Grebe seemed somewhat out-of-place in the river. I had to pull myself away from here to hit a couple of more sites before nightfall. Texas Creek Road was quiet, in contrast to the Fraser/Seton. I then went to Seton Lake to make a short foray by kayak before dark. This proved very productive with more Horned and Western grebes, a flock of Lesser Scaup, and a flotilla of California Gulls feeding on spawned-out salmonids. Just before going to bed, I slipped outside to check out the sky and a Great Horned Owl was hooting! Species number 70, not a bad tally for late October in these parts.

## List of birds observed around Lillooet on October 18, 2009.

American Coot	46	Herring Gull	3
American Crow	75	Hooded Merganser	4
American Dipper	1	Horned Grebe	6
American Kestrel	1	House Finch	1
American Pipit	1	Killdeer	1
American Robin	3	Lesser Scaup	16
American Wigeon	236	Lincoln's Sparrow	1
Bald Eagle	1	Mallard	285
Barrow's Goldeneye	32	Merlin	1
Belted Kingfisher	1	Mountain Chickadee	11
Black-billed Magpie	3	Mourning Dove	1
Black-capped Chickadee	6	Northern Flicker	4
Bonaparte's Gull	2	Northern Harrier	1
Bufflehead	8	Northern Pintail	4
Cackling Goose	1	Pileated Woodpecker	1
California Gull	56	Pine Siskin	23
Canada Goose	208	Red-breasted Nuthatch	3
Canvasback	2	Red-necked Grebe	1
Clark's Nutcracker	1	Ring-billed Gull	1
Common Loon	1	Ring-necked Duck	42
Common Merganser	12	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1
Common Raven	11	Ruddy Duck	3
Dark-eyed Junco	4	Ruffed Grouse	1
Downy Woodpecker	1	Savannah Sparrow	3
European Starling	51	Snow Goose	1
Evening Grosbeak	2	Song Sparrow	4
Gadwall	3	<i>Sparrow sp</i>	5
Glaucous-winged Gull	10	Spotted Towhee	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	Surf Scoter	1
Gray Jay	2	Townsend's Solitaire	5
Great Blue Heron	2	Trumpeter Swan	1
Great Horned Owl	1	Western Grebe	5
Greater White-fronted Goose	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	1
Green-winged Teal	27	White-crowned Sparrow	8
<i>Gull sp</i>	10	Wilson's Snipe	1
Hairy Woodpecker	2	Yellow-rumped Warbler	29

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\*Check out my photos at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/Seton2008/>



## **Update on the BC Coastal Waterbird Survey**

*by Karen Barry and Peter Davidson, Bird Studies Canada*

This year marks the 10 year anniversary of the Coastal Waterbird Survey (CWBS), a volunteer monitoring program coordinated by Bird Studies Canada which aims to assess patterns in abundance and distribution of loons, grebes, cormorants, herons, waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, alcids and raptors using coastal areas of BC. The survey is designed to assess long-term trends. We have just completed an analysis of trends in ~60 species from the 10 years of data collected to date. The results are being collated in a report that will update the survey's first five-year trend results published in the special issue of BC Birds no.37 in 2008. Early indications suggest that long-term declines in some species, e.g. Western Grebe, are continuing, but there are also apparent success stories, e.g. Pigeon Guillemot, which appears to be showing a strong increasing trend. The next step is to understand what is driving these trends, which involves teaming up with other groups, both in BC and in Puget Sound, Washington, working on these birds, their food sources, and their habitats.

These birds are all responding to changes in the environment, which could affect their distribution and consequently their visibility to shore-based observers. For example if prey move further offshore or if there are increased levels of human disturbance or predation, the birds may move to different areas and may become difficult to count. Nevertheless, there are signs that prey for some waterbirds, particularly fish-eaters, is declining. A recent article in Marine Ornithology discusses trends in pelagic forage fish in the Salish Sea (Volume 37, pages 3-8). Study results indicate that herring spawn concentrations and spawning duration have shifted since the 1980's. This could mean that access to herring prey by seabirds is now more restricted in terms of location and timing. At the same time, herring survival from eggs to juvenile has been extremely low in some years, particularly in 2005 and 2007.



Consequently almost no small herring were available for seabirds during these years, and returning adult herring will be fewer as a result. In addition to herring, prey such as Pacific sand lance, shellfish and other invertebrates play a key role for waterbirds in BC. Despite their importance, information about some of these groups is minimal. Further studies about the marine food web will hopefully shed light on the interactions between overwintering coastal and marine birds and what they depend on for food.

Bird Studies Canada has started a new project to examine the seasonal habitat associations of coastal waterbirds. Using Coastal Waterbird Survey counts and detailed habitat information about the coastline, our goal is to identify those habitat features (eg. rocky shores, mudflats, gravel beaches) that certain bird species require or prefer at different times of year, and which habitats and areas are being used by the majority of the region's populations. For this project, we have asked Coastal Waterbird Surveyors to confirm precisely their survey site boundaries so that we can accurately overlay existing habitat information. This analysis should show some interesting relationships between waterbirds and habitat.

The CWBS is the only long term monitoring program focusing on a broad suite of coastal and marine birds in BC. Although 10 years is a significant milestone for the program, it remains a relatively short period of time in terms of assessing trends in species that frequently live longer than 10 years. The strength of the program relies on continuing the surveys and engaging new interested volunteers. We extend our deepest gratitude to all BCFO members who have contributed to this long-term effort over the years, and strongly encourage new (or indeed returning) volunteers interested in participating to contact us at [BCprograms@birdscanada.org](mailto:BCprograms@birdscanada.org), or toll-free 1-877-349-2473. There are plenty of gaps around the 27,000 km of BC's coastline to be filled!

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An American Robin feeds its chick an interesting prey item; a Pacific Tree Frog!  
Port Alberni, June 2008. *photo* © Guy L. Monty



## B.C. Breeding Bird Atlas Update

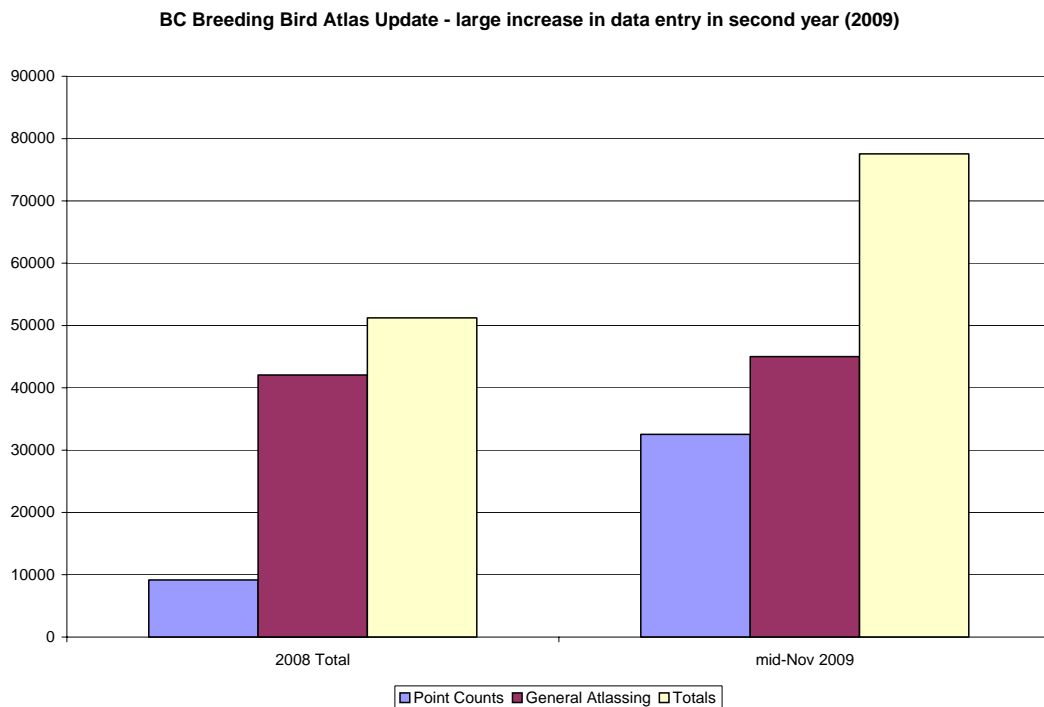
There must be a lot of tired birders this year because we had a phenomenal year for data entry. Depending on where you were atlassing this summer, you could have had almost 24 hours of atlas adventures. Night time 'owling', early morning point counting, driving between squares, and hours of data entry are time consuming but make the atlas project better every year.

This year as of mid-November we've entered nearly 78,000 records over 8,600 hours and the data keep coming in! We've had many diligent atlasers doing point counts so that we now have completed four times more than last year.

With 309 species confirmed as breeding birds in BC, we still have a few more to confirm and many remote areas that could use a concerted effort. We need to keep the momentum going and growing! There are still some long-time birders who haven't yet entered any data so we hope that all will contribute and get thanked in the final atlas product. The project will only be as good as the records we can collect.

If you still need help, talk to us; being birders, we're good at listening!

Submitted by:  
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# NMT

*by Guy L. Monty*

For many years, I have had reservations about the amount of resources, particularly petroleum products, used in the course of my birding. It doesn't take a genius to realize that conservation and intensive car based birding are fundamentally at odds. But what can one do? You certainly can't bird effectively without a car? Can you?

In the winter of 2008, I was reading a book called "Planetwalker", by American writer and conservationist, John Francis. The book tells the story of Mr. Francis' 22 years of walking

North America, refusing to use internal combustion, after his disgust at witnessing the death of birds from an oil spill in the San Francisco Bay area. This book had a huge effect on me. John Francis wasn't just some wild eyed hippy. He was a brilliant young man with convictions, and he did not let the comfort of riding in a vehicle, come between himself and those convictions. And by refusing to use a vehicle, he wasn't "dropping out" either. He continued with his employment and education, eventually earning a PHD. He simply found ways around using a car, and proved that

success was possible without personal use of some of the technologies that are killing our planet. It occurred to me while reading this book, that this could very easily be applied to birding. And then I had an idea...

I wasn't a stranger to "green birding". For the past several years I had been participating on bike teams during the Brant Festival Big Day birding competition, but that just didn't seem like it was going far enough. A big day by bike was one thing. What about a big year by bike? Did that make any sense at all?

At various holiday gatherings near the end of 2008, I discussed the idea with other birders. Although most agreed with the idea, few were ready to try it for themselves. Somewhere close to midnight on New Year's Eve, I got Rich Mooney to agree to a 2009 No Motorized Transportation (NMT) big year. I think he was more than a little surprised the next day, when I reminded him what he had agreed to, but Rich is always a good sport, and grudgingly agreed to give it a go. On many a long hot ride through that year, he would remind me that he wasn't in his right mind when he had agreed to this. Writing about my idea on the BCVIBIRDS internet chat group, others began taking up the challenge as well. Vancouver Island birders, Rick Shortinghuis, Mike McGrenere, Jan Brown, Alan McLeod, and Rob Gowan, all thought that a big year on a bicycle made perfect sense, and were soon trying to figure out how to safely pack a spotting scope for a ride out to a local beach. Another group, claiming that bikes were just too dangerous, decided to hoof it for the year. In no time, Derrick Marven, Michael Shepard, Aziza Cooper, Ian Cruickshank, Rhys Harrison, and John Brighton, were all doing their big year chasing birds entirely by foot. The 2009 NMT was underway.

Thinking about it from the comfort of my office chair, it seemed like 200 species might be possible, if I stuck to a few simple rules.

- Bird local areas thoroughly, and often
- Chase every rarity reported that was within the range of how much I could ride

- Make several long distance, multi-night trips for birds unlikely in my local area.

Simple enough, right? The first issue that arose was the weather. While winter birding in coastal BC can be cold, wet, and windy at the best of times, doing it entirely from a bike, can be downright dangerous. It didn't help matters that the winter of 2009 was one of the fiercest in a decade, and snow and ice were the norm well into January. This made birding "local areas thoroughly, and often", virtually impossible until about March, and even then it was often painful until April.

On January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009, I decided to combine the second two rules, by riding from Nanoose to south Nanaimo, to chase a long-staying Northern Hawk-Owl, a MEGA rarity for Vancouver Island, and to try and pick up a few of the Nanaimo River Estuary specialties, such as Short-eared Owl, Western Meadowlark, and Northern Shrike. I left home before it was fully light, and the first 20 kilometres flew by, under chilly, but clear skies, and roads without ice, or snow. Then I hit the Nanaimo city limits. Apparently, they had suffered through another big dump of snow earlier in the week, which missed Nanoose. A meter of hard crusty white stuff on the bike trail which bypasses Nanaimo and its frantic traffic was a skating rink. I eventually did manage to see the Hawk-Owl, but it meant hours of pushing the bike, and falling down on icy snow dozens and dozens of times. I slept well that night, after 60+ kilometres and too many bruises to count.

The next major obstacle I encountered was the time it took to do this. While it had always been fairly simple to hop into the car and hit a half dozen hot spots on a morning before work, this was no longer an option. It took me a full hour to ride from my house to the south end of Parksville, and anywhere in Qualicum Beach meant a full day in the saddle. I eventually got to the point where I was doing several Brant surveys a week, entirely by bike, just to be able to tick anything that might happen to fly by while I was working. This did net me a Glaucous Gull, an Iceland Gull, and a

Hudsonian Godwit. The godwit was originally found by Rich Mooney at the Englishman River estuary. I made three special trips there, which meant an hour and a half ride to the estuary, the time spent searching, and an hour and a half back home. I eventually saw the bird at Rath Trevor Provincial Park, while doing a Brant survey!

One of the best days of the entire year, was the Brant Festival Big Day Birding competition. Rich Mooney, Bernard Schroeder, Pete Boon, Neil Hughes, and I did the big day as a “green team entry, by bikes. Our starting point was to be the top of Little Mountain. In order to do a true NMT day, Rich, and I had to ride our bikes up there the night before, and camp. The weather was with us, and it turned into a spectacular day for both birding and riding. I was with a great bunch of friends, one could almost smell spring around the corner, and the recent warming trend had brought in plenty of migrant birds. We ended up getting the most species of any of the green entries, and actually beat the teams using cars too! I added 7 new species to my NMT year list, which now sat at 127 species. The highlight of the day, was sitting on a bench outside of the Rocking Horse Pub in rural Nanoose, resting up for the remaining three kilometre ride home. A beautiful male Mountain Bluebird, a fairly good bird for Vancouver Island, landed on the other end of the bench, looked at me for a few seconds, and then fluttered off to a nearby horse pasture. Birding just doesn’t get much better than that!

Spring and early summer, although they always promise more birds, also brought a few more challenges. I was often away from home for weeks at a time working. And when I was home, there were chores to do, family to reconnect with, and a heat wave in July which effectively brought an end to riding, and productive birding, for almost two weeks. Then there were volunteer commitments, like the BC Breeding Bird Atlas. Although I was able to cover areas around my home quite well with the bike, I had some remote areas farther up

island, which I could never reach by bike, and often meant whole weekends away from the bike. The end result was that I only added 4 species in June, and none at all in July. This was the only month that I added no new species to my list. I tried to make up for it in August though, tackling the migrant shorebird and passerine flocks. I was able to add some great birds in August, including, Long-tailed Jaeger, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Dusky Flycatcher, and Bank Swallow. After adding nothing in July, the 11 new species in August felt great, and I ended the month with 196 species, just 4 species short of my goal for the whole year.

September is arguably the best birding month on Vancouver Island, but after seeing 196 species, is there anything left to see? Well, yes, but not without effort. I found myself riding more, and farther, for less and less new birds. The birding was good, but there simply were not many new birds to see. I ended September with five new species, three of which were seen on the same day. It was the 7<sup>th</sup> of September when I met my goal of seeing 200 species by bike in 2009. And number 200 couldn’t have been more exciting. Rich Mooney and I had ridden down to the Englishman River estuary in Parksville, and quickly, and without much effort at all, added two new species to our lists. A Sanderling and a stunning Pacific Golden-Plover. Still buzzing from two new ticks, we spent the next few hours sea-watching off the mouth of the Englishman River. I spotted a small grey alcid about 100 meters offshore. It dove at virtually the same second I got my scope on it, but the adrenaline was already pumping. I yelled at Rich to scope in the area I was pointing to. The bird popped back up. There was about five minutes of silence while we both let what we were seeing slowly, and completely sink into our heads, as we tried to convince ourselves that we weren’t seeing, what we knew we were seeing. Then, all at once, we both came to our senses, and the hooting and hollering started. A Cassin’s Auklet! The first either of us had ever seen in the Parksville-Qualicum checklist area! I was extremely excited about the bird, but then Rich



reminded me of something I hadn't even thought of. "Dude! That's your 200<sup>th</sup> bird!". He was right. It was! Now I was really excited, and I yelled, "Well, that means it's your 199<sup>th</sup> species Rich"! There was more yelling and back slapping. It was an awesome late summer day, and it couldn't have been more fun. I was loving this NMT experiment.

Even on lotus-land Vancouver Island, October's changing weather reminds one that the year has turned, and is rapidly reaching a conclusion. For a birder doing a big year, this becomes especially significant. After early October, migration is essentially over, and winter is bound to follow. If one is going to add any species, it must be done in early October. I looked through my checklist, and it was painfully obvious, that adding much more in my local area, was getting more and more unlikely. But, there were a few species being reported in Victoria that I needed. Hmmm, how far is it to Victoria? I knew it was a two hour drive, but how long would it take me to ride there? Could I do it? Well, only one way to find out.

I left Parksville at first light on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, and rode hard all day. At sundown, I was forced to retire to the smelliest, dirtiest motel room I had ever seen, in any country, along the highway just north of Duncan. I checked the GPS unit, and I had 79.8 kilometres. This was the greatest distance I had done in one day all year, and I certainly felt like it. I wolfed down as many carbs as I could find at a roadside cafe serving curry and rice, and hobbled back to the motel where I collapsed on top of the filthy bedspread, and slept soundly until 4:30 AM the next morning. Despite being the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, it was predicted to be fairly warm and sunny, so I threw on a light shirt and a pair of riding shorts. I stepped out of the motel room and gasped. It had frozen. It was - 2', and everything was covered in a glistening coat of frost. Including the road. Although I didn't crash on the way into Duncan, I came close. About 8 times. But at least it was downhill. The fun part of the day was to start at

the south end of Duncan. This is where you ride uphill for several hours, before plunging back to almost sea-level at Mill Bay. And then, you start back uphill, towards the Malahat Summit. Oh lord. The Malahat. As I got off my bike, puffing and wondering about the potential for cardiac arrest, I thought about how hard my car had to work to force its way up and over this mountain. It was awful. I was hating this NMT experiment. By the time I made the summit I had been riding for almost 10 hours. I was hot. I was sweaty. I was running out of water, and patience. But it felt good to reach the summit, where there was a small rest stop, and a picnic table where I could stretch out and maybe sleep for a few minutes. I don't know exactly how long I was asleep, but when I sat up and opened my eyes, I felt much better. Especially since there was a Golden eagle sitting in a tree just below the rest stop. Yeah! My 203<sup>rd</sup> NMT species! Reinvigorated by a rest and a great bird, I took off down the other side of the Malahat. For all the hours of grunting, swearing, sweating and suffering to get to the top, it took about 15 minutes to descend the other side. But they were 15 minutes of sheer terror. Imagine going as fast as you have ever gone on a bicycle, on a strip of shoulder less than a meter wide, strewn with gravel and larger rocks, with a granite wall on your right, and speeding cars and trucks to your left. Wow, what a ride. But I made it safely, and arrived at a friend's house in downtown Victoria in time for thanksgiving dinner, which I devoured before falling asleep at the dinner table. I had ridden more than 80 kilometres this day, and added two more species, a Ruddy Duck and a Redhead.

The following two days I was able to add three more species around Victoria, including a very Willet, and that Victoria favourite, the Skylark. Unfortunately, my trip was cut short by a speeding Toyota that side swiped me near Swan Lake, sending me spinning off head over heels into the median, my bike coming to rest on top of me. The motorist was polite enough to honk loudly as he sped off! My bike was banged up a bit, but luckily the only injuries

sustained consisted of a few bruises and having the tip of one finger ground off on the pavement. A definite “OUCH”, but nothing too serious. I left Victoria with 208 species. I ended October with an Ancient Murrelet off Parksville, my 210<sup>th</sup> species for the year.



By November, Rich and I put our heads together, and realized that the best chance for adding a few new species, would involve a ride to the Somass Estuary in Port Alberni. We both realized that this meant at least 50 kilometres one way, and a mountain to cross along the way. But, new ticks awaited, so off we went. As hard as the trip over the Malahat was, the trip to Port Alberni was worse. It seemed to be uphill from the second we left Parksville. It was cold, gray, and drizzling. We could see that up on top of the pass, it was snowing. It took us several hours to push our bikes to the summit. There was no riding this one. It was just too steep. When I finally reached the summit, the sun was breaking, and Rich was nowhere to be seen. He had already started down the other side. Although not quite as scary as the Malahat, I must have reached greater speed casting down off the mountain and into Port

Alberni in record time. Rich was already tearing into his second hamburger when I reached the drive in where we had agreed to meet. In record time, we blazed down to the estuary, and picked up a Swamp sparrow with very little effort. Then we headed out towards the inlet, and began hearing a goose-like call which neither of us could quite recognize. It would call for a minute or so, and would search with our scopes and binoculars as best as we could, but we couldn't find the bird. I was fairly certain it wasn't a Snow Goose, White-front, or anything else I'd ever heard. We scratched our heads, and continued to search. Then, suddenly, it was directly above us. Although I'd only seen them in field guides before, I almost instantly recognized the bird as a Bean Goose. I yelled it out and Rich almost fell over. Several colourful words were shouted, and the bird continued circling overhead. It rose, it called, and eventually, it flew out of site over the mountains to the Southeast. A Bean Goose? The possibility of an escapee was certainly on our minds, but the bird's behaviour seemed to suggest otherwise. After searching the literature back at home, we both decided to give it a provisional tick, pending a decision by a proper records committee. A Taiga Bean Goose was number 212 on my list, and a few dozen Canvasbacks out on Alberni Inlet topped up my November list to 213 species. The next day it started raining hard and never stopped for the next 26 days.

December turned out to be kind of anti-climatic. I did plenty of riding, and although the weather stayed fairly warm, it was extremely wet. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, a friend reported a bird at his feeder that he thought might be a winter Chipping Sparrow. Donna and I rode our bikes over and I was able to tick a Clay-colored Sparrow, the first I had ever seen in Parksville. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, I was treated to my final species of the year, from the comfort of my office chair. In the birch tree outside of my window, a couple of Common Redpolls sparred with the Pine Siskins heading for the feeder on my deck.

Despite riding and walking some short trips a dozen more times in December, the Common Redpolls were my final species of 2009, and my 215<sup>th</sup> species recorded.

I had ridden 2371 kilometres, walked almost 300 kilometres, and seen 15 more species than my original goal. Most importantly, I had proven to myself that a car was not absolutely necessary in birding on Vancouver Island. Especially since 215 species is a very respectable total here even if one is using a car!

Beyond proving to myself that I could get by without a car, I was also thrilled that so many others had also taken up the challenge on Vancouver Island in 2009. Remarkably, Mike McGrenere rode 8718 kilometres, and saw 219

species of birds! Rich Mooney's final tally was 207 species and over 1200 kilometres traveled.

Maybe even more remarkable, were some of the totals earned by those who walked their routes. While Derrick Marven, and Michael Shepard both broke the 150 mark on their walking NMT big years, and Aziza Cooper was able to find 174 species, Ian Cruickshank's final tally of 184 species is absolutely amazing.

In 2010 I may not go as hard as I did in 2009, but I will continue to do as much birding without a vehicle as I am able. It is a very pleasant way to bird, is good for one physically, and it is far kinder to our mother Earth, and the creatures that exist here. It's also just plain fun. Good riding, good walking, and great birding everyone!





## Christmas Bird Counts on Haida Gwaii

by Margo Hearne

### *Greater Massett*

One of the constantly astonishing things about Christmas Bird Counts on Haida Gwaii is that new birds appear every year. On Christmas Day we had a call from our birding buddy, Martin who had found a "strange bird". We abandoned our dinner preparations and rushed to Old Massett to see a tiny morsel of feathers sitting in a hemlock beside the church. A mystery morsel. After many discussions and diversions and moving of the camera and spotting scope, Peter finally confirmed his initial impression that it was a Little Bunting, not some small bunting species, but a incredibly rare Little Bunting from Asia. The first ever CBC record for Haida Gwaii, Canada and North America, including Alaska. What a find! Martin saw it again next morning with the juncos, but we never saw it again. On bird count day we were up and out early and into a classic, white, deep winter scene, the first since the early 1980's. We tramped through the deep snow, trudged through the brush, strolled through the frosty meadows and wandered by the riverbank. A velvety little Fox Sparrow fed scattered some frozen leaves in the underbrush but most of the other forest birds were hunkered down. Chown Brook was completely frozen so there was nothing there. The white meadow had many Canada Geese pecking for anything edible. A pintail flew off with a start from the saline sloughs where a multitude of mallard, teal wigeon and gadwall dabbled busily. We moved to Masset Inlet and scanned along the beach just as a tiny flock of very small things flew in. Seven Least Sandpipers! A Savannah Sparrow joined them, then a Song and as we watched a Greater Yellowlegs wavered in and landed before our very eyes. Where had they been all winter?

Out over Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary an eagle hunted languidly until hounded off by a Peregrine Falcon, and then a Merlin flashed through the approaching blizzard, all speedy wings and intentional direction. Ducks make a tasty dinner for the swift. The day was a study in light and dark. Brilliantly white and blue for a half hour, then stunning blizzards where everything vanished. Speaking of stunning, can I interest you in an Evening Grosbeak? It's been around Masset since 29th November. Another exotic rarity, and together with the Little Bunting, reminded us that we live on the edge of everything and anything can show up.

### *Port Clements*

We had one of the best weather days ever. The sun shone all day and we found lovely birds in unexpected places. Three White-fronted Geese were hiding under the outdoor bleachers at the park and a Red-winged Blackbird chirped overhead. It's not a common bird here. The Lowry's feeder once again had a high number of White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows and one White-throated. Hundreds of ducks were back at the Yakoun Estuary and a flock of about 600 Dunlin tripped along the mudflats. Away up in Juskatla an exceptional Canvasback floated serenely on the still water with five Lesser Scaup, eight Barrow's Goldeneye and two Horned Grebes. Although we searched diligently for dippers, there's wasn't one to be seen. The rivers were partly frozen and with snow at least eight inches deep there were not many songbirds around. It took us a while to find one Great Blue Heron and even kingfishers were elusive, although we did fine one. We wandered through the cedar forest at Kumdis and commented on the Red-breasted Sapsucker's beauty, with its bright red head silhouetted against the bright white snow. We only found one Hairy Woodpecker; the usual hotspots of salmonberry cane and alder were so covered in snow that nothing could feed there. Three Eurasian Wigeon fed with the Americans and the thirty-six Trumpeter Swans reversed the downward trend of the past twenty-three years. A good sign.

## *Tlell*

"There was eight to ten inches of snow almost everywhere with heavy snow-showers all day," Peter Hamel said. "We had to find sanctuaries in the trees and look for places where snow hadn't reached the ground. There we found the birds. At the Ranch two Hermit Thrushes and a Yellow-rumped Warbler sought refuge in the grass outside one of the barns. It's really late in the year for hermits and it was the first warbler of that species on all counts. Sometimes we get six or seven wintering over throughout the islands, but only one this year. It was lovely to see it like a flash of sunlight in the dark winter. The rare Wood Duck seen earlier in December was long gone, although there were ducks on the Tlell River and in the flooded fields. While I checked out over Hecate Strait, Martin (Williams) and my son Richard, here for Christmas, tramped through the woodlands and found many Varied Thrushes, an American Pipit and a Red-breasted Nuthatch. The only real concentration of waterfowl was in front of the pottery, where 1,614 Common Goldeneye, six Red-throated Loons, four Western Grebes and a tiny Cassin's Auklet were all within visible range. We had a tally of fifty species in all, which, given the snowpack, was very respectable."

## *Rose Spit*

Ever since the island counts began twenty-seven years ago, Peter Hamel had dreamed of doing an ocean count off Rose Spit. This year his dream came true. Peter, Martin and Kirk Thorgeirson all set out on 2nd January aboard Kirk's 27-foot Boston Whaler.

"They are the bird men of Masset," Kirk told me. "I ran the boat; Martin watched the seas and Peter watched for birds from the fish box in the stern the whole time. He was like the Rock of Gibraltar sitting there. He scanned the waters for hours. Every time he saw a bird Martin and I yelled "lock and load"! It was very entertaining. When he said "let's go over there to look for birds" Martin and I had to tell him that "over there" was a sandbar! We drank lots of coffee and Peter's cheese and crackers were great. When a bird showed up both of them would say "there's a rare one" and both of them would have the binoculars up and scanning. The seas were very rough on the way out, perhaps four to six foot waves against the tide, but on the way back when the tide turned it was flat calm. It was cold though, perhaps one degree or so, but we were all well dressed. We got about a mile-and-a-half past the red can-buoy at Rose Spit; almost got as far south as the green buoy before turning back.

"My boat has two Mercury 225 outboards so we got out there fast enough, but idled everywhere on the way back. We covered the inshore areas around Tow Hill, the Hiellen River, the pinnacle off Yakan Point and off the Sangan River, then raced over to Striae Island and went in behind there. It began to get dark, otherwise we'd have tried for Naden Harbour! When we got back to shore they both just looked so happy! They had a good time and so did I. It was very enjoyable hanging out all day with the bird men of Masset."

On the count they found many birds including 1,510 Common Murres and 23 Ancient Murrelets but the most exciting find was nine Yellow-billed Loons, a new high for the Rose Spit count.





A Special Thanks to Ted Goshaluk  
for his many years of service to the BCFO  
as the distribution manager for the  
*BC Birding newsletter.*

#### **News from Membership**

**Renewal for 2010 due January 1<sup>st</sup>**

*Membership Application and Renewal Form* on the BCFO website at:

<http://www.bcfo.ca/membership.php>.

If you wish to correct or update the information, please indicate changes directly on the form.

Gordon Neish  
Membership Coordinator

### **IMPORTANT NOTICE**

#### **BCFO has a new address**

**B.C. Field Ornithologists  
PO Box 45507,  
Westside RPO,  
Vancouver, B.C.,  
V6S 2N5**



## TOURS FOR NATURALISTS

### \*\*\*COSTA RICA BIRDING\*\*\*

22 January-2 February 2010 (12 days)

Cost \$3900(dbl occup) from San Jose, Costa Rica

Costa Rica is one of the birdiest regions of the world with 830 species recorded in the tiny country. The tour offers a classic tropical birding experience with parrots, macaws, hummingbirds, trogons, motmots, toucans, antbirds, cotingas, manikins, tanagers & many others.

The tour is led by our own tour manager and an expert local bird guide.

Birds: Resplendent Quetzal, Scarlet Macaw, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher.

### \*\*\*ARIZONA IN FEBRUARY\*\*\*

17-28 February 2010 (12 days)

Cost \$2650(dbl occup) from Phoenix

Arizona is home to some of the most unique, famous and unforgettable landscapes in the world. The Grand Canyon, the mesas and buttes of Monument Valley and the silhouette of a saguaro against a golden sunset are images so famous that we have grown up with them since childhood. The tour incorporates all of the elements that make Arizona such a memorable destination and in 12 days we will experience many of its most beautiful and famous landscapes including The Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly, Sedona, and the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts. Join us for a midwinter tour to the blue skies and fascinating deserts of this famous state.

Birds: Greater Roadrunner, Cactus Wren, Phainopepla, Pyrrhuloxia

### \*\*\*YUKON & DEMPSTER HIGHWAY\*\*\*

Land of the Midnight Sun

Tour I, 18-29 June 2010 (12 days)

Tour II, 1-12 July 2010 (12 days)

Cost \$3450 (dbl occup)+GST, from Whitehorse

The Yukon is a fabled land whose very name evokes archetypal images of wilderness and a frontier populated by colourful characters. On this tour we will experience both the natural and human landscapes of this fascinating and beautiful land, visiting the Klondike, Dempster Highway, & the Mackenzie Delta. The heart of our adventure is the drive up the Dempster Highway from Dawson City to Inuvik. The Dempster, 750 kms of good gravel, is the only public road in North America that extends north of the Arctic Circle. Along its route we traverse two mountain ranges, wild river valleys, muskeg and tundra & cross the mighty Mackenzie River on a ferry. At latitude 66N, at the Arctic Circle, we enter the Land of the Midnight Sun. The Dempster is renowned as a naturalist's paradise with its varied and beautiful landscapes, sought-after bird species, large mammals and myriad wildflowers. Join us on this adventure to the Land of the Midnight Sun, the big country immortalized by Robert Service.....the Yukon.

Birds: Gyrfalcon, Willow Ptarmigan, Long-tailed Jaeger, Northern Hawk Owl.

Flowers: Arctic Poppy, Yukon Bellflower.



Leaders: Tony Greenfield & Dr. Rand Rudland

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Full details & itineraries at website: [www.whiskeyjacknaturetours.com](http://www.whiskeyjacknaturetours.com)



# BIRDING IN TAIWAN

## NEXT TRIPS:

**2009: Nov. 10-22:** Endemics, Black-faced Spoonbill

**2010: March 18-31: *SPECIAL TOUR FOR BCFO MEMBERS.***

BCFO has been invited to Taiwan again. Visit the home area of BCFO's partner society in Changhua, Taiwan, and the very popular Bagua Mountain Bird Fair. The rest of the tour will focus on endemic species (good chances for all 15 in March plus the next endemics-to-be) and subspecies, as well as Lanyu Island; 14 day tour, **FROM VANCOUVER**, INCLUDING AIR, \$4590 (sharing), \$5090 (single). Ask for a detailed itinerary.

**2010: November 9-21: *Endemics, Black-faced Spoonbill***

**REGULAR PRICE: 13 days:** From Taipei, Taiwan: \$4000 (sharing); \$4500 (single)

**July, 9 days:** Contact us for details and price

**EARLY BOOKING DISCOUNT for regularly scheduled tours:** Register at least 60 days before tour start date; get 5% off tour price.

## [www.birdingintaiwan.org](http://www.birdingintaiwan.org)

Collared Bush Robin, Formosan Whistling-Thrush, Steere's Liocichla, Taiwan Barwing, White-eared Sibia, Taiwan Yuhina, Yellow Tit, Flamecrest, Formosan Magpie, White-whiskered Laughingthrush, Styan's Bulbul, Taiwan Partridge, Taiwan Bush-Warbler, Swinhoe's and Mikado Pheasants are Taiwan's 15 generally recognized endemics--the new Birds of East Asia recognizes 24. There are over 60 endemic sub-species. In spring, visit Lanyu Island with 6 bird specialties of its own, including an endemic subspecies of Ryukyu Scops-Owl. The Black-faced Spoonbill will still be at its wintering site in the Tsengwen Estuary.

Want to see one of the rarest birds in the world? Chinese Crested Tern, *Thalasseus bernsteini* nests in very small numbers in the tern reserve in the Matsu Archipelago.

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