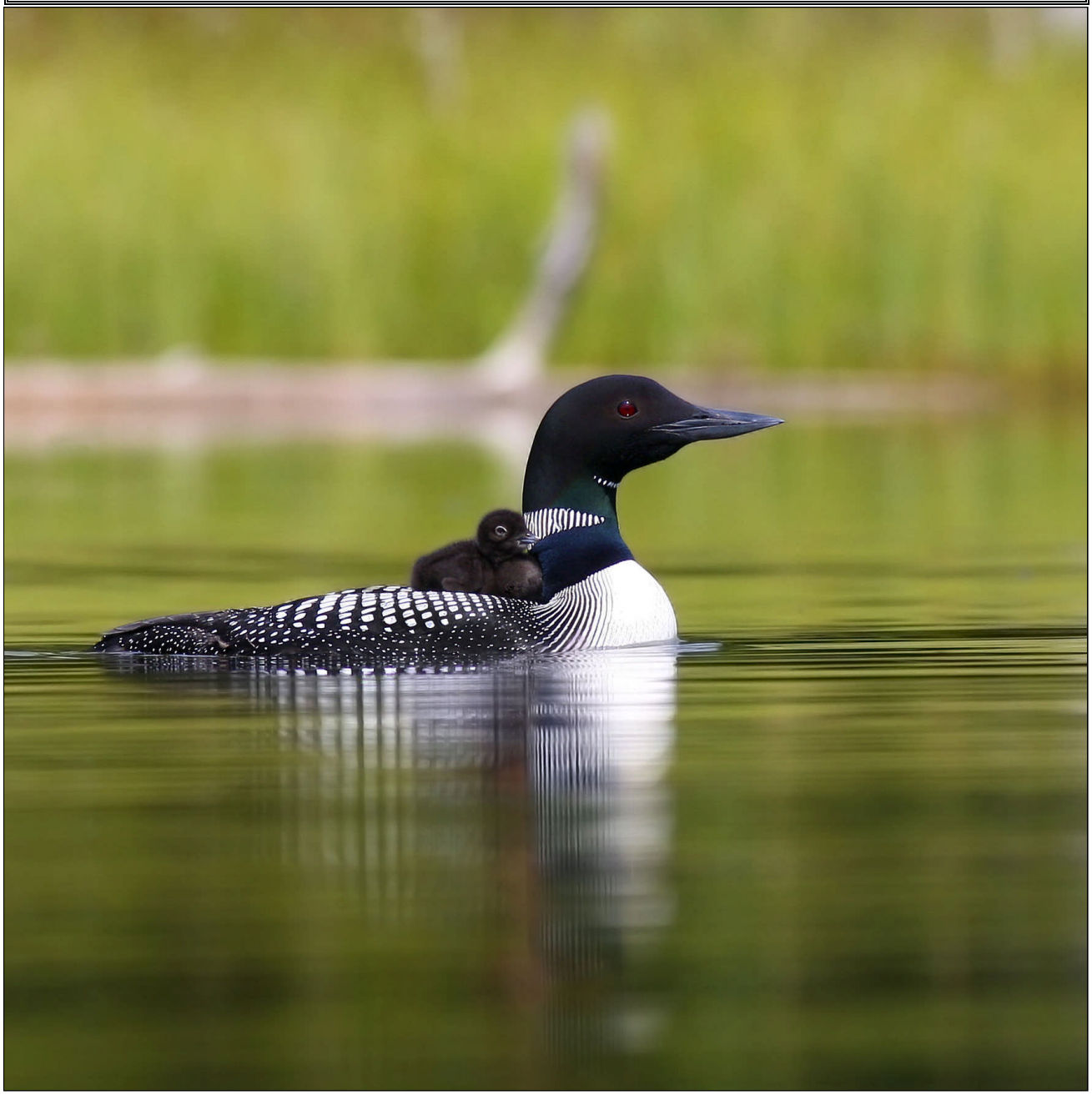
BC BIRDING

Newsletter of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

ISSN 1206-1611 Volume 22 Number 3 / September 2012



BCFO Officers and Directors

Executive

President: George Clulow, Burnaby
604-438-7639 gclulow@shaw.ca

Vice President: Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows
604-465-1402 lawrencecowan@shaw.ca

Recording Secretary: Mary Taitt, Ladner
604-946-2438 marytaitt@gmail.com

Treasurer: Mike Fung, Vancouver
604-266-0238 mike.mikefung@gmail.com

Past President: Jude Grass, Surrey
604-538-8774 judegrass@shaw.ca

Other Board Members

Art Martell, Courtenay
250-334-2979 Martell.BCBirds@shaw.ca

June Ryder, Vancouver
604-736-4189 jmryder@telus.net

Wayne C. Weber, Delta
604-597-7201 contopus@telus.net

BCFO Committees & Representatives to Other Organizations
(* Board Member)

AGM Planning Committee:
Wayne Diakow

Archivist: Les Gyug

British Columbia Birds (Journal)
Editor: Art Martell*

BC Birding (Newsletter)
Editors: June Ryder* & Mark Habdas

BC Breeding Bird Atlas:
George Clulow*

BCFO Awards Committee:
Wayne Weber*

Canadian International Joint Venture:
Wayne Weber*

Changhua Wild Bird Society:
Jo Ann MacKenzie

Librarian: Andy Buhler

Membership Committee:
Larry Cowan*

BC Birding, ISSN 1206-1611, is published four times a year by the

British Columbia Field Ornithologists (BCFO)

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

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

Annual Membership Dues:

General membership (Canada)	$30.
Junior membership (Canada)	$20.
U.S. and International Membership	$35.

Newsletter Submissions

Send material to the Editors at jmryder@telus.net (MS Word format preferred but not essential) or mail to BCFO at above address. Submissions may include bird finding information for our "Site Guide" series, articles about birding experiences, casual observations of bird behaviour, photos, and other topics of interest to birders, preferably but not necessarily in British Columbia.

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

Advertising Rates

Full page: $125 per issue or $112.50 each for 4 or more issues
Half page: $75 per issue or $67.50 each for 4 or more issues
Quarter page: $40 per issue or $36 each for 4 or more issues.

BCFO Website: http://bcfo.ca/

IN THIS ISSUE

COVER STORY

Photographer Hank Tseng found this Common Loon on July 7, 2009, at Englishmen Lake, Kane Valley Road.

Kane Valley, about 15 km SE of Merritt, is best known as a cross-country ski haven, but this area is well worth visiting for its birds and other wildlife. Varied habitats are provided by rolling grasslands with stands of aspen and ponderosa pine, forested hillsides, and a series of easily accessible lakes and marshes along the valley floor.

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

BCFO RESEARCH GRANTS

BCFO encourages submission of proposals for financial assistance for bird surveys and other ornithological research. It also wishes to foster greater connections 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 making a submission.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking Back, Looking Forward

The fifth and final year of field work for the BC Breeding Bird Atlas is just coming to a close, and many members are already feeling a sense of loss. I know I am. For many of us, it's been a huge thrill to get 'out there' and search for breeding birds in some of BC's fabulous birding areas.

What are we going to do now to fill the huge hole that the Atlas will leave? Can we bird our local patches with the same intensity? Can we be inspired to search out new areas to explore, add new experiences to our birding lives, and contribute to new understandings of the province's birds?

Well, of course we can. The answer to all such existential questions, and even to those dark days of the birder's soul is simple: MORE BIRDING!

We don't need excuses or reasons to grab our bins and head out, and if it's what we want to do, we can find other ways to contribute. Many times it's good enough just to get out there and bird.

Staying on the theme of contributions and losses, it has been my very good fortune to step into the presidential shoes of one of BC's most committed birders and natural historians. Jude Grass, our President for the last two years, is a tireless contributor, not only to BCFO, but also to many other organisations around the province.

She'll be a loss to BCFO, but fortunately she's not leaving entirely. Jude gets to stay involved with us as Past President. Good for us.

Jude's two years leading BCFO have seen new directions set, and a strong financial situation left behind. We have a strong, committed Board of Directors, and a team of others without "official" duties who, behind the scenes, make our organisation run. Jude listed many of those members in her farewell President's Message in the last Newsletter. I won't repeat the names here, but just reiterate the "thank you all". We couldn't do it without you.

The future is looking good for BCFO. We've got new programs, a new website, and lots of great ideas being floated for both new and "old" undertakings. With that in mind, we've already approached a couple of non-board members to form a Future Directions Committee to advise the Board. Got some ideas for them? Drop me an email, or volunteer to join them. The BCFO Board fall planning meeting takes place on October 1st. Give us your ideas about BCFO's future to include in our discussions.

And despite Yogi Berra's advice that *You can observe a lot just by watching,* you can also get involved. Making a contribution doubles the fun.

I'm looking forward to serving the membership in my term as President, and I know we can grow as an organisation and see BCFO become an even stronger force for birds and birders in BC.

And please, get 'out there' and enjoy that Fall migration.

George Clulow

EDITORS' NOTES

Welcome to the September edition of the Newsletter. You will immediately notice that this is a very thick/long issue, with lots of interesting (I hope) reading. I am very grateful to all the writers and photographers who have contributed articles and images. Special appreciation is due to three "guest photographers" Jared Hobbs donated the beautiful images of White-headed Woodpeckers; many of you will know Jared for his 2007 book that celebrates the Spotted Owl. Hank Tseng, who contributed the Common Loon image on page one has provided many bird images to local natural history publications. Amanda Lahaie of the Vermillion Forks Naturalists (Princeton) sent us her splendid images of the Great Grey Owl.

This issue includes accounts of the field trips that took place in conjunction with the Princeton Conference. Be aware that in order to save space in the Newsletter, bird species lists for all these trips will be available on the BCFO web-site in an Appendix to this Newsletter. If you cannot access the website, please get in touch with Mark or myself and we will forward lists to you by other means. We have included two "parallel" accounts of the Princeton Conference Extension Trip: one from the perspective of trip leader Russ Cannings, and the other from the perspective of participant Adrian Leather.

Also in this issue, you will find the first of a series of columns by BCFO member Clive Keen (Prince George) -- "The Reflective Birder". Clive will present his thoughts on points to ponder – and you may or may not agree with his conclusions. (Letters to Editor welcomed!)

Another item in this issue that also will likely be the start of a series is by BCFO member Anne Murray. Ann writes a monthly column for a Metro-Vancouver-area on-line newspaper. It features current issues about birds, conservation, and related topics. We will include in the Newsletter articles likely to be of interest to birders throughout the province – with apologies for 'double posting' to some Vancouver area members.

And last but not least, my thanks to John Sprague and Jude Grass for proof reading this issue.

Yes, make time to get out there and enjoy the birds – but don't forget to read your Newsletter!.

June Ryder

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In the June newsletter, there was an interesting review by M. Church, explaining how invasive earthworms were damaging forest communities and some resident birds. The invasive earthworms were decreasing the natural leaf litter in forests, with very bad effects on nutrient cycles and the natural flora and fauna.

However, there was a little slip in the wording that could give readers an incorrect impression. The review stated that "Earthworms are not native to North America." It is quite true that there were no native earthworms in those areas of North America which had been covered by the glaciers. Not surprisingly, the worms had apparently been killed off by the glaciers.

However, of about 180 species of earthworms which live in North America today, about two thirds are native species. The rest are Eurasian invaders, as described in the review. The native species survived in parts of the USA that were free of glaciation (and further south). Those native species failed to recolonize areas which had been glaciated. In particular, much of Canada's northern forest was without earthworms before the European colonists.

John B. Sprague

Reply from M.Church

I wish to thank Mr. Sprague for his helpful letter, which is correct in all respects. I had carelessly assumed that readers would identify 'Earthworm' with the invasive *Lumbricus terrestris* (the common earthworm most of us frequently seen). *Mea culpa.*

Juvenile House Finches *Peter Candido*

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Compiled by Martin K. McNicholl, Wayne C. Weber and Jude Grass

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/ornithol/birdmeet.html.

EVENTS IN 2012:

Sept. 1-2 - - BCFO SALMON ARM FIELD TRIP. Contact: Ted Hillary, 1740 -16 St. NE, Salmon Arm, B.C.; phone (250) 832-4755; e-mail: tedhillary@shaw.ca.

Sept. 27-30 - - B.C. NATURE FALL GENERAL MEETING, Nanoose Bay & Parksville area, Vancouver Island.; phone (250) 468-7475; e-mail: bcnaturefgm12@gmail.com; web-site: http://www.arrowsmithnats.org .

Sept. 29 - - ROCKY POINT BIRD OBSERVATORY SEMI-PELAGIC TRIP, Strait of Juan de Fuca.
Contact: Jeremy Kimm [no address, phone number or e-mail announced]; web-site: www.rpbo.org/trips/php.

Oct. 1-6 - - B.C. NATURE LILLOOET CAMP, Contact: Vivian Birch-Jones, Box 1065, Lillooet, B.C. V0K 1V0; phone (250) 256-4062; e-mail: vivianbj@telus.net; web-site: http://www.lilooetnaturalistsociety.org.

Oct. 14 - - NATURE VANCOUVER PICNIC, Lighthouse Park, West Vancouver. Contact: Nellie Bacou, c/o Nature Vancouver, Box 3021, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 3X5; phone (604) 221-1620; e-mail: nellieba@telus.net; web-site: www.naturevancouver.ca

Oct. 16-18 - - THIRD INTERNATIONAL RUSTY BLACKBIRD WORKING GROUP, Plymouth, MA. Contact details not yet announced.

Nov. 3-4 - - BCFO VICTORIA, B.C. & PORT ANGELES FERRY FIELD TRIP. Contact: Mike McGrenere, 1178 Sunnygrove Terrace, Victoria, BC V8Y 2V9; phone (250) 658-8624; e-mail: mmcgrenere@shaw.ca

EVENTS IN 2013:

Jan. 27-31 - - 6TH NORTH AMERICAN DUCK SYMPOSIUM: ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION OF NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL, Mississippi State University. Contact: Richard M. Kaminiski, Endowed Chair in Wetlands & Waterfowl Conservation, Mississippi State University; phone (662) 325-2623; e-mail: rkaminski@cfr.msstate.edu OR J. B. Davis, Waterfowl & Wetland Ecol., Mississippi State Univ.; phone (662) 325-4790; e-mail: bdavis@cfr.msstate.edu.

Mar. 7-10 - - 2013 WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING, Williamsburg, VA. Contact: Dan Cristol, Dept. Biol., College of William & Mary, Box 8795, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795; phone (757) 221-2405/6483; e-mail: dacris@wm.edu .

May 2-5 - - B.C. NATURE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Abbotsford, B.C. Hosted by the Abbotsford- Mission Nature Club. Contact information not yet announced

May 10 – 12 - - SKAGIT VALLEY BIRD BLITZ. Skagit Valley Provincial Park. e-mail: info@hopemountain.org Web: www.hopemountain.org

June 14 – 16 - - MANNING PARK BIRD BLITZ. Manning Provincial Park. e-mail: info@hopemountain.org Web: www.hopemountain.org

June 20 – 23 - - BIRDLIFE WORLD CONGRESS, Ottawa, Ont. Contact information not yet announced.

Sep. 24-29 - - 37TH ANNUAL MEETING, WATERBIRD SOCIETY & 2013 ANNUAL CONFERENCE, WADER STUDY GROUP, Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Contact: [names, addresses, phone number and e-mails not yet announced] web-site: http://www.waterbirds.org .

Oct. 21 – 25 - - 2013 RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL MEETING WITH NEOTROPICAL RAPTOR NETWORK & WORLD WORKING GROUP ON BIRDS OF PREY AND OWLS, Bariloche, Argentina. Contact: Libby Mojica [no address or phone number yet announced]; e-mail: ekmojica@wm.edu.

EVENTS IN 2014:

August 26TH INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS, Tokyo, Japan. Contact: Erik Matthysen [address and phone number not yet announced] e-mail: erik.matthysen@ua.ac.be OR Keisuke Ueda [address and phone number not yet announced] e-mail: keisuke@rikkyo.ac.ip .

B.C. BIRDING NEWS BRIEFS

Compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

Bird-Related Nature Vancouver Awards

Awards at the 2012 Annual General Meeting of Nature Vancouver (Vancouver Natural History Society) related entirely or partially to contributions to the study and/or conservation of birds were the Kaye and Charles Ney Award to former Birding Section Chair and society President Adrian Grant Duff, who frequently leads birding field trips and has been organizing the Vancouver Christmas Bird Count in recent years, and the Davidson Award for Conservation to Pat Miller and Virginia Hayes for their work on promoting habitat restoration and nature documentation in Hastings Park through the Hastings Park Sanctuary, including monthly nature walks. -- based on e-mail message of 30 April 2012 to VNHS members.

Nature Vancouver Scholarship

Jay Brogan of Simon Fraser University was awarded Nature Vancouver's annual scholarship at the 2012 VNHS annual general meeting for M.Sc. studies on possible effects of persistent organic pollutants on Cooper's Hawks in the B.C. "lower mainland." – based on e-mail of 30 April 2012 to VNHS members.

COSEWIC Ratings of B.C. Birds

All bird species assessed at the latest meeting of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada in May 2012 occur at least casually in B.C. Threatened status was continued for Marbled Murrelet and recommended for two races of the Western Screech-Owl. Buff-breasted Sandpiper was recommended for Species of Special Concern Status. Hooded Warbler was "down-listed" from Threatened to "Not at Risk," while Baird's Sparrow moved in the opposite direction from "Not at Risk" to Special Concern. – based on Anonymous. *Bird Studies Canada News* 18 May 2012.

2012 Baillie Award

Ph.D. student Stefanie Lazerte of the University of Northern B.C. is the recipient of the 2012 James L. Baillie Award of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists for her thesis on the effects of noise and urbanization on communication in Mountain and Black-capped chickadees. – based on I. Warkentin. 2012. *Picoides* 25(2):8-10.

Plastics in Northern Fulmars

Over 92% of Northern Fulmars collected in 2009 on beaches along the west coast of Vancouver Island by B.C. Beached Bird Survey participants in collaboration with Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada and others, had candy wrappers, styrofoam, twine or other plastics in their stomachs, according to a paper in press co-authored by Karen Barry in *Marine Pollution Bulletin.* – based on Anonymous. *Bird Studies Canada Latest News* 6 July 2012:3.

BC BIRDING NEEDS YOUR SUBMISSIONS

BCFO's newsletter can accommodate a variety of materials – something for everyone. Items range from very short notes to articles of several pages. Here are some examples of the kinds of items you can contribute:

- short note (e.g. 1 – 2 paragraphs) about an interesting sighting, unexpected encounter, observed bird behaviour, early morning walk, or other birding experience;
- a single photograph with a short or longer (paragraph) caption;
- photo story (several related photos with a short text);
- if you have recently discovered an interesting book (preferably about birds) that you would like to bring to the attention of other birders, send in a paragraph saying why you like it.
- description of a special day's birding or account of a birding event (Christmas Bird Count, Big Day, Big Backyard Bird Watch; Bio-Blitz);
- a short birding guide to one of your favourite areas, or to a local nature reserve, or a city park;
- information about a conservation issue in your home area;
- summary of an article from another birding magazine or a scientific publication (but don't copy it word for word);
- sketches, drawings, cartoons;
- letter to editor;
- description of a BCFO field trip (conference and/or "two-day field trips"). We like to include a report from every BCFO field trip. This can be done by a participant or by the leader.

NOTE: We need material from *you* to keep our newsletter interesting, to keep in touch, and to report on what is happening around the province. Whether a life-long birder or new to birding, we will be happy to hear from you.

GLENN RYDER WINS THE STEVE CANNINGS AWARD

The Steve Cannings Award is an annual award presented by BC Field Ornithologists for exceptional contributions to ornithology in British Columbia, which can include research on or documentation of the birds of any part of British Columbia, public education about birds, or contributions to the conservation of birds or bird habitat. It honours the memory of the late Steve Cannings of Penticton, who was a renowned amateur ornithologist, nature photographer, and conservationist.

This year, the BCFO Awards Committee has recommended that the Steve Cannings Award be presented to Glenn Ryder of Langley, long-time amateur ornithologist, bird artist, and naturalist.

Glenn is a knowledgeable and skilled field observer, not only of birds, but also of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and plants. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing to the present, he has kept detailed field journals of birds and other natural history subjects, and these probably span a longer time period than those of any other observer in BC. They cover many areas of BC, but especially the Lower Fraser Valley where he has spent most of his life. Most of Glenn's bird notes are on file at the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies in Victoria. Many of his records have been submitted to the BC Conservation Data Centre, and others have been very valuable in environmental assessment studies for various development projects in BC.

Glenn is also a talented artist. His drawing of a Crested Myna adorned the front of several editions of the Vancouver bird checklist, and his drawings have been published in a number of books, including nearly all the bird drawings in *Nature West Coast as seen in Lighthouse Park*, published by the Vancouver Natural History Society.

Glenn has never been a prolific writer, but he has authored or co-authored a number of articles on birds, mammals, and herptiles, including an article in the most recent issue of *Wildlife Afield*.

To quote Phil Henderson, who has worked with Glenn a lot in recent years: "Glenn has a gift for observation and discovery. His notes and records are a result of frequency of outings, keen observational skills, incessant curiosity, patience, an unflappable code of ethics, and a true love of and fascination for all living organisms. (It must be said, however, that Glenn has a special fondness for and knowledge of owls, especially Western Screech-Owls, for which he provides and maintains nest boxes in several areas of the Fraser Valley.) Glenn's observations also result from characteristics and abilities less tangible, an attitude, or for lack of a better description and at risk of sounding trite, a spiritual affinity with nature. Glenn's quiet and persistent efforts to document native animals and plants, his reverence for nature and distaste for all that destroys it, are inspiring and point us all in the right direction."

Glenn was not able to attend this meeting*, but we take great pleasure in announcing this award, and we plan to present it to him very soon at a suitable occasion in Langley.

* BCFO AGM in Princeton, June 2, 2012.

Steve Cannings Award presentation to Glenn Ryder at a Langley Field Naturalists Summer Social. From left to right: Bob Puls (LFN President), Glenn Ryder, Al Grass, Jude Grass, and Dr. Fred Bunnell.

TWO-DAY FIELD TRIPS FOR MEMBERS – 2012

ONLY ONE TRIP REMAINS FOR THE 2012 SEASON!

VICTORIA AND PORT ANGELES FERRY

November 3-4, 2012
Our first waterborne two-day field trip will be a unique event. Day 1, pelagic birds from the "Coho" Ferry in Juan de Fuca Strait. Day 2, rocky coast shorebirds and other Victoria specialties.

Contact: Mike McGrenere email: mmgrenere@shaw.ca phone: 250 658 8624

*Two-day field trips for members are **BCFO** led, but participants make their own arrangements for accommodation, food, and travel.*
***Day 1**: am birding; pm birding, and evening get together (see below).*
***Day 2**: am birding; pm optional birding.*
Carpooling for birding will be arranged on the morning of Day 1.

Register in advance
***Important:** Register **at least** two weeks in advance. Email or phone the trip leader, advising the names and numbers of participants. The leader will advise specifically when and where to meet.*
If needed, additional leaders will be recruited to keep group sizes small.

Cost per two-day event
Members: $10.00 per person
Non-members: $40.00 incl. BCFO membership*
** Note: BCFO general memberships are family memberships*

The Social Side
At the end of Day 1, where possible, leaders will make arrangements for participants to meet for dinner at a nearby restaurant to recap the day, tally species seen, and confirm arrangements for Day 2.

Black Oystercatchers *MH*

The Reflective Birder #1

Clive Keen

A Cooper's Hawk grabs a bird on your feeder and you (pick one):

A) rush pell-mell to rescue the squawking victim;

B) grin and grab your camera;

C) are immobilized with existential angst.

Me, I'm definitely a C-type personality. Not because I have no sympathy with the A's: the instinctive rescuers. The urge to rescue something that emphatically doesn't want to be eaten is extraordinarily powerful. Few can wholly resist it I'm glad to say, even if the instinct isn't really defensible. I certainly have a lot less affinity with the B-type personalities, especially when they argue that predators are "serving a necessary function by keeping prey populations healthy through natural selection." That line just doesn't work on me. It's precisely the weak, the sick, the naive, the elderly, the injured, that I feel most protective about. I once had a ragged one-legged blackbird hanging round my feeder, and suspect I'd have defended it with a bazooka if some big hulk of a hawk had tried to turn it into dinner.

But perhaps not. Because in truth, I'd have been immobilized with existential angst. Cooper's Hawks have to eat too. So do their chicks. Would some chick have starved because its mum's hunt had been spoiled by a broom-wielding houseowner? I'm told that being a predator is a tough way to make a living – that most predators spend much of their time on the edge of starvation, and the majority of their young die of malnourishment. And it would surely be a poorer world if there were no wolves, no lynx, no cougars, no martens, no Cooper's Hawks swooping down on my or your feeder.

We have no choice but to stare reality in the face, even if we aren't enchanted with what we see.

Once upon a time, I was out walking with my wife when we saw a Great Horned Owl at the base of a tree. It didn't have the strength to fly away. Being naive youngsters, we picked up the owl, took it home, and tried to give it some succour. Guess what I tried to feed it? Sausages. Probably vegetarian sausages at that. When we took it to a wildlife rehabilitation centre, we were quietly appalled that they gave it live mice to eat. It was a wake-up call. Mother Nature just wasn't raised in The Disney Home for Cuddly Bunnies.

In an ideal world, we might come to a compromise. We'd put up a sign by our feeders saying "You're welcome to eat the cowbirds, starlings and house sparrows so long as I'm not at home and can't watch, but please leave anything rare, or particularly pretty, or with big sad eyes." Hawks, though, can't read.

And in truth, Pete Dunne had it right when he wrote about raptors visiting our feeders. "*We have no standing in this.*" Those are the wisest words I've ever read on the issue. It is a huge but natural mistake to think we can improve on them.

BIRD COMPASS: PART 2

We recently learned (*BC Birding*: June 2012) that the locus of birds' ability to sense Earth's magnetic field as a long-distance navigation guide does not, as formerly proposed, reside in specialized cells in the bird's beak (at least, not in pigeons' beaks). But scientists don't give up easily. They are now attempting to track the birds' magnetic field sensing ability from the other end – the receptor neurons in the bird's brain that receive the magnetic signals. Investigators have recorded electrical signals from some 300 neurons in a part of a pigeon's brain that processes sensory inputs from the bird's inner ear and found that some of them responded systematically to variations in the orientation and intensity of an artificially applied magnetic field of strength comparable to that of Earth. Individual neurons fire in response to information about the direction and intensity of the field. It is suspected (but not confirmed) that cells in the inner ear are able to sense the orientation of magnetite crystals incorporated into the cell. It is now up to the pigeon physiologists to search for such structures.

The cells are thought to reside in the 'lagena', an otolith organ in the inner ear possessed by mammals that do not bear live young (e.g., egg-layers). No hope, then, for a human built-in compass. The reporters of this work also point out that the ancestors of pigeons and songbirds diverged in evolution more than 50 million years ago, hence what is learned from pigeons may not be true of all birds.

Reference: Wu, L-Q and Dickman, J.D. 2012. Neural correlates of a magnetic sense. Science 336: 1054-1057. Commentary by M. Winklhofer, An avian magnetometer: pp.991-2. Summary by M.Church

REDUCING BIRD-KILL AT WINDOWS

John B. Sprague

Collisions are important

We are all aware of bird mortalities when they hit windows, towers, glass skyscrapers, power lines, and even the new windmills. Figure 1 shows the horrendous kill of migrating birds by big buildings in the city. As a cause of dwindling populations of birds, collisions might be second only to habitat destruction. A conservative estimate is one billion dead birds a year from collisions with buildings and glass in the USA, according to Dr. Daniel Klem who studied this for 34 years (see references at end). The estimate is confirmed by data from Project Feeder Watch. This astonishing number averages about 2.7 million per day! We might take that as a rough estimate for North America. There is some question about the importance of this for declining populations (Arnold and Zink 2011, Bird 2012) but to say the least, it cannot be beneficial.

Figure 1. Birds that hit buildings in Toronto, collected by volunteers of FLAP. From Sheppard 2011.

People still speak of the Exxon Valdez oil spill which was 23 years ago. The media have called it "a world-class environmental disaster". Birds were the most notable victims and some 300,000 were killed. But consider that media coverage is almost zero for collisions, a much greater slaughter. Collisions during the 23 years would be equivalent to bird deaths from some 77,000 Valdez oil spills! On average, each and every day, collisions are equivalent to the kill from nine Valdez-type spills.

House windows

The windows on millions of houses across North America add up to contribute an important part of the total slaughter. Houses vary, but one in the USA was documented with 33 strikes per year. Most of us have been saddened by collisions, and we might be unaware of the total for our house – for example an unnoticed body might be carried off at night by racoons.

About three-quarters of all birds that collide with windows die. Half of them die quickly, almost always from head trauma and internal bleeding (not from broken necks). The other half seem to recover and fly away, but studies show that every second one dies later of internal causes. (You might recall a similar thing in 2009 when a famous actress fell while skiing, seemed okay and refused medical aid, but some days later she died in hospital from internal bleeding in the head.)

Two problems with windows

Glass kills because it is transparent, but also because it reflects. In some lighting conditions, glass is invisible. A bird might think that two windows meeting at a corner looked like a short cut. Windows on opposite sides of a house might look like a "tunnel" through the obstruction. Many bird species are accustomed to zooming through narrow openings in the woods and flying around obstacles, so they might go full speed ahead into such windows. They might even see a big potted plant behind the window, and head for it.

The other problem is that in certain lights, windows show excellent reflections. It might be a reflection of the sky, or an inviting habitat with trees as shown in Figure 2. Once again, a bird might go full speed ahead toward that habitat. Sticking something on the inside of a window does nothing to reduce the kill from reflections.

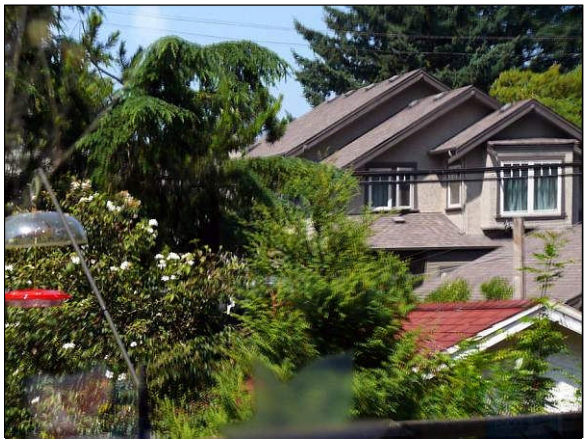


Figure 2. A spectacular reflection of bird habitat in the kitchen window of our editor, June Ryder. Photo: J.M. Ryder.

General comments on remedies

The only answer is to make glass visible to birds. There are several ways; it depends on how much decoration you can tolerate on windows, how many dollars you think birds are worth, and how much time you want to spend building a system. First of all

identify the windows with greatest problems, and apply remedies to them.

Some supposed remedies fail. As mentioned, things *inside* the window do not solve the problem of reflections (for example, drawing patterns inside with a marking pen). Sticking one of those black silhouettes of a hawk inside the window just doesn't work. Other demonstrated failures are owl decoys, blinking lights, or a small hanging plant or set of wind chimes outside the window (Bird 2000). General categories of remedies are reviewed below.

Layout and Design

- If you have bird feeders, birdbaths or nest boxes**, put them either very far away or very close to windows.** Research has shown that deaths increase with distance up to at least 10 metres away, so use more than 10 metres. Or instead, place the attraction **within** a metre of the window – then a bird will seldom build up enough momentum for injury.

- Don't plant a lot of trees or bushes close to big areas of glass.

- White cloth drapes, or blinds, have been shown to help. They stop birds from seeing a pathway through, but they won't cure the outside reflection and they only work when closed.

- In design phase, substitute skylights or glass bricks for some windows. Commercial tinted glass is not suitable -- it reflects. A special type of glass called Ornilux, visible to birds, is becoming available in North America (see below). If installing ordinary glass panels, slant them downward as much as 20° instead of vertical, so they reflect the ground instead of sky. (We did that when building regulations required glass around our deck – it may be of some small benefit.)

Netting or screens

This can be completely effective**.** The best home-made system I have seen was done by Wil Mayhew on Salt Spring Island. He stretched netting on simple frames and held it out from the windows (Figure 3). He used pairs of cedar slats at top and bottom of each window. Top and bottom of the netting were glued and stapled between two slats as sandwiches. Slats were held out from the window frames by 6-inch screws inside 4-inch tubes (he used tubes cut from bamboo). Birds will see the netting when they get close enough, but if they do not, they will bounce off harmlessly in trampoline style. The netting *(Utility Netting)* was purchased at a local garden supply store. It is fine black plastic strands in a pattern of ¾-inch squares. It was $20 for a roll 2.1 metres by 15.2 m (7 x 50 feet), which should cover a lot of windows.

Figure 3. Pair of wooden slats holding netting at the bottom of a small window at the home of Wil Mayhew.

The Mayhew system is not objectionable in appearance from outside, and the view from inside is excellent – one can hardly notice the netting (Figure 4). Other types of frames might be conceived and built with similar good results (Zickefoose 2009).

Figure 4. View out a picture window at the Wil Mayhew residence. The netting is faintly visible in the original photo but has little aesthetic effect.

Similar plastic netting such as *Bird d-Fence* should be available at many garden and hardware stores. The best might be *Ross Tree Netting*, a fine-gauge diamond-pattern black nylon net. Not offered in Canada, packages are sold on many U.S. web sites such as www.rachelsrobin.com in Michigan. Outward view through the tree netting is apparently excellent and a bird-artist in Ohio reports that she even takes good photos through it. A complete assembled screen kit is offered for $US 22.50 per small window at www.birdscreen.com. Screening is held out from the window by hooks or suction cups. Again, vision out is little affected, according to the manufacturer. Cost would increase for bigger windows or many windows, and purchasing from the USA can become

expensive with delivery charges, and prohibitive broker's fees are added by some courier companies.

A simpler alternative would be to tack netting directly onto the window-frame, but this would lack the trampoline effect.

Film on the glass

A special film called *CollidEscape* is a most elegant remedy – apparently effective but costly. It is applied on the outside of glass to reduce reflections and transparency. From outside, it appears like sand-blasting but you still enjoy the view from inside because thousands of small perforations allow light to pass. Indeed, you can observe birds at a close-in feeder without frightening them. Its life-span is said to be three years or longer. Cost is $US 50 for a piece 3 x 4.5 feet. Expensive, but cost might be reduced by using it at only a few of the most important windows. To investigate, visit the manufacturer at www.collidescape.org or to purchase from the USA, go to www.duncraft.com/CollidEscape-Full-Window-Protector

Canadian nature shops may carry other items to stick on the outside. A common one is *WindowAlert* which is a pattern (maple leaf) the size of your hand which reflects ultra-violet light. Birds have good perception of u.v. so they see this pattern as a barrier. From inside, it looks like a slightly sand-blasted leaf pattern. I cannot vouch for the effectiveness but have heard good reports. There are four leaves in a package for $6. There would have to be enough of them to cover most of the window (see distance guidelines below), so there would be some cost to this method.

Also in shops, you might find a stick-on which looks like a 20-cm spider web. There is a white bar in the centre which you have probably noticed in some real webs. The manufacturer says that orb spiders have evolved this to keep birds from destroying their webs, and that birds have evolved to avoid the white bar and its web. Information is at www.drollyankees.com. Here also, I cannot vouch for effectiveness.

Recently available is window glass called *Ornilux* with a patterned ultra-violet reflective coating. It is transparent yet gives proven protection from bird-strikes. It could be used for renovations or new construction. The glass was developed in Germany, is now available in North America, and has apparently been used in Canada. It is said to be available as laminated glass or as a double-glazed insulated unit with a low-E or solar control coating, thus offering both energy efficiency and bird strike protection. A web-site with supplier contacts is www.ornilus.com/contact.html or phone (805) 895.9436.

Stuff hanging or taped outside

Many things works but you might not want them. Ribbons, decorative ropes or strings of ornaments have to be 5 centimetres apart for the full width of the glass, obscuring the view. There are also ready-made commercial items called *FeatherGuards* (www.featherguard.com) which are poultry feathers stuck onto a string. Shimmering coloured decorations or old CDs are other options. Some items might have short lives, and would be rather annoying during a windstorm.

Similarly, strips of outdoor tape down the glass would be very effective, but would also interfere with the view. Tape must be contrasting. Vertical tape 2 cm wide must be no more than 10 cm apart (or 1-cm tape 5 cm apart). If horizontal, strips must be 5 cm apart. These measurements apply to any patterns on the outside of a window; if further apart, small birds would be accustomed to flying through such a gap. Insulating tape and non-reflective adhesive tape offer good protection but do not last very long. BirdLife Switzerland sells tape called *Birdstripes* (rolls of 10 metres for 10 Swiss francs) if you are willing to shop online in French or German at www.birdlife.ch/en/shop_d (that's an underscore before the final d).

June Ryder has used wavy lines drawn on the outside of the window with the corner of a bar of soap. This would be easy and especially useful if you wanted to have protection in a hurry. The same measurements would apply.

Sources of information and references

People with computer connections can get a lot more details from the Toronto organization FLAP (www.flap.org).

For a really huge compendium, intended for designers, go to: Sheppard, C. 2011. *Bird-Friendly Building Design*. American Bird Conservancy, The Plains, Virginia, 58p.

www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/collisions/pdf/Bird-friendly_Building_Guide_WEB.pdf

Arnold, T. and R. Zink 2011. Collision mortality has no discernible effect on population trends of North American Birds. *Plos One* 6(9). www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0024708

Bird, David M. 2000. A reflection on window kills. *Bird Watcher's Digest*, July/August 2000: 76-84. [A general discussion]

Bird, David M. 2012. The impact of impacts. *Bird Watcher's Digest*, January-February 2012: 108-113.

Klem, D., Jr. 1990. Bird injuries, cause of death, and recuperation from collisions with windows. *Journal of Field Ornithology,* 61(l):115-119.
[For treatment to increase the chance of initial recovery, place survivors in a protected enclosure

isolated from excessive external stimulation. Keep the enclosure warm and provide the bird with food and water.]

Klem, D. Jr. 2008. Bird window-kills and window-kill records. *Winging It*, December 2008: 21. [Newsletter of the American Birding Association]

Klem, D.L. Jr., Keck, D.C., Marty, K.L., Miller Ball, A.J., Niciu, E.E. and Platt, C.T. 2004. Effects of window angling, feeder placement, and scavengers on avian mortality at plate glass. *Wilson Bulletin,* 116(1): 69–73.

Veltri, C.J. and D. Klem Jr. 2005. Comparison of fatal bird injuries from collisions with towers and windows. *Journal of Field Ornithology,* 76(2):127–133.

Youth, H. 2003. Winged messengers. The decline of birds. *Worldwatch Institute*, *Worldwatch paper no*. 165: 72 p. [Broad and learned information]

Zickefoose, J. 2009. A solution to window strikes. Thinking about thunking. *Bird Watcher's Digest*, March/April 2009: 80-87.

For further details on sources of information, contact John at 250.537.0760 or sssprague@shaw.ca.

MISTLETOE IS A KEYSTONE SPECIES

Anyone looking for a little romance at Christmas time knows that. But mistletoe (of which there are several families) turns out to be a keystone species in a rather more fundamental sense. Two Australian scientists conducted a controlled experiment (no mean feat in the wild) by identifying woodlands infested with mistletoe. They surveyed bird populations in the woodlands through the seasons for two years. Then they cleared mistletoe from one group of woodlands, leaving another group as control. They maintained the manipulated woodland clear of mistletoe for three years, and then resurveyed the birds. They found that the number of species present in the 'sanitized' woodland had declined by 20%. In fact, there were now 25% fewer species present than in the control woodlands because of the recruitment of additional species to the latter (likely because of the end of drought conditions in the interim).

Mistletoebird (male) *David Cook, Wikipedia*

One obvious defector was the mistletoebird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*), a species of flowerpecker native to most of Australia that feeds almost exclusively on mistletoe berries. Species that prefer to nest in mistletoe growths also left. But many other species not obviously dependent on mistletoe disappeared too. Mistletoe is a parasite that weakens or kills its host species, exposing the wood to infestations of wood-boring insects and other invertebrates. It is also a prolific producer of leaf litter, which enhances the forest floor as a productive zone of insects and small invertebrates relied on by insectivorous birds. Hence, mistletoe mediates food opportunities for many species. A species that influences the structure of an entire ecosystem in this way is a 'keystone species'. So it is with mistletoe.

Mistletoebird (female) *Rhonda Hansch, Wikipedia*

The story makes one wonder about the wisdom of indiscriminate removal in our environment of such reviled species as blackberry which, plainly, is used by many species of small songbirds.

Based on an item in The Economist (14 July, 2012), in turn reporting on a paper in Proceedings of the Royal Society, B, by David Watson and Matthew Herring. Summary and comment by M.Church

BCFO TWO-DAY FIELD TRIP – MERRITT AREA – May 31 & June 1, 2012

June Ryder – text and photos

This trip was scheduled for the two days prior to the BCFO Annual Conference (in Princeton) so that members travelling to the conference could maximize their birding in the southwestern corner of BC's dry Interior Plateau. The trip was led by Les Gyug, with back-up from Alan Burger (who lives near Merritt and is the local Regional Coordinator for the BC Breeding Bird Atlas). Trip participants were: Roger Sims, Jerry McFetridge, Adrian Leather, Brian Self, Mike Fung, Jo Ann MacKenzie, Marg Cuthbert, David Riley, Mark Habdas, Robyn Abear, Marian Porter, June Ryder.

On May 31, we (14 people in 4 vehicles) spent the day birding the less-travelled back roads east of Merritt. Weather was mostly sunny with a few clouds. We made numerous stops in a variety of habitats, ranging from sagebrush hillsides and rolling grasslands (still green with moisture from last winter's thick snowpack) to extensive wetlands. We visited many small lakes and marshes, and drove through parkland with aspen copses and scattered pine. Highlights included a Clay-colored Sparrow seen only briefly, but his loud 'electrical' buzzes were well-heard by all.

The Laurie Guichon Memorial Grasslands Interp-retation Site, a small lake with an adjacent patch of woodland, was as interesting as ever. A House Wren provided background music while we watched brilliant Ruddy Ducks, and Bufflehead, Red-winged and Yellow-headed blackbirds, Dusky Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, and Marsh Wren. Barn Swallows flew back and forth to their nests under the viewing platform. Cassin's Finch and Least Flycatcher were seen from the adjacent gravel road. I'm always surprised by the variety of birds in this small conservation area.

Viewing platform at the Laurie Guichon site

A brief stop beside the Nicola River to look for Dipper, instead, turned up Vaux's Swift and Belted Kingfisher.

In the early afternoon we visited Beaver Ranch Flats, a Wildlife Conservation Project of Ducks Unlimited. This site, a few kilometres north of Nicola Lake, encompasses extensive wet marshlands and is one of the finest places in the Nicola area to see waterfowl and other marsh birds. We recorded Redhead, Blue-winged and Cinnamon teal, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Northern Shoveler, Eared Grebe, Sora, Black Tern, and other marsh birds.

From here, we headed up into the extensive grasslands of the Douglas Lake area. Typical ranchland birds found here (and elsewhere throughout the day) included Vesper Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Black-billed Magpie, Western Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird, and several distant Swainson's Hawks. At pothole ponds and pocket marshes with adjacent thickets and patches of woodland we found Yellow Warbler, a Great Blue Heron, and Western and Eastern kingbirds. There were Cliff Swallows hawking over the river at the upper Nicola bridge, and Canvasback amongst other waterfowl and a Wilson's Phalarope at a small lake. We spotted several Turkey Vultures, and then found a Bald Eagle nest with two downy young being fed by their parents. Strange sightings included a single Sandhill Crane resting in a field with a flock of Canada Geese. A Swainson's Hawk carrying prey and being chased by a Red-tail managed to shed its pursuer, and then landed on a rather distant post; scope views showed it plucking and scattering feathers from what appeared to be a Black Tern.

Keen birders went owling this evening and found the nest of a Northern Saw-whet Owl with a young bird obligingly peering out. Les told us that Williamson's Sapsucker had nested in this same tree for several years since 2006.

On June 1 we headed generally southward toward Princeton along Hwy 5 and Coalmont Rd, with two major detours: Kane Valley and the upper slopes of Mount Thynne. The area we traversed on this day, which lies along the eastern flanks of the Cascade Mountains, tends to be wetter than the ranchlands east of Merritt, so grasslands are limited and forested hillsides more common.

We drove about 15 km along the Kane Valley, stopping at several small lakes and marshes (see also Cover Story, p.3), and finding many species of waterfowl, marsh birds, and forest-edge passerines at each location. My quickly-jotted notes show that we found as many as 20 species at a single stop. New birds for the trip included Northern Pintail, Hooded Merganser, Wilson's Snipe, Pileated Woodpecker,

One of the many wetlands in the Kane Valley

Steller's Jay, Western Tanager, Red-naped Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee and Warbling Vireo. Light rain started, but did not detract from the birding. A Northern Waterthrush teased us by calling from a dense thicket, but eventually gave us some good views, while a Warbling Vireo sang nearby.

We returned to Hwy 5A and continued south through Aspen Grove, stopping briefly at Kidd Lake where we found more Black Terns and a Coot on its nest -- and the rain ceased.

Williamson's Sapsucker habitat – aspen woodland

We proceeded on to the Coalmont Rd and a site that, I think for all of us, turned out to be the high point of the two-day trip. We pulled over at a rather ordinary patch of aspen woodland but Les, based on his years of study in this area, assured us that this was where we would see Williamson's Sapsucker. And sure enough, after only a brief wait, we heard this woodpecker's distinctive drumming. Then a male appeared and all too quickly (for us) vanished into his nest hole – which we could see clearly from where we stood. Then the female arrived, just as the male departed—the two of them almost colliding at the entrance to the nest hole. What beautiful birds! As if this was not enough, while we waited for more sapsucker views, we saw Tree Swallow, House Wren and Northern Flicker all at their nest holes nearby in the aspens.

Leaving this site reluctantly, we started on our second detour by heading up a side road toward Brookmere, stopping briefly for Western Bluebird, and then a Townsend's Solitare: Alan discovered its nest with five eggs. Shortly, we crossed the line of the old Kettle Valley Railway (now the TransCanada Trail), and continued along a logging road toward Mount Thynne until we reached subalpine forest at about 1250 m elevation. We were hoping to find boreal birds, especially woodpeckers – American Three-toed and Black-backed – but strong wind and cold temperatures seemed to have reduced bird activity to zero. We did get a good look at an area where beetle-killed trees had been recently logged.

By now it was time to head back to Coalmont Road and on toward Princeton. We had time for a few short stops along the way. I headed for the three lakes north of Tulameen (Thynne, Frembd and Otter) where I monitor Common Loons for the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey. We regrouped at Coalmont -- hopeful…. but, in fact, two days too late to see a vagrant Blue Jay. Then on to Princeton in time to join up with old and new birding friends for the Friday evening social hour at the start of BCFO's annual conference.

Williamson's Sapsucker (male) *Les Gyug*

Note: A complete species list for this trip can be found on the BCFO website in the Appendix to this issue of BC Birding.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS FROM THE PRINCETON CONFERENCE

TRIP ONE: PRINCETON – SUMMERLAND ROAD, OSPREY LAKE

Madelon Schouten
Vermillion Forks Field Naturalists

Ed's Note: No report was available for this trip, so here is the description of birding possibilities along this route that was written before the conference for the information of potential trip participants.

We drive a secondary highway through grassland and forested areas, passing small lakes, ponds, marshes, and larger lakes such as Chain, Osprey, and Link. Hayes Creek runs alongside the road in many places. Elevation range is 650 to 1100 m; approximate distance is 45 km.

Leaving Princeton, we travel past landfill on the left with its usual visitors: Bald and occasional Golden eagles, ravens, crows and occasional large flocks of Brewer's Blackbirds (Rusty?).

The road slowly climbs into grassland. Waterfowl possible at Wayne Lake (on the left) include three species of teal, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck etc., and raptors: Red-tailed Hawk, occasional Harlan's Hawk, Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel. Separation Lake on the right may be productive if snow runoff is adequate; possible shorebirds are Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, early dowitchers. Also watch for Savannah, Vesper, Song and Lincoln's sparrows, Western Meadowlark, Eastern Kingbird, swallows (declining), especially Barn, Northern Rough-winged, Cliff and Bank; Tree and Violet Green are OK. Look for Vaux Swift along creeks, as well as Mountain and Western bluebirds, and Lazuli Bunting; Spotted Towhee is rare, and Gray Catbird is occasional. The usual woodpeckers are here, and in the last year, Lewis's have moved into

Western Tanager *MH*

the region. Also here are Cassin's Finch, Evening Grosbeak, Western.Tanager and Clark's Nutcracker. Along Hayes Creek look for Veery, Swainson's Thrush, and warblers: Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Nashville, McGillivray's, Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned and Wilson's; American Redstart and Townsend's are both rare.

Clark's Nutcracker in Madelon's garden, Princeton
Photo: Dennis Leonard

Wet meadows in a few locations attract Wilson's Snipe, Redwing and Brewer's blackbirds.

Closer to the big lakes (Osprey, Link and Chain) you can find Common Loon, Hooded Merganser, Great Blue Heron, Barrow's Goldeneye, and waterfowl mentioned above. Osprey nest here, as well as Bald Eagle. Varied Thrush and Hermit Thrush are possible. Over the past few years there have been sightings of Wild Turkey near Chain Lake. Seven flycatcher species occur here, as well as Black-headed Grosbeak (occasional), Red Crossbill, Northern Oriole, and chickadees and nuthatches of course.

Guides: Gregg and Terry Tellier and Madelon Schouten,

See Appendix to this issue (on BCFO website) for species seen on June 2 and 3.

TRIP TWO: IRON MOUNTAIN (BALDY), JUNE 2, 2012

Alan E. Burger

Twenty keen birders led by Trish Reid set out early for Iron Mountain, just a few kilometres northeast of Princeton. This rounded mountain, known locally as Baldy because of the absence of forest on its high crown, offers an exciting mix of habitats with great birding potential. Large expanses of grassland with groves of aspen are interspersed with forest dominated by conifers and rocky outcrops. Douglas-fir, lodgepole and ponderosa pine, and spruce are the common forest trees.

Great Gray Owl near Princeton

Alan Burger

Pockets of trembling aspen surrounded by grassland are important nesting sites for many birds and by visiting a few of these groves we soon added American Kestrel, several woodpecker species, Mountain Bluebird, Black-billed Magpie (with noisy nestlings), Tree Swallow, House Wren and many others to our outing lists. On the grasslands, Vesper Sparrows were numerous – providing a sound background quite unusual for birders from the coast.

Forsaking our cars, we hiked up into the coniferous and mixed coniferous/aspen forests. Birding here was mostly by ear and we soon added several warblers (Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, McGillivray's), flycatchers (Dusky, Hammond's, and even a Pacific Slope), Western Tanager, Ruffed Grouse, and even a lone Brown Creeper to the list. Warbling Vireo was common and a few Cassin's Vireos were encountered.

Returning to the lower grasslands we hiked along a valley bottom toward a rocky outcrop where we hoped to locate a Rock Wren. Climbing up the steep grassy slope towards the outcrop was hard work and we were not rewarded by any Rock Wren calls. But, as we turned to head back, one of us flushed a Dusky Grouse female which had several tiny chicks hiding in the grass. The agitated female stayed close by as we hastily retreated, but we all had great looks at this elusive species. As we drove back along the valley road a passing Lewis's Woodpecker gave those in the lead cars a brief glimpse before it headed over the hill.

With a little time left on our schedule we decided on a change of plan and our little convoy headed northeast of Princeton in search of Great Grey Owl. This species is known to have bred in the area in past years, but had not been seen there recently, so we knew it was a long shot but worth a try. At the spot recommended by Madelon Schouten we wandered about in a strange landscape of dense young aspen trees interspersed with a few giant ponderosa pine veterans. A big bird flushed but no-one was sure what it was. Minutes later a Great Grey Owl came floating through the trees to land on a low branch close to our group. For some of our group this was a life bird and for us all an exciting close view of a bird seldom seen in southern BC. A wonderful finale to a great morning of birding. We recorded a total of 64 species.

Mount Baldy participants *JMR*

TRIP THREE: KVR TRAIL ALONG THE TULAMEEN RIVER, JUNE 3, 2012

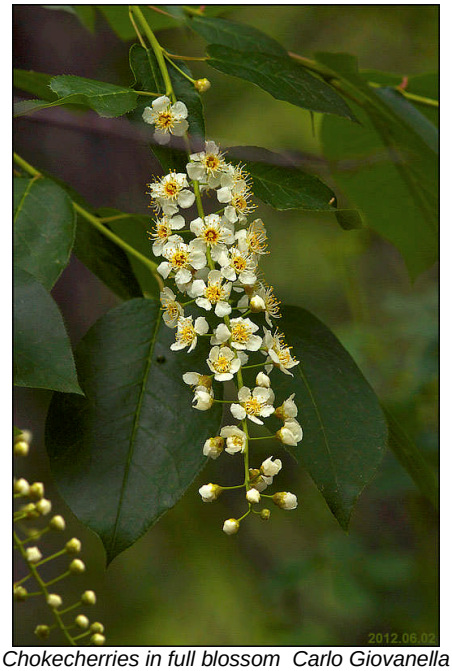
Carlo Giovanella and Viveka Ohman

This involved a delightful and leisurely walk along the KVR Trail, which follows the right-of-way of the historic Kettle Valley Railway (and is also the Trans-Canada Trail in this vicinity.) Our route joined the KVR on the edge of Princeton in the Similkameen Valley, then followed the old rail grade into the Tulameen Valley through a long tunnel (under Highway 3), and then continued northwestward along Tulameen River. Habitat along the river is mostly riparian with some open fields and stands of cottonwood, while the slopes above are typical of dry interior mixed forest (pines and Douglas-fir). We walked about 5 km to a group of interesting hoodoos, before retracing our route back into town. The trip was led by Amanda Lahaie, an enthusiastic young Princeton birder, who brought along an extra bonus -- her father Ed. Between them they provided excellent knowledge of the local birdlife, as well as a wealth of interesting information on the local history of railroading and mining.

MacGillivray's Warbler Carlo Giovanella

The Saturday group detected a total of 63 species, with Dick Cannings and George Clulow helping to locate and record the birds. There were no rare or unusual discoveries, but we did get great leisurely looks at several species that can often be difficult to observe, namely, MacGillivray's Warbler, Gray Catbird, and a Veery perched on a fence post. Other highlights included seven species of flycatchers: Western Kingbird, numerous Western Wood-Pewees, great views of a Least Flycatcher, and four other species of empids (Willow, Hammond's, Dusky and Pacific Slope). We also found Black-headed and Evening grosbeaks, Western Tanagers, and six species of swallows. The Rough-winged Swallows were seen entering and exiting their burrows on the river bank opposite the 'Vermillion Cliffs'. There was a single Common Merganser on the river.

Amanda and Ed pointed out a Red-tailed Hawk's nest with two youngsters aboard that they have been watching. Weather conditions were ideal for our purposes, with no wind and high overcast keeping us cool. Another non-bird highlight was seeing the 'Vermillion Cliffs', a sacred place for the indigenous peoples. These outcrops of reddish sedimentary rock supplied the ochre that was traded by the natives all through the region for use in painting their pictographs. Two busy beavers attracted our attention near the start of the walk; one galloped across our path in a most cumbersome manner. Flowers added significantly to the local ambiance, with chokecherries in full blossom putting on a grand display.



Chokecherries in full blossom Carlo Giovanella

Altogether a delightful trip: Princeton and its wonders will now become a stopover for many of us when birding in the Interior.

Checkerspot Butterfly Carlo Giovanella

TRIP 4: SEWAGE LAGOONS, AUGUST LAKE, COPPER MOUNTAIN ROAD, ALLENBY ROAD, JUNE 2, 2012

Jo Ann Mackenzie – text and photos

After an early breakfast, our group of 16 car-pooled and headed out with leaders Peter Antonick and Les Gyug. We turned south off Hwy 3 onto Copper Mountain Rd just east of Princeton, then took the first left to the sewage lagoons, which had many dabbling and diving ducks. A Pygmy Nuthatch was in the trees above our parked cars but hard to see in the early morning light; Mountain Bluebird and Eastern Kingbird were in the area.

Hammond's Flycatcher

Leaving the sewage lagoons, we returned to Hwy 3 east, continued a short distance then turned south onto Darcy Mountain Rd, which goes past the golf course and hay fields, and on to August Lake via West Ranch Rd. As we continued along West Ranch Rd, a Dusky Grouse emerged from roadside vegetation beside the lead car.

Vesper Sparrow

Possibly the "most wanted" bird for some of the group was Williamson's Sapsucker. With hay fields on our left (some elk were in a field) and ponderosa pines on our right, suddenly a male Williamson's Sapsucker flew into view and disappeared into a nest hole in the trunk of a ponderosa pine. Unfortunately, it came and went too quickly for a photo. As there were known to be seven or eight pairs of these sapsuckers along the road, we hoped for more sightings.

Ferguson Pond

We drove on past August Lake, finding Clark's Nutcracker, Vesper Sparrow, Western Kingbird, Western Tanager, Hammond's Flycatcher, Red-naped Sapsucker attacking a hydro pole, Red-breasted and White-breasted nuthatches, Mountain and Western bluebirds, and Red-tailed Hawk, but we had only glimpses of more Williamson's Sapsuckers.

Western Kingbird

Changing direction, we drove back to Copper Mountain Rd and stopped at Ferguson Pond where there were Cinnamon Teal, Yellow and Yellow-rumped warblers and Mountain Chickadees. The last stop was Allenby Rd. This was sagebrush habitat with potential, but there was little to be seen except Savannah Sparrow. We returned to the Princeton Auditorium for lunch. It was a good morning.

Red-naped Sapsucker

RAIN IN THE DESERT

The tale of the 2012 BCFO AGM Extension Field Trip to Southern Washington State (June 3-6)

Russell Cannings

As lunch wrapped up in the early afternoon of June 3rd, the British Columbia Field Ornithologists' AGM was coming to a close; it was time for 14 keeners (including myself) to keep the party rolling! After leading last year's extension field trip to Fort Nelson, I had the distinct pleasure of leading another one—this time to the interior of Washington State. Along the way we would be concentrating mainly on the birds of shrub-steppe and ponderosa pine habitats. Unfortunately poor weather made for some difficult and unpleasant birding at times, and thwarted our owling ambitions. Nevertheless, some fantastic birds and moments were had by all. Here's our report!

DAY 1: Princeton to Omak, USA

Unlike last year when we had two rented vans, this year we would be carpooling. So after organising the troops, our convoy left Princeton around 2 pm, eastward bound for the Chopaka border-crossing near the lower end of the Canadian Similkameen valley. Before passing through customs, we stopped in an extensive area of sagebrush where Brewer's Sparrow and Sage Thrasher (rare) occur in most years. Unfortunately both of these specialists eluded us on this particular afternoon, but we did get fantastic looks at a showy LARK SPARROW, and best of all was a singing CLAY-COLORED SPARROW (a scarce and irregular breeder in the area). After marvelling at the buzzy song of the male, I noticed some movement in a nearby sage and caught a glimpse of a bird running away along the ground. Intrigued, I checked the bush and sure enough—there was the nest! (4 eggs).

Clay-colored Sparrow R.Cannings

We rolled through US customs relatively unscathed. On the other side we had a nice comparison of large flycatchers as single WESTERN and EASTERN KINGBIRDS lined up along a fence-line beside a SAY'S PHOEBE. Next we headed south past the settlement of Nighthawk (where at least one vehicle saw a nighthawk!), then turned onto the Chopaka Rd which gives access to the rich riparian bottomlands of Champney Slough. Picture Road 22 near Osoyoos but on steroids, with groves of massive cottonwoods surrounded by willow-clad marshes, flooded hayfields, and a meandering creek that leads into the north end of Palmer Lake (of Ross's Gull 2011 fame). Along this road we were treated to scope views of several male BOBOLINKS, while our only HAIRY WOODPECKER of the trip flew past, and a GRAY CATBIRD sang from a willow thicket. Further up the road we stopped beneath a rocky cliff where the cascading song of a CANYON WREN greeted us and WHITE-THROATED SWIFTS chattered high overhead. BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAKS and LAZULI BUNTINGS added their songs to the mix, and a lone male Wood Duck swam in a nearby oxbow.

We still had an hour-long drive ahead of us so we piled back into the vehicles and headed more-or-less straight to our hotel in Omak. We made one stop along the east side of Palmer Lake, where we enjoyed close views of six species of swallows lined up on a power-line, while a CHUKAR called somewhere up on the bluff. After a long weekend of late nights and early mornings in Princeton, everyone was exhausted so the evening of owling was called off in favour of a decent sleep. Mexican food at Rancho Chico's was pretty tasty (at least mine was!), and we all fell asleep with dreams of white-capped cone-peckers dancing in our heads.

DAY 2: Omak to Yakima

After a good night's sleep we awoke rejuvenated and excited about the full day of birding that was to come. The weather however was decidedly less than ideal. Omak was shrouded in low clouds accompanied by a light but steady drizzle. Nothing we could do about that of course, so we headed up into the hills east of town for some pine forest birding.

When we arrived at the first patch of ponderosa pine (where I had seen a pair of White-headed Woodpeckers on two previous occasions), the drizzle appeared to be a bit heavier. On the plus side, there still seemed to be birds around, so we threw on our jackets and those who had brought umbrellas deployed them. (Who would have thought we'd need those in central Washington?) CASSIN'S FINCHES sang from the tops of the trees, while a male SPOTTED TOWHEE trilled from a nearby shrub. Then suddenly we heard the liquid *chilup-chilup* of a GRAY FLYCATCHER. This was a lifer for many in the group so we pranced around in the rain for a bit until we had it out in the open, tail wagging and all! While this was certainly a nice treat, the bird many people had on their minds was that previously alluded-to White-headed Woodpecker!

Supposedly this is part of the Sonoran desert?? R.Cannings

We hiked around in the woods for about 30 minutes until everyone's shoes were soaked through. Next we walked up and down the main road as well as a gravel access road to a few houses behind a small pond. The two ponds in the area produced some nice birds including a lone PIED-BILLED GREBE, a pair of RUDDY DUCKS, several RED-WINGED and YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRDS, and an AMERICAN COOT. A foraging NASHVILLE WARBLER gave us a good look, then best of all, a female VARIED THRUSH came down to the water's edge to drink!!! This is without

a doubt the first time I have observed Varied Thrush in this habitat at this time of year. By now they should all be up in the boreal forest sitting on eggs, and this one was in an open ponderosa pine forest surrounded by miles and miles of sagebrush plateau. Assuming she was a lost anomaly, I was even more astonished when a male started singing behind us! Not exactly a White-headed Woodpecker, but in some ways even more interesting to me… okay sorry!

The rain and lack of woodpeckers had started to affect the group's morale so I decided to try for some sagebrush/grassland species further up the road (we could always try for the woody later). Only a few kilometres beyond this small piney area, the road climbs onto a large plateau (part of the "Okanagan Highlands"), where all one can see for miles in any direction is sage. BREWER'S and VESPER SPARROWS are abundant here and we were pleased to get long and close views of both. Our other target was supposed to be a little harder… I am talking of course about the "secretive" GRASSHOPPER SPARROW. These little guys give their insect-like trills from grass-tussocks, and rarely perch high enough for a clear view. (*Note: If you have attended more than one Deep Purple concert in your life you may not even have a chance of hearing it.*) Today would be different though! Possibly because of the rain, there was a small scattering of sparrows feeding out in the open in a patch of short grass near an old outhouse. They seemed to all be Vespers but then I caught sight of a smaller bird that looked grasshopper-ish! It dashed behind a grass-tuft though and someone suggested it may have been a funky-looking Vesper. "This will solve it," I said, then played a short burst of its song on my phone. Instantly the bird flushed up and landed right at my feet, hopping around wildly as it tried to suss out where the intrusion had come from. I have seen roughly 60ish Grasshopper Sparrows in my life and I can confidently say this would make the top 3! *Oos* and a*hhs* all round!

Happy with our sparrow trio, and keen to get back into the dry, heated vehicles, we headed back down the hill for one last kick at the proverbial "white-headed can." The rain had eased up a bit but the undergrowth off the road was still soaked, so I decided to lead the group along the road in the opposite direction than before. Only a few minutes later… a sharp *chickachick!* came from about 100m off the road. "I just heard it! That's it!" But we couldn't see anything, so the whole group ran back up the road to access a trail that led to where the sound was coming from. Our hearts thumping, no one wanted to miss the Holy of Holies, this ghost of the pines. "There! Oh no wait, that's a sapsucker. Damn" *Chickachick!* "There it is! There it is!" I shouted as it swooped by, right in front of us, before landing low down out of sight near a rocky slope. Hearts beating harder now, some beaming from their brief but close view, others feeling anxious, some may have even missed it… "It's coming out in the open!" someone shouted. And there it was… a gorgeous male WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER—graciously making his way up the side of a pine tree, almost as if he was aware of his celebrity status. We were able to follow him around for a couple more minutes before he vanished, almost into thin air, never to be seen again (on this day anyway).

Well it's hard to top that. For some, this experience was the culmination of multiple decades of searching in vain. Lifers ticked, jinxes broken, magnificent bird well-seen, and for me—a huge relief! I can't deny that I was feeling a bit of pressure after three or four different people approached me in Princeton saying that this bird was the main reason they signed up for the tour. Phew… and in the rain to boot!

With morale fully recovered beyond expectations, we returned to the valley bottom then made our way south to the town of Brewster where we picked up some lunch, while some took advantage of the great Mexican market. We brought our lunches to the Dry Falls State Park visitor centre—possibly the most scenic picnic area in the state! Here, a massive gorge seemingly comes out of nowhere and provides birders with a great mix of wetland habitats far below to go along with rocky slopes, steep cliffs, and grasslands close at hand. WHITE-THROATED SWIFTS darted past at eye-level, and some of the group got point-blank views of a ROCK WREN. A few ducks were scoped out in the ponds down below, and I spotted an adult PEREGRINE FALCON preening on a nearby basalt outcrop.

After lunch our southward progress continued with a brief stop at the south end of Soap Lake where we were treated to close views of two AMERICAN AVOCETS and two BLACK-NECKED STILTS. Next we turned east and cruised on to the small town of Wilson Creek, home to Washington State's only Tricoloured Blackbird colony. Having never been here before, I didn't really know what to expect: would they be easy to find, or would it be a needle in a haystack kind of situation?

White-headed Woodpecker – adult male (Thanks Jared!)

Well we didn't have to worry about finding nice birds. At our first stop, we were pleased to find five GREAT EGRETS foraging in a field alongside some cows. A pair of OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHERS chased each other through some large trees near a farmhouse, and a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT whistled in the distance. Although we couldn't see any Tricolored-like objects, YELLOW-HEADED, RED-WINGED, and BREWER'S BLACKBIRDS were all abundant at this spot, and we definitely heard at least one of the Tricoloreds somewhere out in the marsh.

We moved along to the east end of "Crab Creek Marsh" (as I believe it's called), where more extensive open water provided us with a few new species such as CINNAMON and GREEN-WINGED TEAL, WESTERN GREBE, and more AMERICAN AVOCETS and BLACK-NECKED STILTS. An adult BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON was spotted sitting in an isolated willow, and even better was an AMERICAN BITTERN that flew

past for great looks! At least a couple more TRICOLORED BLACKBIRDS were heard singing from the reeds then someone spotted three blackbirds perched in the open. One was a female-type that looked like a Red-wing, another was definitely a male Red-wing, but the third had noticeably whiter median coverts, and the bill appeared thinner. But soon after getting the scopes on this trio, they all dashed down into some weeds, so unfortunately not everyone was able to get good looks. As it would turn out, a few more "good candidates" would pop up now and then but none that we could say for sure was a Tricolored. The sole exception was when one of the Margarets went for a walk down the road (there were three Margarets and two Daves on this trip) a few hundred metres from the group and was treated to close views of a male Tricolored! Unfortunately the bird flew off before she could get our attention.

The early afternoon had become the late afternoon however, and we still had a way to go to get to Yakima, so we piled back in the cars and started heading back to Soap Lake. Then as we passed a rocky outcrop, I caught some movement in the corner of my eye—a large white bird… Snowy Owl??? Bins up---Holy S*&%%%!!! ALBINO RAVEN!!! Yes indeed, a fully albino raven (pure white with red eye and pink bill) landed on a rocky turret beside an old raven nest—we decided that it must be a recently fledged juvenile. I believe this is the first fully-albino bird I've seen in the wild, and a raven makes it extra-special!

Common Raven – a juvenile albino R.Cannings

Happy to end the day on such a high note, we got back in the cars once more. But what about this incoming hawk? I'd been checking the Red-tails all day. Ooo it's big. Really white. Rusty underparts! Mottled white in the inner webs of the outer primaries! FERRUGINOUS HAWK!!! I yelled as I ran back along the road to alert all the other cars. It was cruising fast but luckily everyone was able to get out in time to marvel at this monarch of the prairie. With our eyes still glowing, it almost seemed inevitable that a smart-looking dark-morph SWAINSON'S HAWK (our first of the trip) was waiting for us on a power-pole at the next junction.

The drive to Yakima took longer than I had anticipated while planning the itinerary (Washinton looks smaller on the map!), so we decided to stop in Ephrata for dinner (more Mexican) before pushing on to Yakima. Many had been looking forward to some owling tonight but unfortunately rain thwarted any hope of Flammulated or Screech. The best we could do was the couple of COMMON NIGHTHAWKS and a single COMMON POORWILL seen by some on the drive south.

It had been a rainy day, but it had been a very good day.

DAY 3: Yakima to Ephrata (via Toppenish, Fort Simcoe, and the Wenas Valley)

Another rainy morning. This was supposed to be a tour of shrub-steppe grasslands and deserts, but the Yakima Valley received 15% of its annual rainfall in the two days we were in the area! But that's birding—the birds are still out there somewhere, and it's our job to find them.

First off we headed to the Toppenish Wildlife Refuge—a great place for a mixture of grassland, sage, and wetlands birds. The wind and rain didn't help of course, but there were still a few birds to be seen. A group of AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS circled in the distance, while a WILSON'S SNIPE perched obligingly on a fence post along the roadside. We went for a short walk into the sage to try for Sage Sparrows, but there were zero sparrows to be had; not even a Vesper or Brewer's! We did find what I believe is a Common Poorwill egg. Unfortunately however, it was cold, wet, and likely abandoned. It took over an hour but we finally found our first sparrow of the day when a SONG SPARROW sang from the roadside—about time! The wind was picking up so we decided to move on to our next destination: the lovely Garry Oak grove that surrounds the historic Fort Simcoe.

At Fort Simcoe, the sun came out for a pleasant while, but the wind was still very much with us. Luckily that did not matter as the birds performed supremely. This stand of planted oaks around the fort is well-known by Washington birders as possibly the most reliable location for LEWIS'S WOODPECKER in the state, so it was no surprise that the group got great looks at around ten of these unique beauties as we strolled around the fort grounds. HOUSE WRENS, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHES, and BULLOCK'S ORIOLES were some of the other favourites in the area, along with a pair of ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHERS! The latter, of course, is a rarity in BC, but this chatty flycatcher may one day breed in our fair land as it has been steadily expanding its range in recent years from the Oregon border north into Washington.

Oh and speaking of chats, we had heard several on the field trip to this point but no visuals. A few members of the group were starting to wonder when my "Don't worry, we'll see one soon" comments were going to come to fruition. Well it turned out that Fort Simcoe would be the spot! We had nearly completed a circle around the fort when, just before angling back to the cars, I heard the familiar whistle of a male YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT coming from a tangle of riparian shrubs.

Yellow-breasted Chat R.Cannings

The group gathered in a grassy clearing, then after a few patient moments of trying to get onto a darting shape in the bushes, North American's largest warbler decided it was time to put his vocal

skills on full display, so he perched up-top for the whole world to see; even shifting perches when he felt the group had seen a particular side of him for too long. We had watched him doing his thing for close to ten minutes when a male BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK decided he didn't want to be left out, so he popped up nearby and started singing. Well, with that it was time for lunch!

We ate lunch in Toppenish then headed north of Yakima to the Wenas Valley. Here a dirt road winds through a large area of protected grasslands, and is home to one of the last remaining colonies of Burrowing Owl in the state. As we pulled up to the area where the owls were supposed to be (I hadn't been here since I was a child), a PRAIRIE FALCON was spotted soaring in front of us; then it swooped down across the road and quickly out of sight. While a few people managed to see it a second time later on, unfortunately a few of the cars ended up missing it. (This was our only Prairie Falcon of the trip.)

When we stepped out of the vehicles, the wind was noticeably strong. After scanning around the network of burrows (made by ground-squirrels and badgers), I was getting worried that the owls might have opted to nap deep inside the holes instead of taking up their typical sentinel posture in front of the entrances. We tried a few places up and down the road, but no owls could be seen and it was too windy to try for sage sparrows and the like. As a last ditch effort, most of the group went for a hike in the surrounding area, and found what we suspect were three active Burrowing Owl burrows—the entrances were littered with white-wash and pellets, and one even had an owl feather! Unfortunately, that would be as close as we would get, a flyover pair of HORNED LARKS being our sole consolation.

The weather was starting to get quite frustrating, as it seemed like either rain, wind, or both, stayed with us the entire trip. The frustration came to a peak when we reached the small community of Vantage on our way north to Ephrata. Here we had hoped to finally kill the Sage Sparrow jinx, with a side of Black-throated Sparrows—a pair of this distinctive desert sparrow had been reliable all spring. But Vantage was even windier, too windy to even attempt to hear or see sparrows. Apparently this isn't too unusual for the area, given the name of a local food-stand: "Blustery Burger".

We checked into the Travelodge in Ephrata, where we would be spending our final night as a group. After the positive experience the evening before, the group opted to once again eat at Tequila's in Ephrata, where the appetizers could probably feed a small nation-state.

Day 4: Ephrata back to Princeton, BC (via Grand Coulee Dam)

This morning the keeners in the group assembled at 5 am, hoping to head down to Vantage for one last attempt at the Black-throated and Sage sparrows. Unfortunately however, the wind was still strong and rain was threatening. Instead we decided to reconvene around 6 am and check out a local park in Ephrata that is a noted migrant trap. The appropriately named "Oasis Park" is not really an amazing example of natural splendor or grandeur, but it's the only lush patch of green amongst miles and miles of dry sage scrub habitat, so migrant songbirds are drawn to it like a magnet. About a week before we arrived, a Black-and-White Warbler and an Eastern Phoebe were both found here -- great birds for Washington. It was now early June however, so we were not sure if any migrants would still be around. Well in fact there were; nothing rare, but a few new birds for the trip list. WILSON'S and MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLERS sang from a thick patch of shrubs, refusing to come out in the open, but the group did get great looks at a pair of TOWNSEND'S WARBLERS, as well as an ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER, and both WARBLING and RED-EYED VIREOS. Nice to get some of these forest birds for the trip since the majority of the tour was in lowland open-country where these species are hard to come by.

After a hearty breakfast in Ephrata, about half of the group split off as people were either continuing with their holidays in Washington or heading back home to the coast. The rest of us continued birding northward toward the border. We first stopped off again at Dry Falls, where the wind had died off considerably. A single CASPIAN TERN flew north along the canyon, while the familiar WHITE-THROATED SWIFTS continued to perform at close range. Since the wind had died down, I decided we had better make one more attempt at Sage Sparrow before continuing north. We walked up an abandoned stretch of highway that parallels a small canyon, with big sage clumps on either side. The habitat looked ideal for sage sparrows but all we could muster were a pair of LARK SPARROWS and a singing ROCK WREN. Just before turning around, Val George of Victoria spotted a bird perched on a sage in the distance—a LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE! Soon it flew past us and landed on a nearby fence allowing a closer look -- our only one of the trip and a lifer for some!

"Okay one more stop, and then we need to get a move one," I said. The birding was starting to pick up but I had to keep in mind that we still had a long trip back to Princeton and I needed to get to Revelstoke that night!

Good thing we stopped though. Immediately after getting out of the car, I heard the distant warbles of a SAGE THRASHER! This is a bird I thought we would find easily, but the wind and rain had thwarted much of our sagebrush birding. We walked closer and closer to the sound then, there it was! We watched with glee as it sang from atop a sage, before flying across the road and onto a chain-link fence. This was a lifer for most present so there were plenty of "yipees" and "All rights!" followed by even more excitement when the thrasher dropped from the fence and into some tall grass, flushing a pair of GREY PARTRIDGES!!! How often does that happen? Thanks for the help Mr. Thrasher!

After the dampened moods of the morning and previous afternoon, this flurry of excitement certainly boosted the morale as we pressed north along the east side of Banks Lake. Here we made a few stops, hoping to find some breeding groups of Western Grebes where we might luck into a couple Clark's mixed in. The first couple of recommended spots were duds however, but then we checked in at a small cove near the northeastern end of the lake. There were only four grebes present but BINGO! one was a CLARK'S GREBE!

Clark's Grebe *Val George*

As Adrian Leather of Quesnel remarked, we had all been expecting to have to scope through a distant flock of grebes to pick out the one with pale flanks and orange bill, but this one swam right past us giving us all splendid views of every field mark. Not to mention the gorgeous backdrop of sagebrush grasslands butting up against rocky cliffs, all reflected in the dark, glassy surface of Banks Lake. Not surprisingly, ROCK WRENS chimed in from the rocky outcrops nearby, and we were all ready for another celebratory lunch! For this we headed through Electric City and into the historic town of Grand Coulee, home of the Grand Coulee Dam.

After lunch the remaining cars headed back to Princeton at their own pace. A few new birds were added to the trip list such as BLACK SWIFT and GOLDEN EAGLE, but mostly we just continued directly back to Princeton where the rest of us had left our cars. For those last few hours we soaked in the lovely scenery that is the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys in springtime.

I'm sure everyone was a little worn out after three-and-a-half long days of birding (added to the long weekend of the conference and the pre-conference field trip for some), but I also suspect that we all returned to our separate lives with the glow of another great birding adventure. Looking back on the trip list, it's hard to believe we fit all that into those few days!

Until next time,

Russell Cannings

……with a big THANK YOU to Les Gyug and Art Martell who both put in a lot of work organizing the drivers and hotel reservations.

SUCCESS!! *Marg Cuthbert*

AVIAN INVADERS

It is widely known that some organisms have higher invasive potential – that is, potential to survive in a new environment – than others. What makes a successful invasive species? Life history as related to reproduction is thought to be of great importance, but how does it work? One would suppose that high reproductive rate might confer a definite advantage by allowing for rapid growth of a population to the point that it can survive chance mortality, but it is possible that other adaptive factors, such as the ability to learn to survive in the new environment, might be important as well.

A group of researchers has investigated the question by studying 2760 introduction events amongst 428 bird species, 47% of which were successful. Surprisingly, they found that simple population growth potential, as indexed by characteristic clutch size, was negatively correlated with invasion success. Perhaps the effort expended in immediate reproduction leaves the birds less able to cope with the stresses of a foreign environment. The likelihood for successful establishment of a population increases with the number of individuals introduced, but only up to about 300 individuals (which would, one supposes, entail something between 100 and 150 breeding pairs). But this fact does not influence the failure of clutch size to be a significant factor. Instead, the researchers found that an index compounded of number of broods in the year x reproductive life span provided the best indicator of likely successful establishment. They regard this index as a measure of likely future breeding success (as opposed to immediate success, indexed by clutch size). 'Future breeding success' allows room for initial failures to reproduce successfully, either for the usual chance reasons (weather; food supply), or because the birds fail initially to adapt adequately to the new environment and require time to learn to cope successfully. In this respect, relative brain size and habitat generalism were found to be significant ancillary factors in determining the likelihood of invasive success. So, canny old birds are most successful (sounds a bit like people).

Reference*: Sol, D., Maspons, J., Vall-Llosera, M., Bartomeus, I, Garcia-Peña, G.E., Piñol, J. and Freckleton, R.P. 2012. Unraveling the life history of successful invaders. Science 337: 580-583*. Summary by M.Church

---

JMR

"No species of bird has colonized North America at the speed with which the Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) has marched across the continent. First found nesting just south of Miami, Florida in 1982, this non-native dove has rapidly adapted to human-altered environments."
From Project FeederWatch Blog (Cornell Lab of Ornithology), Jan 17, 2011

ALTERNATIVE BIRDING EQUIPMENT

Clive Keen

Image-stabilizing Binoculars

I've been in many throngs of birders over the last few years, and each time I've been the only one with image-stabilizing binoculars around my neck. Very odd that. I wouldn't be without them. While others are setting up scopes for closer views, I get to use both my eyes for views that are nearly as magnified, without having to lug a tripod. Relative amateur that I am, I can often confirm identities more easily than most: while my companions are struggling to tell if a distant grebe is a Clark's or Western, I can clearly see the white around the eye of a Clark's.

I originally bought my x15 Canon image-stabilizing binoculars as a more-convenient alternative to a scope, and was expecting to use them for views in open areas, switching to my Vortex Razor 8x42 in woodlands. In fact, I now use the image-stabilizers all the time, and leave the Vortex -- though they have beautiful clear views -- at home. The wider field of view of the Vortex can certainly be useful in woodlands, but there is terrific compensation from the Canon in delivering huge, shake-free views. In fact, after using image-stabilization, I find shake even at x8 a bit of a nuisance. And once you've seen a nearby black-and-white warbler at x15, you just don't want to go back to half-sized images.

Though the Canon IS is only half the price of Swarovskis, cost remain a bit of a drawback. Also, batteries have to be changed rather often. The Canon chews up alkaline AA batteries and is only really content with lithium. $10 for a long day of birding is a small price to pay, though, for gorgeous views.

Binoculars for the ears

A few years ago I came across a spy toy for children. "Dr Snoop" looked like a toy gun, but with a small parabolic reflector on the front, and a small set of headphones. It was said to allow kids to hear conversations from great distances. I immediately wondered if it could spy on avian conversations as effectively, and bought one, at the vast cost of $9.99. It turned out to be a superb tool for picking out birdsong. Blackpoll warblers could be identified half a field away.

Of course, being a flimsy plastic kid's toy, it did not last for long, so I tried buying an adult version. I assumed that all birder stores would carry something so very useful . None did, and I was reduced to trying spy shops (there really are such things, believe it or not.) Spy shops, though, seemed to carry only huge beasts that I'd no intention of lugging around outside. Dr Snoop, by contrast, was a nice compact device that was no trouble to carry around. I miss it. Next to binoculars, it is surely one of the most useful tools any birder could carry. Why on earth have we not clamoured for such a thing?

COLOUR MORPHS LEAD TO NEW SPECIES

Researchers have discovered that species that exhibit a wide range of colour morphs may experience accelerated rates of speciation. Five families of birds that exhibit a relatively high proportion of polymorphic species were investigated: *Accipitridae* (including hawks, kites, eagles and Old World vultures); *Striginae* and *Surniinae* (two sub-families of owls); *Caprimulgidae* (nightjars); *Falconidae* (falcons); and *Phasianidae* (pheasants). These five groups contain 47% of the world's colour-polymorphic species (but less than 7% of all species). Speciation was annotated using molecular sequence data (DNA analysis). [Polymorphism is defined as the presence of genetically distinct members within an interbreeding population.] It was found that four of the five groups exhibit accelerated speciation amongst polymorphic species in comparison with 'monomorphic' species (ones with only one colour pattern) by a factor of 2 to 4 times. In *Accipitridae*, the ratio is 3x and is driven largely by buteos and buzzards (readers will immediately recognize the Red-tailed Hawk amongst this group). The *Surniinae* dominate the 2x acceleration amongst owls. In the pheasants, however, with 15 of 181 species exhibiting colour polymorphism, monomorphic species exhibit a slightly higher rate of speciation.

Perhaps more telling is that over all five groups there is a higher rate of transitions from polymorphic species to successor monomorphic species than the reverse (development of polymorphic species from a monomorphic ancestor), by a factor of between 4 and 10. This pattern of speciation is not necessarily associated with reproductive isolation, which came as something of a surprise.

Reference: Hugall, A.F. and Stuart-Fox, D. 2012. Accelerated speciation in colour-polymorphic birds. Nature 485: 631-4. Summary by M.Church

BIG JAY DAY – A COMPACT COLLECTION OF CLASSY CORVIDS

Carlo Giovanella – text and photos

Ed's Note: This article was previously posted on the now defunct 'Vanbirds' website, but we felt it would still be of interest and worth including in the Newsletter.

Introduction: Eight species of corvids regularly nest within the Province of BC. One of these (Blue Jay) is common only in the northeastern corner of BC, and rare anywhere west of the Rocky Mountains. Another species (Scrub Jay) is common to the south of our border, and has in recent years been appearing sporadically, but still rarely, in southwestern BC. In late winter 2004, there was an unprecedented coincidence of both rare corvids taking up residence in the Vancouver area in the same period. This serendipity of occurrence provided an unusual opportunity, as described in the following story.

Scrub Jay

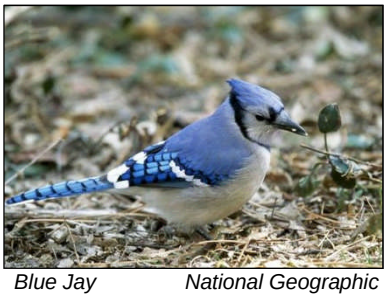
March, 2004: The circumstance of having *two* rather rare (to southwestern BC) species of jay wintering over in the Lower Mainland presented an extra-ordinary chance to tick an unprecedented number of corvids in a single day. If the two coastal rarities could be located without undue delay, then a quick run to the interior could net all the corvids of regular occurrence in Canada, plus one 'casual', for a possible total of *nine* species!

To this end, a dedicated group of four intrepid Lower Mainland birders (alternatively described as "*rave'n* idiots" by their spouses) set out on Sunday morning Mar. 28/04

Common Raven

for the 'Big Jay Day'. Assembling at the site of the rarest target in Ladner, the odyssey began at 05:53 hours. Success was not at all certain, as the jay had been quiet and reclusive of late, and had not been reported for several days.

If the bird did not show in good time, we would have to *scrub* the mission and there would be nothing to *crow* about. Weather was another factor, but the dawn opened with patches of *blue* showing through the *gray* skies. As it turned out, we could not ha' *pica* better day, but without a *steller* performance by all team members



Blue Jay *National Geographic*

we would *nut crack er* even equal a score of 8 or 9 species.

At precisely 06:08 the **Western Scrub-Jay** was sighted, #1. A quick drive to south Richmond, where **Northwestern Crows** were observed frolicking on the dike, #2. Within 6 minutes the **Blue Jay** was heard then observed by all at 06:33, #3. From there we headed eastward through Vancouver to Highway 1, with sightings of **Common Raven** #4 on the Port Mann Bridge (and numerous other sightings during the day). At the 232nd off-ramp the crew coalesced into a single vehicle for the trip inland, but not before a **Steller's Jay** was sighted at 07:37 for #5. Arriving at Manning Park Lodge at 09:30, we found the parking lot bereft of the 'needed' corvid species, bringing on the first twinges of doubt. At Lightning Lake a single **Gray Jay** was coaxed in by a tape of a woodpecker in dire distress, #6 at 09:52. A second sighting of Gray Jay, unaided by recordings, was at

Clark's Nutcracker

the Gibson's Pass Ski Area, but nutcrackers were nowhere in evidence. From thence we continued onward to Princeton with increasing concern.

After logging #7 **American Crow** at 11:55, we obtained advice that nutcrackers were regularly coming to feeders at a particular property, but on arrival there we found a very large and noisy excavator machine busily altering the landscape – and again no sign of the elusive target. On to a second recommended locality along the Osprey Lake Road, all the while scanning the hillsides for magpies and 'crackers to no avail. Then, just as despair was settling in, at 13:34 a solitary **American (Black Billed) Magpie** appeared beside—the road at Wayne Lake, #8. And just a few minutes later, we had close looks at several **Clark's Nutcrackers**! Species #9 and mission accomplished at 13:38.

Retiring to a Princeton oasis for a celebratory brew, the final tick of the day was picked from a team member's nape at about 15:45, and summarily dispatched between thumbnail and tabletop.

Nine species of corvids in a day must certainly qualify as a Canadian record, and probably also an American record. Could we possibly even claim a World record?? We asked if anyone anywhere had information that our score had been previously bettered or equaled, but to date there has been no challenge.to our claims. Surprisingly, it appears to be an issue that does attracted a lot of attention beyond that of those involved.

Our Team, the 'Corvid Connection: George Clulow, Burnaby; Carlo Giovanella, Surrey; Rob Lyske, North Vancouver; and Brian Scott, Fort Langley.

CANARY CHICKENS

The first European settlers to invade the North American Great Plains encountered a sea of grass stretching beyond the limits of the eye. Much has changed since. Today, on the American Great Plains from Texas north to South Dakota, the prairie landscape has experienced a new invasion – of juniper trees. And, if you are a Lesser Prairie Chicken [*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*] of the southern plains, this is definitely a bad thing. The prairie has been subjected to cattle, to ploughing and, after the Great Depression of the 1930s, to the planting of thousands of Eastern redcedar [*Juniperus virginiana*] for windbreaks. Today, these plants, along with the mountain cedar [*Juniperus ashei*] have spread widely into the prairie. Fire suppression has been an important factor in the success of the junipers. Farming activities and settlement have taken a substantial toll on the prairie chickens, and on their northern cousin, the Greater Prairie Chicken [*T. cupido*], but the junipers (and wind turbines) pose additional threats. The birds are strongly intolerant of all vertical structures in the prairie – apparently they see them as hiding and lookout sites for predators (quite right, too). And so they vacate areas that the junipers invade. The establishment of the bushy trees amounts to destruction of prairie chicken habitat. Today, the population of Lesser Prairie Chickens is estimated to be only 10% of that in 1900.

From news notes edited by E.W.Lempinen in the journal Science, vol.336 (2012): pp.432-33.

Compiled by M.Church


Lesser Prairie Chicken Google Images

PRINCETON CONFERENCE AND FIELD TRIPS

Adrian Leather, Quesnel Birding Club

When I feasted my eyes on the itinerary for the BCFO AGM extension trip to Washington State, I knew it had to be done! I realized I'd been discovered when Debbie asked, "How did a few days in Washington become all that time?" Well, the reason is that the weekend AGM of BC Field Ornithologists was just before the extension trip, plus we had the added bonus of a BCFO two-day trip to Merritt as a sort of 'warm-up', and very handy for myself and Jerry McFetridge as it would break our trip from Quesnel to Princeton, the AGM venue……

Our first day in Merritt saw us heading toward Douglas Lake Ranch. Stopping at a few ponds and lakes en-route proved fruitful, with Eared Grebes, Black Terns, Canvasbacks, Redhead, Cinnamon Teal, Common Merganser and Wilson's Phalaropes. Other species included Vaux's Swift, a colony of Cliff Swallows, Olive-sided Flycatchers, a flapping Clark's Nutcracker showing beautifully against a hill, a Pied-billed Grebe, a Townsend's Solitaire, and Turkey Vultures. Clay-colored (uncommon and local around Merritt) and Vesper sparrows sang. A Willow Flycatcher opened-up. Two Bald Eagles hovered simultaneously, one just above the other, then nabbed an unfortunate American Coot off the water. We must have seen at least six Swainson's Hawks. One crested a nearby ridge with prey; it was calling loudly and trying to fend-off a Red-tailed Hawk that was too close for comfort. To our delight, the Swainson's Hawk landed conveniently atop a hydro-pole crossbar and began tearing-off feathers then delving into its meal. This, oddly, appeared to be a Black Tern, which left us pondering how the hawk could have bagged a Black Tern? The Swainson's Hawk posed for half-an-hour allowing great scope views. Other Swainson's Hawks drifted effortlessly around the grassy prairies. A Sandhill Crane was lying in a field with some Canada Geese. A treat was seeing a Northern Saw-whet Owlet peering from its nest hole.

Our second day in the Merritt area added Cooper's Hawk, Steller's Jay, Townsend's Warbler, Hooded Merganser, Cassin's Vireo, and catch-of-the-day, a beautiful pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers changing guard at their nest hole -- simply sublime! Trip Leader Les Gyug shared some interesting information about these exquisite birds. The only disappointment from the Merritt trip was not seeing Burrowing Owl..

Onward to Princeton and the BCFO AGM 2012. The folks at Princeton were very welcoming and friendly. You could feel their pride in hosting this event. The AGM was hosted by Vermilion Forks Naturalists. Madelon Schouten is a stalwart of this group, and very knowledgeable about birds in the Princeton area. Everybody scrambled to sign-up for their choice of trips. Thomasina Catering kept us fed and watered during the weekend as we listened to some fascinating presentations and took breaks from birding forays.

The birding trips were running from 05:30 to 12:30. Jerry and myself had signed-up for the Mt. Baldy trip but then changed our minds, which we later discovered cost us a Great Gray Owl - what can you say? We opted for a relaxed stroll along the Kettle Valley Railway trail, led by Amanda Lahaie. This allowed for really good looks at a variety of species in the riparian strip. The morning's list of 63 species included Black-headed Grosbeak, Gray Catbird, Bullock's Oriole, Mourning Dove, Hammond's Fly-catcher, Lazuli Bunting, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, MacGillivray's Warbler singing from an open snag, and Vaux's Swifts. In town we added Eurasian Collared-Dove and House Finch. No sign of Harlequins. The river was high. We finished the very enjoyable walk a few hours before lunch so teamed-up with George Clulow, Dick Cannings, and Fred from Rossland, and went to August Lake where we had White-breasted Nuthatches at their nest-hole, a Northern Pygmy Owl and Pygmy Nuthatch. In the evening we joined Marian Porter from Saltspring Island and tried the China Creek Rd by the airport and came-up with two Barred Owls with an owlet calling in the background.

On the trail – Kettle Valley Railway Dennis Leonard

Our second Princeton trip was to Mt Baldy led by Trish Reid. It was unexpectedly cold: even gloves were worn. Many had expected warm weather. We travelled around Iron Mtn and Holmes Mtn. Russ Cannings noted a small wetland in the shelter of Holmes Mtn. As we walked toward it, the nearby copse had singing Cassin's Vireo and Cassin's Finches. The wetland held a Wilson's Phalarope, perhaps three Soras, and Blue-winged Teal. George Clulow, took photos of a pair of Killdeer with four chicks. As we climbed higher on Holmes Mountain, a bird flushed from our right and landed on a branch -- yes, at last, finally, my absolute jinx bird, my first Dusky Grouse! I felt a sense of joyful liberation. Now floating up this trail we added Clark's Nutcracker, Gray Jay and Townsend's Warbler to the day-list. Descending to a copse by a corral, we noted a House Wren babbling away, and a neat bit of action was a Cooper's Hawk being chased by an American Kestrel.

Later in the day, Marian, Jerry, and myself made a trip to the sewage lagoons (oh, the places we go) and saw seven Wood Ducks and a good variety of other ducks including Gadwall. An excellent AGM was wrapped-up in Princeton and we gathered for the extension trip to Washington State, led by Russ Cannings.

The Chopaka Rd. by the US border produced a classic Lark Sparrow with burning rufous features. A Clay-colored Sparrow looked extremely dapper in the sage desert light as it posed on the fence. Russ discovered its nest with four eggs. A little further south and it was time to cross the border at Nighthawk USA. As the stern gent at the border post talked, a Common Nighthawk called 'peent' in the background - a nighthawk in Nighthawk! South of the border, we were immediately struck by the natural beauty of the countryside. The Palmer Lake area: absolutely stunning habitat with a timeless feel. We didn't encounter any serious commercialism for quite a while. Six species of swallow were seen. The steep mountain slopes rang with the sounds of

Canyon Wren, Rock Wren and Chukar. Bobolink in the scope is always a great thing. Inevitably, we saw our first of many California Quails. White-throated Swifts zipped around overhead. Other nice birds were Eastern Kingbird, Black-headed Grosbeak and Say's Phoebe. A great birding area !

We overnighted in Omak. The anticipation of the next day was a little overwhelming. Could we really see the birds listed on the itinerary? After driving south for a while, we turned on to a steep mountain road and headed skyward to a delightful wooded area. Rain brought-out umbrellas. Cassin's Finch provided early entertainment. The light was poor, but sufficient to see a Gray Flycatcher, which looked soaked from the rain. After hearing it sing and watching it for a while we moved along the road, adding Nashville Warbler and a Varied Thrush. Red-naped Sapsuckers were working the area but the real target was that mystical legend of a bird, the White-headed Woodpecker, surely a species you only dream of but never see. Time went by, and we enjoyed good looks at a Lazuli Bunting and a few Western Bluebirds. White-breasted Nuthatches were also present. More time went by. Even Russ started to look anxious. You could feel the resignation set-in with the group. We weren't going to see the star bird. It was time to move on. A sinking feeling. Then, suddenly, Russ calls out "That's it, there it is, can you hear it"? The excitement level launched to outer-space as we all settled our bins on an exquisite gem of a White-headed Woodpecker, an avian legend revealed in all its splendour. It's difficult to convey the emotions of this time in mere words. We were just beside ourselves with absolute joy. Here it was, the real thing, a genuine White-headed Woodpecker! Myriad oohs and aahs ensued, then the bird suddenly flew across the road. More than a little amusing to myself was the sight of Jerry sprinting through the woods and leaping over boulders in hot pursuit of this truly beautiful bird. Mind you, I was moving as well. We ran along the road to where the bird appeared to have landed, then slowed right down to a careful walk, just pacing gently forward. I could hear what sounded like tapping or bark-flecking, then there it was, right at the base of a large tree, working its way slowly up the trunk. Just magic! It flew back across the road, but by now the rest of the group had joined us and after scanning we couldn't relocate it. Filled with a tremendous sense of awe, it was time to move on.

Soap Lake provided great looks at American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts. Dry Falls, a sort of mini-Grand Canyon, had two Peregrine Falcons and we enjoyed remarkably close views of White-throated Swifts off the cliff top. A Western Kingbird was in a tree by the washroom block. A Double-crested Cormorant was scoped.

We enjoyed some excellent birding at Wilson Creek. A Yellow-breasted Chat could be heard singing from the edge of the village. Great Egrets provided good viewing as they tackled their meals of Pocket Gophers. Other birds started to show - an American Bittern flew around, a Black-crowned Night Heron perched for us all to see, a Western Grebe was spotted, Double-crested Cormorants rested on a mud bank, Jerry spotted a female Canvasback, several Ring-necked Pheasants provided some solid vocals, a Say's Phoebe and some Western Kingbirds hovered over a rail track. We stopped at a few scanning spots. We were looking for the extremely local Tricolored Blackbird. A Killdeer nest with eggs was located. We hoped nobody would run over the nest as it wasn't the best location. The wind was against us and although many blackbirds were feeding, they were low in the marshland and only isolated individuals would perch for brief moments on reeds before again dropping to the ground and out-of-sight. Frustrating! We continued our patient scanning and suddenly there were three blackbirds perched-up together. The top bird was a male Red-winged Blackbird, but what about the other two? The middle bird looked like a female or juvenile blackbird, but it didn't look like a Red-winged. Then the really interesting bird, the bottom one: it reflected a nice glossy sheen in the sun, but the angle wasn't right to see the median coverts. It was front-on. Then it turned and walked along a reed, a male Tricolored Blackbird in the scope. As Jerry said, a nice comparison between a male Red-winged and Tricolored blackbird. Russ heard Tricolored Blackbirds a few times but we didn't spot any others.

White-headed Woodpecker (adult female)

We'd enjoyed some terrific birding at Wilson Creek, but it wasn't over yet. As we were leaving, Russ came running along the road calling out "an albino Raven". There on the cliff was a pair of Common Ravens with their handsome albino young raven. We were enthralled by this sight. A Rock Wren sang nearby. With everybody on an adrenaline highest of highs from one of the best birding days ever, we happily returned to our vehicles and headed south toward Yakima. Then Russ again came running along the road, but this time he looked more serious. "Ferruginous Hawk" he yelled-out and pointed up to a nearby ridge. Wow! A regal Ferruginous Hawk drifted effortlessly by, drawing huge sighs of admiration from the group, who by this time were totally overwhelmed by a truly memorable day of birding. What a bird, and what a day! Earlier in the day we'd tried a road in sage plateau and were rewarded with jaw-dropping close looks at a Grasshopper Sparrow standing in the open on a mud track, and Brewer's Sparrow posing on sage and on a barbed-wire fence. Fantasy birding! We were on-a-roll!

We stopped at an excellent Mexican restaurant to enjoy a meal, then continued the long haul to Yakima. I was getting more than a bit concerned about the time as we appeared to be a long way from Yakima , and were due to go owling , with possibilities listed

as Western Screech-Owl , Flammulated Owl, and even the unlikely but possible Spotted Owl. It was getting dark. It dawned on us gradually and very painfully that we were going to arrive too late in Yakima for owling. To add insult to very serious injury, it was raining steadily. This bipolar birding day took us to the highest of natural highs but now it felt like a death at a birthday party. We'd looked forward to this owling for months and suddenly it was just gone.

The next morning, our emotional responses were replaced by a more up-beat attitude. The troops rallied in the breakfast room and headed-out birding around Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge and Fort Simcoe. Initially the weather reflected the downcast mood of the previous night. Slowly but surely the birding improved. Bullock's Oriole, Lazuli Bunting, Black-necked Stilts, and an immature Peregrine Falcon helped us all shift out of 'miserable'. Russ found a Common Poorwill egg! We enjoyed good looks at several Swainson's Hawks, and a super-stripey Wilson's Snipe posed perfectly atop a roadside fencepost. Fort Simcoe had a beautiful oak-wood park. Here we were spoiled by Lewis's Woodpeckers flying around, great looks at an Ash-throated Flycatcher, but the best was yet to come: absolutely sensational views of a Yellow-breasted Chat singing and performing in the open. Fantastic, incredible, amazing, and all those other expletives! This command performance continued for quite a while. It couldn't possibly get any better, but then a Black-headed Grosbeak made its song-flight right by the chat! Wow!

Wilson's Snipe *Val George*

We should have guessed it was too good to last. We headed to another destination in search of Burrowing Owl. Some saw a Prairie Falcon, and Swainson's Hawks scanned the prairie. The burrows of the owls proved very hard to locate, but we did eventually find three active burrows complete with pellets, guano, feathers, a dead mouse, even a Burrowing Owl egg, but the owls just wouldn't show. A real shame, but that's the bipolar nature of hardcore birding.

We were now on our return leg to BC, stopping overnight at a motel in Ephrata. Early next morning we took a walk in Oasis Park. We had to abandon listening for Sage Sparrow and Black-throated Sparrow due to very high winds, but the park was pretty good, a pleasant area of riparian on the south edge of town. We had nice looks at Red-eyed Vireo, Townsend's Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, and a MacGillivray's Warbler sang loudly. Cliff Swallows were hawking around, and American Goldfinches were everywhere. A Spotted Sandpiper was on the pond. Bullock's Orioles chattered away and provided their ever welcome splashes of colour. A critter-list addition was a Nuttall's Cottontail - cute bunny.

After breakfast at a local cafe, we pointed our vehicles north. The mood was low, energy and enthusiasm were sapped, but yet again, the birding gradually took us all on an upward curve. Jerry spotted a passing Caspian Tern, and another was waiting at Dry Falls. Russ then announced he had a possible area for Sage Sparrow. No luck with that, but we then enjoyed a period of thrilling birding. Two Lark Sparrows got things rolling. A beautifully marked Loggerhead Shrike was spotted. Then a Sage Thrasher was singing. It came closer and closer then flew across the road posing obligingly on a chain-link fence. Then it suddenly dropped to the ground flushing two Gray Partridge! What the ? Everyone was on a high again!

Now we were searching for something on the water, a glittering prize of local lakes, if you could be lucky enough to find one. Our initial scanning didn't even spot a single bird on the lakes. Russ optimistically commented that we could try some more sheltered bays further along the road. The first bay we stopped at had an empty parking lot and a trail to a campground. There was nobody around. Just a serene bay among pristine scenery, and there it was, an immaculate Clark's Grebe! Russ had done it again! It appeared to be paired with a Western Grebe which stayed nearby. The Clark's swam slowly and agonizingly into a corner we couldn't see, so we quickly set-off in hopes of another look at this beauty. We relocated it, close in, and seemingly utterly unconcerned about our presence. This was something special! I'd had this vision of trying to see a Clark's at distance among a few hundred or so Western Grebes, but here, we just had this perfect comparison between the two birds in a most beautiful peaceful setting. Diagnostics noted, scoped, oohs and aahs made, sense of awe and wonder ratcheted up to max, and then overdrive. It was time for lunch.

We still had some time on the Washington side of the line. Could we add a few extra species? Yes we could. A stop just south of Oroville gave us a Golden Eagle and five Black Swifts.

Dick Cannings and Russ had very kindly invited us to Penticton to try for Flammulated Owl and Common Poorwill. Dick pointed out a track up a nearby slope. It looked very steep, but we clambered up grabbing branches, rocks, tufts of grass, anything to maintain our balance. We then looked back down the hill to experience the wondrous sight of a Flammulated Owl, close by, peering at us through a nestbox hole, cute as can be. Photos were taken, then we descended carefully.

In Penticton we checked into a hotel, then tried a road Dick and Russ had recommended for Common Poorwill. Dick mentioned the weather was the worst it could be for poorwill. There had been a lot of rain and it was unusually cold. The road was filled with large puddles. It didn't look too hopeful. We started up the road and after a surprisingly short time we could see a Common Poorwill on the road! Jerry edged the vehicle forward. We were very close. We admired the chequered patterning, and noted the small eyes and bill. The poorwill then flashed its white throat. Jerry took some photos. What a bird! We saw another poorwill; this didn't stick around for as long as the first, but we were more than happy and called it a night.

It seemed a fitting way to close our trip with some brief birding along Vaseux Cliffs near Okanagan Falls. We reveled in great views of Western Bluebird , Black-headed Grosbeak, Lewis's Woodpecker, Bullock's Oriole, White-throated Swifts, and departed to the rasping sound of a Clark's Nutcracker and the beautiful cascading song of a Canyon Wren.

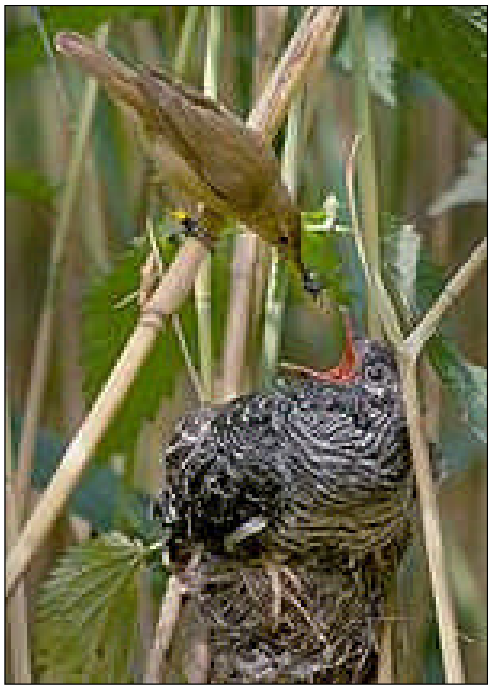
Jerry had a suitcase full of lifers. I had half a dozen plus Gray Partridge for N. America, but more than anything, we'd enjoyed a fantastic trip with some truly awesome birding, and created some outstanding lifetime memories!

Eds Note: Small parts of this text have been omitted due to space constraints.

CUCKOO CLOTHING

There are 142 species in the family *Cuculidae*, of which 17 are polymorphic (i.e., the adult birds exhibit two or more distinct plumages). This proportion (12%) is unusually high: only 3.5% of all birds are polymorphic. What is going on? It turns out that all polymorphic cuckoos are brood parasites (birds that lay their eggs in the nest of another species). Is there a connection?

A new study of the European Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) and its frequent nest host, the Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) throws light on the situation. Common Cuckoo males are always grey, but the female may be grey or rufous. In the United Kingdom, rufous females are rare, but in central Europe they may locally be in the majority. Is there some advantage to be gained from unequal proportions? The grey female Cuckoo bears a more than passing resemblance to the European Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), a feared predator of the Reed Warbler.



Reed Warbler raising Common Cuckoo *Wikipedia*

This mimicry is not a surprising adaptation – it facilitates access to the intended host's nest. But many Reed Warblers have learned the distinction and are sufficiently courageous to mob the Cuckoo and drive it off. The mobbing behaviour no doubt promotes learning amongst the Reed Warblers so their mobbing tactic becomes more effective. But the rufous female is a bird of a different colour. She bears some resemblance to the female Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) or Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). If she is rare, there is much less chance for the host bird to tumble to her disguise, hence an improved chance of successfully penetrating its nest. Presumably, the reverse situation holds when grey birds are the rare sort. There is an evolutionary war going on here between cuckoos and their brood hosts in which variable polymorphism plays an important role.

Black-billed Cuckoo *….Cornell Lab of Ornithology*

Extra notes: Experts will recognise this game as a variation on classic Batesian mimicry. In this case the 'dupe' (the bird that is fooled by appearances) is not the intending predator, but the victim, while the mimic is the aggressor.

North America hosts six species of *Cuculidae*, none polymorphic. The three Cuckoos (Genus *Coccyzus*) are only occasionally brood parasites and are sometimes themselves parasitized by each other or by the notorious Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*).

References: Thorogood, R. and Davies, N. B. 2012. Cuckoos combat socially transmitted defences of reed warbler hosts with a plumage polymorphism. Science 337: 578-580. Commentary: How did the cuckoo get its polymorphic plumage? By J. Mappes and L. Lindström, Science 337: 532-533 .

Summary and notes by M.Church

REPORTS FROM THE BCFO AGM
PRINCETON, JUNE 2nd 2012

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This has already appeared in the June 2012 issue of BC Birding – see Presidents Message, p.4.

MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR'S REPORT

As of 31 December 2011, the BCFO had two hundred and thirteen (213) regular members, four (4) honourary members, and seven (7) institutional members for a total of two hundred and twenty-four (224) members.

As of 31 May 2012, the BCFO has two hundred and nine (209) regular members, four (4) honourary members, and seven (7) institutional members for a total of two hundred and twenty (220) members. There are eighteen (18) new members. Twenty-five (25) members in good standing in 2011 did not renew their memberships for 2012.

Forty-seven (47) members have paid their dues for 2013, six (6) for 2014, two (2) for 2015 and one (1) each for 2016 & 2017.

Of the 198 regular and honourary members providing an email address, 171 (86%) have opted to receive the newsletter via e-mailed PDF or from the BCFO website compared to 91 (44%) in 2011. Also 37 members have opted to receive the Journal via email or website. Fifteen (15) members have not provided an email address.

Membership categorized by region using the Province of BC's Tourism Zones:

-
- 33% Vancouver Coast & Mountains (70)
- 23% Vancouver Island (50)
- 18% Thompson/Okanagan (39)
- 10% Northern BC (21)
- 6% BC Rockies (13)
- 4% Cariboo/Chilcotin Coast (8)
- 3% Alberta (6)
- 0.5% Ontario (1)
- 2% United States (5 – Washington (3), New Jersey (1), South Carolina (1))

Respectfully submitted,
Larry Cowan, Membership Coordinator

TREASURER'S REPORT

British Columbia Field Ornithologists

Statement of Revenues and Expenditures for the Year ending December 31, 2011 (Unaudited)

Revenue	**2011**	**2010**
Membership	$4,388.50	$5,920.91
Conference fees	$6,600.00	$7,960.00
Conference Extension	$9,100.00	$6,490.00
Other conference income	$130.50	$0.00
Donation Income	$130.00	$454.00
Back issue sales	$0.00	$25.32
Field Trips	$330.00	$0.00
Bank Interest	$439.31	$394.39
(GST) HST Rebate	$367.73	$111.95
Advertising	$150.00	$190.00
Total Revenue	**$21,636.04**	**$21,546.57**
Expenditure		
Newsletter Printing	$824.81	$985.43
Newsletter Postage.	$648.80	$873.30
Newsletter miscellaneous	$39.19	$170.28
Conference	$5,397.20	$6,431.98
Conference honouraria	$500.00	$0.00
Conference Extension	$7,109.73	$4,613.60
Extention honouraria	$800.00	$0.00
Journal Printing	$911.57	$699.75
Journal Postage	$553.39	$615.91
Miscellaneaous journal expenses	$58.51	$96.79
Research Grants, Awards, Donations	$0.00	$2,679.20
Honoraria	$0.00	$100.00
Officers' travel	$13.85	$559.44
Teleconference	$0.00	$972.14
Misc. Postage	$66.46	$118.77
Photocopying	$9.80	$23.67
Materials and Equipment	$9.90	$78.87
Bank Fees	$5.00	$103.25
Insurance	$750.00	$750.00
Website	$546.52	$749.34
Memberships & Society Fees	$25.00	$60.00
Post Office Box Rental	$151.20	$203.20
Total Expenditures	**$18,420.93**	**$20,884.92**
Surplus / (Deficit)	**$3,215.11**	**$661.65**
Savings acct. (ING Direct)	$35,382.97	$34,943.66
Chequing acct. (Coast Capital)	$10,136.24	$7,238.52
Total Assets	**$45,519.21**	**$42,182.18**
Prepaid memberships	$2,190.00	$4,762.29
Delayed publications	$1,732.45	$2,550.00
Total Liabilities	**$3,922.45**	**$7,312.29**

Mike Fung
Treasurer

REPORT OF THE EDITOR OF BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS

Volume 21 (2011) of *British Columbia Birds* was produced early in 2012. The regular submission of manuscripts over the past year has ensured the publication of Volume 22 (2012) in a timely manner. I currently have two manuscripts for Volume 23, and with a steady flow, we can continue to have *British Columbia Birds* published regularly. All members are encouraged to submit manuscripts and to encourage friends and colleagues to do likewise. This is your journal, and it has room for a diversity of papers on wild birds in British Columbia.

The quality of all of the papers is enhanced by our Editorial Board: Neil Bourne, Andy Buhler, Rob Butler, Mark Phinney and Mary Taitt. Thanks go to them as well as to the external reviewers of the papers, all of whom have given willingly of their time and thought. Neil Dawe again has done a splendid job of producing the journal and of placing the papers on the website.

Art Martell
Editor, *British Columbia Birds*

REPORT FROM THE EDITOR OF BC BIRDING

The editorship of *BC Birding* changed in October when June Ryder and Mark Habdas took over from Guy and Donna Monte. Guy and Donna were editors from March 2009 to September 2011, during which time they published seven issues of the Newsletter and initiated the attractive cover page design with eye-catching large-format photos that we continue to use. Our sincere thanks to Guy and Donna for all their work and time.

The first newsletter of the new editorial regime appeared in December, 2011. Mark Habdas is looking after photos, layout/design and mailing; June Ryder is responsible for words, text and communications with authors.

Since June 2011, the BCFO Board has been encouraging members who have e-mail to opt for electronic delivery of *BC Birding*, which provides a pdf of a full colour version of the newsletter. Electronic delivery results in considerable savings for BCFO, and allows us to financially support other worthwhile projects. By December 2011, about 60% of our members were opting for electronic copy. Electronic delivery also allows us more freedom when compiling the newsletter because a few extra pages now result in proportionally less extra costs for printing and postage. We will, of course, continue to send black-and white paper copies to members who do not have e-mail.

Please support your newsletter by sending in contributions – these can range from single photos and short notes to full articles, such as reports on field trips. See recent issues for further ideas and examples.

June Ryder
Editor, *BC Birding*

DELEGATE REPORT TO BC FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS---- MAY 2012

CANADIAN INTERMOUNTAIN JOINT VENTURE

The Canadian Intermountain Joint Venture is a bird habitat acquisition, enhancement, and stewardship program which operates in the interior of British Columbia and in the Rocky Mountain region of Alberta. It is similar to the Pacific Coast Joint Venture, Prairie Joint Venture, and Eastern Joint Venture which operate in other parts of Canada. The CIJV is a partnership of 18 government and non-government organizations, of which BC Nature is one. Administrative support is provided by the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada. Most of the organizations included in the CIJV carry on their activities somewhat independently, and some of them have done since well before the CIJV was formally established in 2003. However, the CIJV serves as a forum for assessing bird habitat acquisition/steward-ship needs and for coordinating action among the partners.

The CIJV also allows for the expenditure of U.S. federal government money for bird habitat acquisition and management in Canada, under provisions of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). NAWCA funds must be spent on wetland areas, with the aim of securing and improving habitat for waterfowl and other wetland species. However, funds from Canadian sources and from non-government U.S. sources may be and are spent on upland habitats to benefit upland bird species. The CIJV is the first “all-bird” Joint Venture, with efforts focused on all bird species whose habitat is at risk, not just waterbirds.

From 2003 through March 2010, a total of $38.8 million has been spent by the CIJV partners on bird habitat programs. Of this, $24.7 million came from Canadian sources, and $14.1 million from American sources, including $7.0 million from the core funding provided by the U.S. government under NAWCA. Of the total expenditures, 62% have gone toward habitat securement (including land acquisition), 14% toward habitat enhancement, and the remainder toward stewardship and management activities. Since 2003, a total of 269,000 acres of habitat have been secured,

and enhancement activities have taken place on 119,000 acres.

The CIJV has a website at http://www.cijv.ca , with information about the program and links to the websites of the partner organizations.

The CIJV Board held a two-day meeting, jointly with the Board of the Pacific Coast Joint Venture (PCJV), in Vancouver on February 8 and 9, 2012. The purpose of this meeting was to finalize a Charter covering both Joint Ventures, which describes in some detail the representation and rules of operation of the Joint Venture boards. This charter replaces a less formal MOU which had been in place until now. The new Charter has not yet been signed by all the CIJV partners, but will be over the next few months.

The date of the next CIJV Board meeting has not been set yet, but is expected to be sometime in the summer or fall of 2012.

Tasha Sargent is the current Coordinator for both the CIJV and PCJY, and has served in this position since 2010. The coordinator position is a paid staff position with the Canadian Wildlife Service, which underwrites most of the administrative costs of the CIJV.

A copy of the finalized Charter, plus the minutes of the joint Board meeting in February 2012, is appended to this report.

The CIJV is an extremely valuable, long-term habitat acquisition and management program which BC Nature should continue to support and be involved in.

Wayne C. Weber,
CIJV delegate for BC Field Ornithologists

MORE PHOTOS FROM PRINCETON

Left: Yellow-headed Blackbird – Jo Ann Mackenzie
Lower left: American Avocet – Val George
(Soap Lake, Wash.)
Below: Hairy Woodpecker – Jo Ann Mackenzie

NEW TECHNOLOGY IS RAPIDLY CHANGING THE WAY BIRDS ARE STUDIED

Anne Murray, August 21, 2012 -- from Georgia Straight On-Line

The study of bird migration is being transformed by new technologies. Satellite transmitters and geolocators are now smaller and less intrusive. These tools are tracking birds from breeding to wintering grounds, revealing extraordinary insights into the diversity of migration patterns.

Combined with the torrent of information being gathered and entered into online databases by volunteer birdwatchers, the knowledge gained should drive more effective conservation on the ground and ward off extinctions.

The strength of the latest technologies was highlighted in presentation after presentation at the fifth North American Ornithological Conference (NAOC), a gathering of 1,500 international bird scientists, held this month at UBC. Ornithologists spend hours in the field tracking bird behaviour, food requirements, mating strategies, and migration journeys, all aimed at solving the riddle of why birds do what they do. Their findings help answer the question: what causes population declines?

One reason birds are studied is because they are excellent ecological indicators: widely distributed, rapid responders to habitat and climate changes, and often more easily observed than other animals. It is known that over half the neotropical birds (those that migrate between North America and the tropics) have suffered population declines in the last few decades.

Yet it is still a mystery where many spend their time after the northern breeding season. Peter Marra of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., was one of several presenters to emphasize the need for more research into the full lifecycles of migratory birds, as an essential tool for making environmentally sound decisions about global land use and resource exploitation.

There has been an evolution in migration technology. The simplest surveys use only a pair of binoculars, like the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), on the go in North America since 1966, and Project Feeder Watch since 1987. Both programs involve thousands of volunteer, "citizen science" participants, watching and counting birds, and have contributed enormous amounts of data, much of which is now online.

Bird banding is more complex, but has been in use for more than 100 years. Volunteers join professionals working long hours during migration season to catch birds in mist nets, fit leg bands, and collect biophysical data. Yet birds disperse widely, and of the 64 million birds that have been fitted with little metal leg rings in North America, only 4.4 million bands have been returned and only a tiny proportion of birds recovered alive.

Inevitably, there are questions that cannot be answered by field observation or bird banding, and require other technologies. NAOC presentations showed that scientists commonly use weather radar, radio and satellite telemetry, and light-level geolocators.

Weather radar allows observation of migratory birds at night and can answer questions about large-scale bird movements. Andrew Laughlin, a graduate student at Tulane University, was able to decipher the seasonal movements of tree swallows by locating huge roosting flocks in winter among the cane fields of Louisiana. They showed up as 20-kilometre-wide, doughnut-shaped echoes on the radar screen.

Jill Deppe of Eastern Illinois University used tracking towers to pick up signals of Swainson's thrush and other migrant songbirds fitted with automated radio-telemetry systems (ARTs), as they crossed the 1,000-kilometre-wide Gulf of Mexico, a formidable feat for any bird. Typically, ARTS have a tiny transmitter and aerial, fitted to the bird's back or tail. For larger birds, such as raptors, cranes, geese and some shorebirds, heavier satellite systems can be used, that track over even longer distances.

Exciting discoveries have been made, especially of shorebirds, such as the non-stop, 11,500-kilometre flight of a bar-tailed godwit from Alaska to New Zealand, and the repeated journeys between Virginia and the Mackenzie River delta of a whimbrel named Hope. The bird must be caught to be fitted with a transmitter (tricky with a large bird like a sandhill crane) and care must be taken that the instrumentation does not cause the bird distress or bias the research by impeding its behaviour in any way. Birds are not recaptured and sometimes continue sending data long after the expected end date.

While still expensive, transmitters are much lighter than previously; ARTS can weigh less than a gram, and a typical satellite transmitter is about three grams, compared with prototypes of 170 gram two decades ago.

The light-level geolocator, a tiny device pioneered by the British Antarctic Survey, weighs less than 1.5 grams, and determines a migrating bird's position by the level of natural light. They are smaller and cheaper than satellites, and very long-lasting, though they require recapture of the bird to obtain the data. Much hope, however, is being put in the geolocators ability to answer the many questions remaining about life cycles and migration destinations, at a cost affordable throughout the Americas.

The conservation of birds, and by association many more species which share their habitats, depends upon strong scientific knowledge of their life cycles. With such mobile creatures, some with declining populations, there is a clear need for studies that do not intrude on the bird's behavior or health. As demonstrated at NAOC, the emerging technologies used by the new generation of scientists appear to be headed in the right direction.

Anne Murray is an independent writer and naturalist and the author of two books on the natural history of Boundary Bay: A Nature Guide to Boundary Bay *and* Tracing Our Past ~ A Heritage Guide to Boundary Bay*, both available at bookstores or online from www.natureguidesbc.com*

.

Rare Bird report:
December 2011 to February 2012

British Columbia

As sent to *North American Birds*

Chris Charlesworth

WATERFOWL THROUGH ALCIDS

A male '*crecca*' Green-winged Teal was of note at Boundary Bay in Tsawwassen 12 Jan to 17 Feb (RS). Also at Tsawwassen, a Clark's Grebe was found at the ferry jetty 17 to 21 Jan (JK, IT). In Chilliwack, a pair of Green Herons seen 11 to 13 Dec were unseasonal (Deon van der Heever, et al). A Cattle Egret was seen by many in Surrey near the Serpentine River, 2 to 7 Dec (Michael Klots, m.ob).

Cattle Egret, Surrey *Jo Ann Mackenzie*

Very rare in December in BC, a Turkey Vulture seen at Brunswick Point, Ladner, 2 Dec was a nice find (RS). Another lingering raptor at Brunswick Point was an Osprey seen 15 Dec (TA). In the Okanagan, a Prairie Falcon spent much of the winter on the north side of Dilworth Mt in Kelowna, arriving 18 Dec and staying until at least 15 Feb, (IW, CC, m.ob). On the Lower Mainland, a grey-phase Gyrfalcon was found near Surrey on 1 Dec, and remained throughout period (MT, m.ob). Rare in the interior in winter, a lingering Dunlin was along the Salmon Arm foreshore 13 Dec (DC). A Sora was found along Road 6 in Oliver, 10 Jan, constituting a rare winter record for the interior (DB, et al). Reports of several individual Lesser Black-backed Gulls came in from the Okanagan Valley this winter. A second yr bird was at Okanagan Landing near Vernon 30 Jan (CC, MF), while an ad. was seen the next day, 31 Jan, at the Maude Roxby Bird Sanctuary in Kelowna (CC). Reports of Iceland Gulls in the Okanagan have become frequent over the past decade or so, but most of these reports are of 'Kumlein's' Gulls. An apparent ad 'Glaucoides' Iceland Gull was found on Okanagan L in Penticton 7 Feb and remained to 12 Feb (LN, m.ob). Another Iceland Gull showed up near the same time in the Okanagan, this one an ad. 'Kumlein's' bird at the Maude Roxby Bird Sanctuary, 5 Feb (MTo). A flight of 21,000 Ancient Murrelets counted over the Straight of Georgia 17 Dec on the Sunshine Coast CBC, produced a new North American high for the Christmas Bird Count (RT).

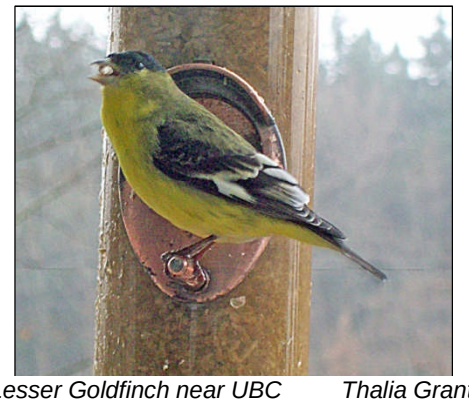
Iceland Gull, Okanagan *Laure Neish*

DOVES TO BUNTINGS

The winter of 2011/12 will be remembered because of a major invasion of Snowy Owls, as hungry and weak birds strayed south in search of food. The first birds began to show up in November, with large numbers gathering at Boundary Bay in Vancouver. Up to 40 were tallied along Boundary Bay on the Ladner Christmas Bird Count, 27 Dec (fide Jude Grass). In the interior, where Snowy Owl sightings are rare even in an invasion year, there was a scattering of sightings. One was at Swan Lk in Creston, 20 Dec (JF), with another in Castlegar near the Robson Bridge, 16 Dec (Pat Sweeney). Near Merritt, two were at Minnie Lk, 3 Dec (AB). Although it was not an irruption year for Northern Hawk-Owls, a number were noted, especially at ski resorts. One was seen at Sun Peaks Resort near

Kamloops, 10 Dec (Ken Lipinski), with another noted at Big White near Kelowna, 12 Dec (Ian Williams). A single hawk-owl was at Nakusp in the West Kootenay 16 Dec to Jan 3, on which date the local CBC was held (GD, et al). Another hawk-owl was found along Rock Ck / Bridesville Rd E. of Osoyoos on Anarchist Mt. 5 Feb (MTo). In Salmon Arm, a Northern Hawk-Owl was a nice addition to the local CBC on 19 Dec (TH, et al). The male Costa's Hummingbird, now present for 18 months, continued throughout the period in the Dunbar area of Vancouver (RC, m.ob). Rare on the Sunshine Coast, especially in winter, a Rock Wren found at Wilson's Ck, 11 Jan was a fantastic find (Kai Bosch, et al). The bird remained until at least 5 Feb, constituting the 7th record for the Sunshine Coast. At Beacon Hill Pk in Victoria, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was an exceptional find, 4 Dec (Steven Roais, m.ob). The bird remained until 10 Dec and was seen by many. A Northern Mockingbird was positively identified in Squamish on 26 Feb, but had been present for at least two weeks prior (CD). Extremely rare in the interior in winter, a Swainson's Thrush photographed at a compost pile in Nakusp, 19 Jan was an exciting discovery (GD). Not as rare as Swainson's Thrush, but still rare in the interior in winter, a Hermit Thrush made a brief appearance at Inkaneep Provincial Pk near Oliver, 9 Jan (LN). A distinct lack of Bohemian Waxwings throughout southern BC this winter was of note. The Penticton CBC, which often tallies well over a thousand Bohemian Waxwings in most years, recorded a meagre 1 on 19 Dec (fide RCa). Wintering warblers included a Nashville Warbler in a Nelson back yard, feeding on grapes 17 Dec to 4 Jan (Jakob Dulisse). A first fall female Black-throated Blue Warbler was found along the Okanagan River in Penticton on the CBC, 19 Dec and remained until at least 25 Dec (RC, m.ob). At the Chichester Bird Sanctuary in Kelowna, a female type Wilson's Warbler was present from the beginning of the period until 17 Dec when it was tallied on the local CBC (RC, CC, et al). Another Wilson's Warbler lingered from the fall period in Nakusp, visiting a compost pile, last reported 17 Jan (GD). A Clay-colored Sparrow was at the Carmanah Point Light Station on SW Vancouver Island from the beginning of the period to at least 17 Dec (JE). Another out of range Clay-colored Sparrow showed up in West Vancouver and visited a feeder between 6 to 18 Dec (RC, m.ob). A Swamp Sparrow was at the Reifel Refuge in Ladner, 2 & 3 Dec (RC, JK, et al). A Lapland Longspur at Revelstoke, 16 Dec, provided a local late date for this species (George Winingder). The first year male **Summer Tanager** lingered from the fall period through the winter to at least 26 Jan (RH, et al). In Abbotsford a Bullock's Oriole, 14 Dec was a rare find indeed (SO), as was a female Rusty Blackbird along 88th St in Ladner, 14 Jan (JK). In what turned out to be an irruption year for redpolls, a number of reports of Hoary Redpolls came in from throughout the interior. Near Vernon, one was with a flock of Common Redpolls picking up grit along the road, 1 Dec (CC, CS). At Mt. Baldy near Oliver, a Hoary Redpoll was found, 2 Dec (TM). Another Hoary Redpoll was found amongst 250 Common Redpolls along Rock Ck / Bridesville Road, E. of Osoyoos., 7 Feb (MTo), while two different birds visited feeders at the McCulloch Nordic Ski Trails near Kelowna, 19 Feb through to the end of the period (CC, MF, m.ob). In the West Kootenays, a Hoary Redpoll was photographed at Johnson's Landing, 6 to 8 Dec (GS). Feeders at Big White Ski Resort near Kelowna hosted up to 30 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches from 8 Jan through the end of the period (CC, m.ob). Birds of both the interior and coastal races were noted. A male Lesser Goldfinch near UBC in Vancouver was present 13 to 25 Feb, but was frustratingly hard to see (Suzie Lavalee, m.ob). The only Asian rarity to appear this winter, a first year female **Brambling**, was in a Victoria yard patronizing a feeder 31 Dec to 2 Jan (Ray Lapshinoff).

Hoary Redpoll *Gail Spitler*



Lesser Goldfinch near UBC *Thalia Grant*

OBSERVERS: TA – Ted Ardley; DB – Doug Brown; AB – Alan Burger; CC – Chris Charlesworth; DC – Don Cecile; RC – Russell Cannings; RCa – Richard Cannings; CD – Chris Dale; JE – Jerry Etzkorn; JF – Jess Findlay; MF – Michael Force; RH – Ralph Hocken; TH – Ted Hillary; JK – Jeremiah Kennedy; LN – Laure Neish; TM – Thor Manson; CS – Chris Siddle; SO – Stan Olson; GS – Gail Spitler; RS – Richard Swanston; IT – Ian Thomas; MT – Mike Tabak; MTo – Mike Toochin; RT – Russ Tkachuk; IW – Ian Walker;

Chris Charlesworth,
#106 – 571 Yates Rd.,
Kelowna, BC. V1V 2V5.

Great Gray Owl Images
by
Amanda Lahaie
Vermillion Forks Naturalists