

# B<sub>C</sub> BIRDING

Newsletter of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

ISSN 1206-1611

Volume 22 Number 4 / December 2012



## BCFO Officers and Directors

---

### Executive

**President:** George Clulow, Burnaby  
604-438-7639 [gclulow@shaw.ca](mailto:gclulow@shaw.ca)

**Vice President:** Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows  
604-465-1402 [lawrencecowan@shaw.ca](mailto:lawrencecowan@shaw.ca)

**Recording Secretary:** Mary Taitt, Ladner  
604-946-2438 [marytaitt@gmail.com](mailto:marytaitt@gmail.com)

**Treasurer:** Mike Fung, Vancouver  
604-266-0238 [mike.mikefung@gmail.com](mailto:mike.mikefung@gmail.com)

**Past President:** Jude Grass, Surrey  
604-538-8774 [judegrass@shaw.ca](mailto:judegrass@shaw.ca)

### Other Board Members

Art Martell, Courtenay  
250-334-2979 [Martell.BCBirds@shaw.ca](mailto:Martell.BCBirds@shaw.ca)

June Ryder, Vancouver  
604-736-4189 [jmryder@telus.net](mailto:jmryder@telus.net)

Wayne C. Weber, Delta  
604-597-7201 [contopus@telus.net](mailto: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 Changhua Wild Bird Society, Changhua, 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](mailto: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 15<sup>th</sup> 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

BCFO Information	2,3
President's Message	4
Editor's Notes, Letters to Editor	5
Welcome New Members	6
Upcoming Meetings and Events	6
Birding News Briefs	7
Membership Renewal for 2013	9
The Reflective Birder	10
Christmas Bird Counts – New Info.	11
Two-day Field Trip – Salmon Arm	12
Two-day Field Trip -- Victoria	14
Pretty Brainy Polly	15
Reducing Bird Kills by Irresponsible...	16
Aerial Foraging by Wood Ducks	18
Storytelling of Ravens on Mount Work	19
Tours.....	20
Big Duck Shoot – A Saga of Tick ....	22
Nesting Behaviour Pied-billed Grebes	24
Raptors – Workshop	27
Plastic Food	28
Ramsar Designation for Fraser Delta	29
Species at Risk...Conservation	30
No Contest Here -- Sex Trumps Sleep	31
Collages: Snow Goose, Northern Pintail	32

### COVER STORY

*Varied Thrush (male) by Jared Hobbs;  
Victoria (Saanich), March 13, 2011.*

Jared captured this image from a blind near a feeder in a friend's backyard. He notes that "Varied Thrush is usually pretty shy and tough to photograph."

This thrush winters in southern BC, especially in SW coastal areas. During severe weather, it will frequent feeders, eating raisins, nuts and even millet.

### BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS

#### Needs submissions

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

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

### BCFO RESEARCH GRANTS

BCFO encourages 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

## *Moving Forward*

If you've been tracking the action on our BCFO website, you'll have noticed that the organization's activities are increasing and improving. BCFO is becoming more effective and efficient in its communications as it reaches out to its members and gives them the information they want.

Following a very productive Planning Meeting on October 1<sup>st</sup>, your Directors have taken on a number of projects that are moving us forward:

- In keeping with the upcoming season of Christmas Bird Counts, the CBC calendar on our website is presently (time of writing) being updated daily, as part of our commitment to being current and timely.
- Our website now has a Featured Photographer component; our first showcases the photographs of Laure Neish. If you haven't checked it out, it's not to be missed.
- You'll also now find on the website a huge collection of back issues of *BC Birding* and *British Columbia Birds*, respectively our Newsletter and Journal. They are available for download now, while the ones not yet available, will appear soon.

Also on the good news front is that we are fully meeting our commitment to publish four newsletters per year, and at least one journal. To get access to the current year's issues however, membership is required. Encourage your birder friends to join up. We've got lots to offer.

Furthermore, and in keeping with our commitment to keeping our eye on where BCFO is headed, the *Future Directions Committee* is now up and running.

As we roll toward winter it may be a challenging time to be out birding, but with Christmas counts looming, and a number of stunning Provincial rarities appearing in November, it's worth putting on the raingear, mitts and toques to find those birds.

All the best for the season,

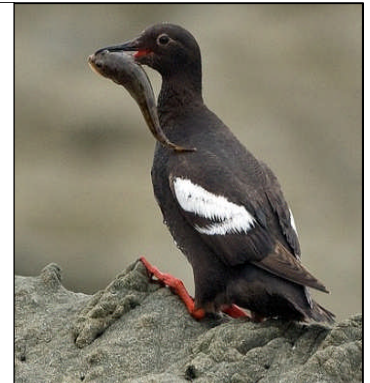
George Clulow,  
President



## ADVANCE NOTICE -2013 BCFO AGM



We are planning to hold the 23rd Annual BCFO Conference on Southern Vancouver Island in May 2013. Organizers are hard at work selecting the conference location, dates (during the first two weeks of May), and field trip and extension destinations. We will update the BCFO website as details are finalized



Photos: Google Images



## EDITORS' NOTES

Greetings fellow birders, bird watchers, naturalists. Here we are well into the dark days of winter – the only advantage being that local bird counts don't start until 0800 or 0830 (possibly even later further north?). Long evenings are good for reading, or editing photos, or catching up with data entry, or even owling at an hour that is respectable!

You will find that this December issue of your Newsletter is not quite as bulky as September's (32 pages cf. 40), although the digital file may again overload a few mailboxes because many photos are included. But hopefully, there is sufficient interesting material here to hold your attention. Feedback is welcomed.

Note that news about upcoming events is scattered throughout the pages that follow, and that more information is (or will be) available on our website (e.g., Christmas Bird Counts). You may search the Newsletter unsuccessfully for any words about Two-day Field Trips, but not to worry, planning for 2013 is well underway. This popular program is certainly continuing and details will appear shortly on the website and in the March Newsletter. If you would like to lead a trip in your local area (which requires that you know where to find the birds but not that you are a hot-shot birder), get in touch with George Clulow.

Inserted (loose leaf) in the paper Newsletter are forms for Listers' Corner, together with personalized Membership Renewal Forms for people whose membership expires at the end of this year (see p.9). 'Electronic members' will receive these items by e-mail or be able to find them on the website.

As always, many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this issue. Guest writer Sherril Guthrie (p.16-18) is an Abbotsford-based researcher and writer with a background in adult education and communication. She has been the lead researcher for provincial and local studies of diabetes, housing and child poverty. Her 2008-2009 research into the cat overpopulation crisis throughout North America led to the CBC documentary *Cat Crazy*, produced by Vancouver-based Bountiful Films. Writer Ana Simeon (p.19), a BCFO member, wrote that she ".... is a grassroots coordinator for Sierra Club BC, and a mediator in private practice in Victoria. Ana and her husband Tom take every opportunity to observe birds through their special pair of binoculars which they acquired in lieu of wedding rings." Special appreciation again to photographer Jared Hobbs who donated the beautiful bird on the front cover. (To view more of his images, use the link to his website on p.20.) Thanks also to new members Sheila and John Linn and photographer Roy Lamble for their amazing images and story (p.24-27). Missing from this issue is our usual Rare Bird Report from North American Birds, written and contributed by Chris Charlesworth. It turns out that *BC Birding* was getting slightly ahead of *NA Birds*, so the next (Spring 2012) report will appear in our March issue.

Finally, please send in contributions for *your Newsletter*. These can range from a captioned photo to articles of three or four pages (see previous issues). I'm mildly concerned that the present issue consists almost entirely of material from sw BC. This material is all good, but to be more representative of our province, we also need items from further north, northwest, northeast and east. So people in the 'interior' (north and south), the Kootenays, and those of you who reside in the far-flung corners of BC, please let us know what you and the birds are doing!

All the best for Christmas Bird Counts, Holidays, Festive Season, and Celebrations.

June Ryder, Editor

## LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor:

Glenn Ryder asked if I would send a letter to BC Birding to, and I quote, "thank the BCFO for thinking about me" and recognizing his contributions to ornithology and natural history in British Columbia. He was most honoured to receive the Steve Cannings Award.

Sincerely,

Phil Henderson, Fort Langley



*Barrow's Goldeneye*

*Laure Wilson Neish*

## **UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS**

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

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

### **EVENTS IN 2013:**

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

Mar. 7-9 - - 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](mailto:dacris@wm.edu); web-site: <http://www.wilsonociety.org/meetings> .

May 2-4 - - B.C. NATURE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Abbotsford. Contact: Betty Davison, B.C. Nature, Heritage Centre, 1620 Mount Seymour Rd., North Vancouver, B.C. V7G 2R9, phone (604) 985-3057; e-mail: [manager@bcnature.ca](mailto:manager@bcnature.ca) .

May 10-12 - - SKAGIT VALLEY BIRD BLITZ, Skagit Valley Provincial Park. e-mail: [info@hopemountain.org](mailto:info@hopemountain.org); web-site: [www.hopemountain.org](http://www.hopemountain.org).

May 11 – INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY – Connecting people and birds: Celebrate the incredible journeys of migratory birds between their breeding grounds in North America and their wintering grounds – Plan a public event or field trip in your area. For more info: [http://www.naturecanada.ca/bird\\_cons\\_involved\\_migratory.asp](http://www.naturecanada.ca/bird_cons_involved_migratory.asp)

June 14-16 - - MANNING PARK BIRD BLITZ, Manning Provincial Park. e-mail: [info@hopemountain.org](mailto:info@hopemountain.org); web-site: [www.hopemountain.org](http://www.hopemountain.org).

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

Aug. 13-17 - - 131ST STATED MEETING, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION & 83<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL MEETING, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, Chicago, Illinois. Contact: Peter E. Lowther, The Field Museum, 1400 South Lake Shore Dr., Chicago, IL 60605-2496; phone (312) 665-7953; e-mail: [plowther@fieldmuseum.org](mailto:plowther@fieldmuseum.org).

Sep. 24-29 - - 37<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING, WATERBIRD SOCIETY & 2013 ANNUAL CONFERENCE, WADER STUDY GROUP, Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Contact: Peter H. Becker, Institut für Vogelforschung, Vogelwarte Helgoland, An der Vogelwarte 21, Wilhelmshaven D-26386, Germany, phone 49-4421-96890, e-mail: [peter.becker@ifv-vogelwarte.de](mailto:peter.becker@ifv-vogelwarte.de); web-site: <http://www.waterbirds.org>.

Sep. 19 - 22 - - B.C. NATURE FALL GENERAL MEETING, Cranbrook. Detail to follow.

Oct. 21 – 24 - - 2013 RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE WITH 3RD NEOTROPICAL RAPTOR CONFERENCE & 7<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE WORLD ON BIRDS OF PREY AND OWLS, Bariloche, Argentina. Contact: Kate Davis [no address or phone number yet announced]; e-mail: [raptors@montana.com](mailto:raptors@montana.com); web-site: [bariloheraptors@gmail.com](mailto:bariloheraptors@gmail.com); web-site: <http://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org/conferences/current-conference>.

#### EVENTS IN 2014:

Aug 26<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS, Tokyo, Japan. Contact: Erik Matthysen [address and phone number not yet announced] e-mail: [erik.matthysen@ua.ac.be](mailto:erik.matthysen@ua.ac.be) OR Keisuke Ueda [address and phone number not yet announced] e-mail: [keisuke@rikkyo.ac.jp](mailto:keisuke@rikkyo.ac.jp).

Sep. 24-27 - - ANNUAL MEETINGS, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY & SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS, Estes Park, Colorado. Contact details not yet announced.

---

## B.C. BIRDING NEWS BRIEFS

*Compiled by Martin K. McNicholl*

### James Hatter

B.C.'s first Chief Game Biologist, Dr. James ("Jimmie") Hatter, who also served as a Director of the B.C. Fish & Wildlife Branch, passed away on 19 May 2012 at age 91. He was one of the 14 founders of the B.C. Waterfowl Society. –based on Anonymous. 2012. *Marshnotes* summer 2012:6.

### Marilyn Dutton

Long-time Nature Vancouver member and prominent birder Marilyn Dutton passed away on 4 June 2012. She was also involved in several other nature-oriented and outdoor sporting organizations and travelled widely. She was very proud of sharing Birtle, Manitoba as her birthplace with prominent aspen parkland ecologist Dr. Ralph D. Bird. –based on Anonymous. 2012. *Wandering Tattler* 36(1):6, 2012 and personal conversations.

### **Cooper's Hawk Nest Delays Construction**

The discovery of an active Cooper's Hawk nest in the Capilano Highlands caused a delay by the District of North Vancouver in some road and waterline construction work in July 2012, a sign that conservation priorities at least occasionally have clout in some areas. –based on Anonymous. 2012. *North Shore News* as excerpted in *Wandering Tattler* 36(1): Sept. 2012.

### **Bob Puls Awarded**

Current Langley Field Naturalists' President Bob Puhls was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award in Fort Langley in June 2012 for his work with several conservation and naturalist committees and organizations in the Langley area. In addition to several contributions to environmental efforts, Bob's contributions recognized by the award included installation of nest boxes around Bryden Lagoon, Fort Langley and the Forslund Watson Protected Area, and participation in the B.C. Breeding Bird Atlas project and in Christmas Bird Counts. –based on Anonymous. 2012. *Langley Field Naturalists' Newsletter* Sept. 2012:3.

### **Toots Tucker Also Awarded**

Another Langley area naturalist awarded a Lifetime Volunteer Award recently was Toots Tucker, for a plethora of volunteer activities, including her efforts on behalf of naturalists in the Langley area. –based on Anonymous. 2012. *Langley Field Naturalists' Newsletter* Sept. 2012:3.

### **Burns Bog Designated Ramsar Site**

A 17-year effort to have Burns Bog listed as a Ramsar site [a wetland of world ecological significance] has finally resulted in a Government of Canada designation of 20,682 ha of wetlands as the Fraser Delta Ramsar Site.. This Ramsar Site includes Burns Bog, Sturgeon Bank, South Arm [of Fraser River] marshes, Boundary Bay, Serpentine Fen and the existing Alaksen Ramsar Site. It is considered an internationally critical migratory stopover for Sandhill Cranes, as well as significant habitat for waterfowl, shorebird and other water-bird species. –based primarily on 23 September 2012 news release by Eliza Olson of the Burns Bog Conservation Society, forwarded by Annabel Griffiths. (See also p.29)

### **A.O.U. Fellows**

During the 130<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union in Vancouver in August 2012, two of the 20 newly elected Fellows had B.C. connections. Dr. Jean-Pierre L. Savard conducted his graduate student research at UBC on goldeneyes, and Dr. Tony D. Williams is a faculty member at Simon Fraser University. –based on Anonymous. 2012. *Ornithological Newsletter* 210:2.

### **Student Travel Awardee**

Ashley Morrison of Thompson Rivers University was one of the students who received travel grants to attend the 5<sup>th</sup> North American Ornithological Conference in Vancouver during August 2012. –based on Anonymous. 2012. *Ornithological Newsletter* 210:2-3.

### **B.C. Representation on Bird Studies Canada Board**

B.C. *Birds* Editor Dr. Art Martell continues to chair the board of Bird Studies Canada, while former Federation of B.C. Naturalists President Anne Murray was added to the board at B.S.C.'s annual general meeting on 22 September 2012. –based on Anonymous. 2012. *Bird Studies Canada Latest News* 5 Oct./12:3.

### **Spencer Sealy's New Editorship**

Spencer G. Sealy recently accepted an invitation to edit *Wildlife Afield*, the biannual journal of the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies. Spencer's Ph.D. studies were conducted in B.C. (primarily) and Alaska, and he continues to publish B.C. observations and research findings. He recently retired as Editor of *The Auk* and is a Professor Emeritus of the University of Manitoba. His new editorship started with *Wildlife Afield* 8, "2011." –based on personal communications with R. Wayne Campbell and Spencer G. Sealy and on R. W. Campbell and S. G. Sealy. 2011. *Wildlife Afield* 8:2.



## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FOR 2013

Personalized membership renewal forms are being sent to members whose membership expires on 31 December 2012. This form will provide contact information, privacy and newsletter distribution instructions. If this information is correct, complete the annual fees section and return the form to BCFO with your payment. If you wish to correct or update the information, please indicate your changes directly on the form.

If you should wish to make a donation please note the amount on the appropriate line of the form. You will be issued a receipt for income tax purposes.

Please note that the BCFO By-Laws (Part 1, Section 4) state that *“The annual Membership dues shall be payable on the first day of January. A member shall be considered in arrears if dues are not received by the first day of March and is no longer considered to be a Member in good standing.”*

We would greatly appreciate your consideration in sending us your dues by the end of the year; however, if we have not heard from you by the end of January, a reminder will be sent to remit your dues no later than 1 March 2013 so that your membership does not lapse.



Larry Cowan  
Membership Coordinator

## UPCOMING !



## The Reflective Birder #2

---

Clive Keen

### Know Thyself, said Socrates

Do you really know why you go birding? I sure didn't until a few weeks ago.

I was at my usual spot at the local Water Polishing Facility when a septic engineer ("my truck really sucks") approached and asked me what I paid for my binoculars. I told him, and was rewarded with a "@#\$%!" I then volunteered the cost of my camera and lens combination, which produced an even more emphatic "#\$%!!!" After a pause, he added "You must really love birds." That, rather than the comment with the three exclamation marks, gave me pause.

Do I love birds? The phrase doesn't seem right. I could say that I love brie, good beer, crispy bacon and the mutt we've had in the house for nearly a decade. Even when it pees on the floor. But is a love of the feathered guys the reason I go birding? That doesn't press the right buttons. I once had an amazing experience seeing a Bald Eagle pluck a Mallard from the water, something that would make any birder's pulse race, but I wouldn't dream of saying that I *loved* that, or any other, eagle.

So, a bit of soul searching was in order. I thought first about what gave me most evident delight in birding. Seeing rarities, certainly. Seeing lifers, even more. My first really good look at a Lazuli Bunting gave me a buzz that lasted all day. But, come to think of it, my first really good look at a wolverine gave me a buzz that lasted a month, and so did my parachute jump. And I certainly didn't give up birding to chase wolverines or jump regularly out of aeroplanes. So something other than the thrilling moment is involved.

"Fascinated by birds..." "intrigued by birds...." These seemed a bit closer. And yet such terms still didn't seem to get to the heart of why I go birding. I then focused on the times I'm most content in the field. It's not when I'm chasing some rarity, and finally putting a

tick against the Lawrence's backcross of a Golden-winged Warbler or whatever. It's when I'm quietly observing birds going about their daily business. At the lagoons, once the septic engineer left, I spent probably ninety minutes watching a single section of marsh, where dowitchers, yellowlegs and snipe were living their birdy lives. A muskrat made a brief nuisance of itself, disturbing the doze of a snipe. The dowitchers prodded away in the mud. A Killdeer landed. The birds all looked up when a hawk passed far overhead. A Wilson's Phalarope joined the yellowlegs and, unusually, behaved just like them. A Greater and a Lesser yellowlegs, standing side by side, allowed me to see how different their bills were.

For most of those ninety minutes, I was *in the moment*, as people say these days. I was alone, but it would have been even more enjoyable if I'd been accompanied by another birder, in companionable silence. What would definitely not have worked, though, was if I'd been accompanied by a non-birder who wanted to talk about some television personality, or sporting event, or pop song, or whatever. And I think I can now see exactly why.

When we're birding, and fully in the groove of birding, we're *connecting* with our world in a visceral way. The more we know about the birds – their songs, their behaviour, their habits, their call-notes, their individual markings – the more complete the connection. A birder colleague, quietly observing the same scene, and perhaps occasionally pointing out something I might have missed, would have added to the connection. The garrulous non-birder would have shattered it.

As E.M.Forster said – "Only connect". It really is what we do when we are birding. I bet you didn't know that. I sure didn't before the septic engineer said "@#\$%!!!".

### UPCOMING !

#### Looking to Participate in a **Christmas Bird Count** in BC?

The 2012 CBC will take place December 14, 2012 to January 5, 2013.

Many counts are looking for more birders – of all skill levels – to help out.

For a list of all the BC Christmas Bird Counts, their dates and contact information see:

## **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS 2012 –**

### **NEW INFORMATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS....**

The Christmas Bird Count has always been an integral part of the holiday season for birders across North America. Its huge database is one of the most important sources of information about bird populations on the continent. The Count is a project of the National Audubon Society, coordinated in Canada by Bird Studies Canada. *This year there is a big change coming to the program's funding structure.*



Christmas Bird Count coordination and data analysis have long been funded by mandatory participation fees as instituted by Audubon. For the past 25 years or more, these have been set at \$5 per participant. Audubon announced this fall that they would no longer be collecting this fee, and Bird Studies Canada will follow suit. While the elimination of the fees will be welcomed by many, it does leave a big funding gap. Bird Studies Canada hopes that much of this gap can be made up by voluntary donations. So if you enjoy the Christmas Bird Count and appreciate the important role it plays in North American bird conservation, please see <http://www.birdscanada.org/> to donate.

Thank you for your continued support of this critically important program!

From: Bird Studies Canada, Latest News, Oct.19, 2012



### ***Request for Nominations***

#### ***THE STEVE CANNINGS AWARD FOR B.C. ORNITHOLOGY***

In 2007, B.C.F.O. presented its first award for contributions to B.C. ornithology, now named *The Steve Cannings Award for B.C. Ornithology*, to Dr. Ian McTaggart-Cowan. Subsequent awards have been presented to David Stirling (2008), Madelon Schouten (2010), Dr. Jeremy Tatum (2010), Ralph Ritcey (2011), and Glenn Ryder (2012).

The award recognizes contributions over a long period of time to ornithology in British Columbia in one or more of the following three categories: (1) research on bird biology and/or ecology, or detailed documentation of the avifauna of a portion of B.C.; (2) conservation of birds and/or bird habitats in B.C.; (3) public education about birds in B.C. The award is to be announced and, if possible, presented to the recipient annually during the banquet at the B.C.F.O. annual meeting.

***We request nominations*** from any B.C.F.O. member for candidates for future Steve Cannings Awards. Nominations should include at least a brief statement as to why the nominator(s) believe that the nominee is deserving of the award. Nominations should be sent in writing to Dr. Wayne C. Weber, Chair of the Steve Cannings Award Committee, either by mail to 51-6712 Baker Rd., Delta, B.C. V4E 2V3, or by e-mail to [contopus@telus.net](mailto:contopus@telus.net).

The recipient of a given year's award is recommended by a three-person Awards Committee (Richard J. Cannings, Martin K. McNicholl and Wayne C. Weber) and approved by the B.C.F.O. board. All nominees not chosen in a given year will be considered automatically in future years without requiring another nomination, but updates or expansions to previous nominations are welcome.

All nominations for the award will be gratefully received.



## ***BCFO TWO-DAY FIELD TRIP - SALMON ARM BAY -- SEPTEMBER 1-2, 2012***

Geoff Styles – Text

Leona Breckenridge – Photos

The third BCFO outing of the year centered around Salmon Arm Bay. It was led by Ted Hillary and Geoff Styles, and there were six participants: Mark Yunker and his wife Jan Erasmus from Victoria, Ben Keen from Vancouver, Leona Breckenridge from White Rock, Peter Blokker from Vernon, and Joyce Henderson from Salmon Arm. Salmon Arm Bay is a great place to bird year-round, but the special attraction at this time of year is the shorebirds.



*Great views of Salmon Arm Bay from here*

As well as shorebirds, the possibility of interesting gulls also increases in this season. Add to that the talk of the rarities seen in the days prior to the outing, and Ted's bold call of possibly 100 species over the two days: no wonder we were an excited group heading out on Saturday morning!

The birding started very well under cloudy skies at the Salmon Arm wharf, with excellent looks at some of the more common shorebirds, such as Wilson's Snipe and Spotted, Least and Pectoral sandpipers, as well as both yellowlegs and many Killdeer. Long-billed Dowitcher fed right under our noses, while further out toward Salmon River a group of six Red-necked Phalarope were whirling about with one Wilson's Phalarope, giving good side-by-side views.

Things got really interesting as we made our way to the end of the wharf when someone spotted two Double-crested Cormorant to the east, and then one of the hoped-for rarities, Hudsonian Godwit, was seen in the distance for our first crack at it. (It would re-appear much closer the next morning.) The highlight of the morning (or weekend, for some) came quickly on the heels of the godwit in the form of an Upland



*Hudsonian Godwit*

Sandpiper! This was a lifer for most of the group and gave excellent, if a little distant, views. We weren't even two hours into the weekend and already most of the group had a lifer! Where do we go from there?

Well, right behind the Upland Sandpiper was the first of a few juvenile Franklin's Gulls for the weekend, and very close looks at an Osprey. We finally made it to the end of the wharf (not a long walk under normal circumstances) to search through the Western Grebe flocks for another Salmon Arm specialty - Clark's Grebe. With a heap of patience and some excellent scope work by many in our group, we got on to three individuals, also providing a lifer for some. Another highlight was six species of swallow swooping and twittering overhead and around the boats in the marina. Many were landing on the tops of houseboats or the railings of other boats, giving extremely close views and great opportunities to compare sizes and patterning between the species. The long-staying seven American White Pelican were also spotted.



*Franklin's Gull (juvenile, right)) with Ring-billed Gull*



Scoping the Bay itself yielded a few interesting birds, including a single Common Loon, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, Horned Grebe, some Hooded Merganser, and a few Pied-billed Grebe. An American Pipit flew over and several Yellow-rumped Warblers were heard in the nearby willows.

Since the wharf is distant from the mouth of the Salmon River, we decided to head to nearby Peter Jannink Park for a closer look and perhaps walk down onto the mudflats to see what we could find. However, this year's near-record high water has left the expanding area of mud in the bay extremely goeey, and after almost losing Peter to it, we decided to stay a little closer to the 'mainland' to scope. A juvenile Peregrine Falcon sitting on the ground was followed by an adult about ten minutes later. A few Bald Eagle were also spotted out at the river mouth. In the park itself, the small pond held two Blue-winged Teal, a Cinnamon Teal, and an array of the more common ducks for this time of year. Both Stilt and Baird's sandpiper were added as well.

For lunch we headed back to the wharf area and sat watching small numbers of birds moving through the trees on the Bay's edge. MacGillivray's, Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped warblers were seen, and Cedar Waxwing and Western Wood-Pewee were added to our bulging list. In the afternoon we headed to the west side of the bay through the Switzmalph Cultural Center property, adding a wheeling flock of 11 Turkey Vulture en route. On the forest walk, we added Red-tailed Hawk and Hairy Woodpecker, and later saw a Merlin, our last new bird of the day for a total of 82 species.



*Sora (this one was photographed in Kelowna)*

On day two, we headed east of the wharf down the Raven Trail, but not before enjoying point-blank views of the Hudsonian Godwit at the foot of the wharf! A small group of peeps added both Western and Semipalmated sandpipers to our list. A Belted Kingfisher was heard before we moved on down the trail toward Christmas Island. As we wandered along we added some nice birds to our lists, including Willow Flycatcher, Red Crossbill, Red-eyed and Warbling vireos, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Gray Catbird, American Golden Plover



*American Golden Plover*

Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, and a closely-seen Sora.

Christmas Island was very productive, starting with good views of a Merlin eating a dragonfly. Shorebirds were there in good numbers along the banks and in the mud, including more yellowlegs, good looks at Baird's and Pectoral sandpipers, and more ducks. The far side held Savannah Sparrow and the best bird of the day - a very obliging American Golden-Plover! Further down the trail one fortuitous stop found us five Semipalmated Plover and a small pocket of ducks that were totally different from those elsewhere in the Bay. They included 15 Redhead, three Greater and two Lesser scaup, and a few Red-necked Grebe. Later on Joyce and Peter watched a Common Nighthawk fly overhead. The day ended with lunch at a lovely viewpoint at Larch Hills Winery.



In all, 103 species were recorded and a good time was had by all!

*Note: See BCFO website for a complete species list.*



## *BCFO TWO DAY FIELD TRIP – VICTORIA – NOVEMBER 3-4, 2012*

*Mike McGrenere*

Twelve people ignored the damp weekend weather forecast and showed up at the MV Coho ferry terminal in Victoria on Saturday morning for the “mini pelagic” trip. We had great provincial representation with participants from the Interior, Okanagan, Lower Mainland, Gulf Islands and Victoria. And the best part? It wasn't raining.



*The Group on board the MV Coho*

*George Clulow*

We gathered at the bow of the MV Coho as it made its way out of the harbour heading for Port Angeles. For some, this was their first adventure looking for seabirds. There were plenty of birds to look at, and our focus quickly turned to the many alcids and gulls near Ogden Point. Pigeon Guillemots, Common Murres, Marbled Murrelets and Rhinoceros Auklets were on the water, while Glaucous-winged, Mew, Heermann's and Bonaparte's gulls were flying on both sides of the ship. In fact, Bonaparte's Gulls were everywhere: we estimated that we saw over 4,500 “Bonies” in the first 20 minutes of the trip.

As we headed further out into the Strait of Juan de Fuca, another highlight species appeared – Ancient Murrelets. These birds fly in small groups then land on the water and disappear. We were able to get good views of these gray-backed alcids when they returned to the surface. A pelagic trip would not be successful without a real pelagic species. So we were happy when we spotted our first Northern Fulmar sitting on the water and eventually taking to the air, providing excellent views of its stiff-winged flight. We spotted a second fulmar a few minutes later, and a third when we crossed the U.S. boundary. All three were dark morph birds.

On arrival in Port Angeles, the customs officer saw our birding group and quickly got us through the process. We only had a short time in Port Angeles

so we ate our lunch in a nearby park and strolled down the waterfront walkway observing the birds in the harbour and nearby pond. One of the highlight birds on this short stroll was a Wilson's Snipe that completely ignored our presence as it fed on the edge of the pond.

The trip back to Victoria was uneventful with no wind and very calm seas. On entering Victoria Harbour, we noticed a birder on the Ogden Point breakwater looking into a ball-up of gulls and alcids. We couldn't see anything different from the ferry but we later found out that he was looking at an adult Little Gull that could not be relocated. We finished the day at Milestones Restaurant on the Victoria harbour.

On Sunday morning, we started at the Ogden Point breakwater where we looked for the Little Gull, along with other local birders, but without success. An Elegant Tern had been seen in Victoria at Cattle Point on three previous days so we headed there with high hopes. We spent an hour at this location but could not find the tern. A Lapland Longspur feeding on the point provided excellent views and photo opportunities. We could see fog rolling in from the east so we headed to Clover Point. Here we hit the bonanza for gulls with six species resting on a rock – Glaucous-winged, California, Western, Herring, Thayer's and 27 Heermann's gulls. Mew Gulls were flying just offshore. Surfbirds, Black Turnstones and a single Sanderling were also nearby.



*Heermann's Gull*

*Clive Keen*

The fog eventually rolled across Clover Point so we decided to go inland to the Martindale Road area. This is an agricultural area that is usually very good for waterfowl and hawks in the fall and winter. After everyone had gathered, we stopped along Martindale Road beside a large flooded field with plenty of water birds. Our eyes were immediately drawn to the swans in the distance and we identified both Tundra and Trumpeter. Canada, Cackling and Greater White-fronted geese and a single Snow Goose were resting and feeding in the fields along with many species of puddle ducks. Some sharp eyes picked out a single California Quail in blackberry brambles and two Greater Yellowlegs feeding near the swans. A Peregrine Falcon and male American Kestrel perched nearby

The trip ended just before 2:00 p.m. allowing people sufficient time to head to Swartz Bay for the ferries. We observed a total of 72 species for the weekend Oh, and one more thing, it started to rain just after 2:00 pm!



Lapland Longspur

Clive Keen

*Note: A complete species list for this trip can be found on the BCFO website.*

## PRETTY BRAINY POLLY

The ability to do logical inference is considered to be a hallmark of human intelligence. Birds don't do intelligence, do they?

Well, researchers tested six African Grey Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) to see whether they could solve a task requiring inferential ability. They presented the parrots with two boxes, in one of which food was hidden. They then shook one or both boxes horizontally or vertically or, in a control run, not at all. The box containing the food (walnuts — scrumptious grub if you are a parrot) rattled. The parrots were then allowed to choose a box in search of the reward (the walnuts).



The position of the reward and the shaking actions were varied randomly in successive trials. The birds nailed the trick right away. And this requires the ability to make logical inferences because, when only the empty box was shaken, they had to infer that the reward must be in the other box. Supplementary experiments satisfied the researchers that the birds were not cuing on some inadvertent clue.

Furthermore, their behaviour declined to random in the control trial (no shaking at all), as it should. You and I could do no better.

Oddly enough, the birds performed well when the boxes were shaken horizontally but not vertically. That's a logical problem for the experimenters to chew on; they hypothesize that the vertical motion confused the birds because it mimicked some natural behaviour (parrots do more or less noisy head-bobbing in a variety of circumstances).

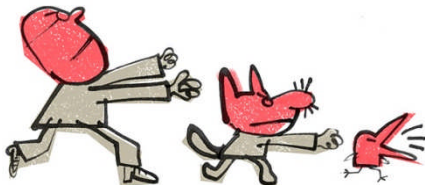
Comparable logical solution of problems has been seen, otherwise, only in great apes and in humans. (The parrots are performing at the level of a child of 3-4 years age). So, the next time you think of someone (or some bird) as a 'birdbrain', consider what that might imply.

*Reference: Schloegl, C., Schmidt, J, Boeckle, M., Weiss, B.M, and Kotrschal, K. 2012. Grey parrots use inferential reasoning based on acoustic cues alone. Proceedings of the Royal Society B 279: 4135-4142. doi: 10.1098/rspb.2012.1292*

Summary by M.Church

*Image: African Grey Parrot, Bloedel Conservatory, Vancouver, BC.*





## **REDUCING BIRD-KILLS BY IRRESPONSIBLE CAT OWNERS**

Sherril Guthrie



Over the past century, native and migratory birds have faced many threats to their survival. These include habitat loss due to agriculture and development, the introduction of invasive species, pesticide use, disease, window strikes, hunting and poaching, oil spills, and now climate change. But no threat is as tragic or senseless as human-induced predation by domestic cats.

The number of birds killed by irresponsible cat owners is staggering—over a billion each year in the United States and countless millions in Canada. The numbers are so enormous that most people no longer find them meaningful. Unlike a room stacked to the ceiling with elephant tusks or wolf pelts, it's simply not possible to comprehend that many dead birds and the devastating impact on some species. In the final analysis however, all we really need to grasp is that the numbers aren't sustainable. But because of where many bird-kills occur, the death toll can be reduced.

Most bird-kills by cats occur in our own backyards and neighbourhoods. Others occur on rural or vacant properties and green belts bordering populated areas—all prime locations for stray domestics that fuel the growing number of feral cat colonies. In other words, the killing of BC's birds on a massive scale is occurring close to home and right under our noses.

### **The Responsibility in British Columbia**

Over 300 species of birds breed each year in BC—more than in any other province in Canada. Sixty-five species breed nowhere else in Canada, and for several species, BC holds most of the world population. Situated along the Pacific Flyway that extends from Patagonia to Alaska, our province, as you know, is a major migration corridor and staging area for many species. BC is also one of the world's top birding destinations.

Because of this, every municipality, neighbourhood and family plays a pivotal role in bird conservation efforts. As stewards of our own backyards, urban and rural, we simply must do our part to help native and migratory birds safely feed, nest and raise their young. It's a responsibility that BC residents can't turn away from or rely on others to manage.

### **Scope of the Problem**

No one knows how many irresponsible cat owners there are in Canada or in BC, only that there are far

too many. In terms of the number of cats, a 2007 Ipsos-Reid study offered a fuzzy estimate of 7.9 million cats in Canada. But because the study didn't account for the many multi-cat households or growing number of feral cats, this outdated figure is just a starting point. The study also didn't account for the large population of unspayed and unneutered cats and their reproductive prowess.

Unspayed domestic females produce two litters a year, while feral females have four. Thanks to routine abandonment and the practice of free roam, many domestics and ferals have ample opportunity to reproduce. Ferals often breed with domestics, and here in BC with our moderate climate and outdated animal control bylaws, this is a serious concern. The number of unwanted cats and feral colonies in BC is growing despite current spay/neuter programs, including trap-neuter-return or TNR.

*"It's kitten season year round and the problem is getting worse."*

**Spay/Neuter Action Committee -- Vancouver Island**

TNR programs, such as the one in Delta, BC, cannot deliver on their goal to reduce and eliminate feral populations. Overtime, there are never enough funds or reliable volunteers to properly manage all the colonies. Furthermore, as soon as a community learns that TNR is in place, irresponsible cat owners are more willing to abandon their intact cats, especially those with behavioural problems. This has been proven time and time again throughout North America and confirmed by feral colony managers and volunteers. Yet here in BC, naive politicians and animal welfare staff buy into flimsy research and continue to give it a try. As one Canadian biologist stated after assessing the body of research that is used to support TNR:

*"It represents atrocious scholarship, contains bald assertions without providing references, has no credibility and contains shocking misportrayals. And as it would be generous to ascribe this to ignorance, I can only conclude that the statements made and conclusions reached in the research supporting TNR are outright falsehoods."*

**- Professor Michael Clinchy, Biologist, University of Western Ontario**



## Cat Crisis in BC

Throughout my 2008-2009 research leading to the 2011 CBC documentary, *Cat Crazy*, there were plenty of headlines and stories about shelters overflowing with cats, and towns and cities overrun with nuisance felines. Fast-forward to 2012 and it's clear that in most BC municipalities, cat overpopulation and its related impacts are worse. Here's a small sample.

- **Merritt**—After four years of activity by local feral cat groups, Merritt is now struggling with over 500 ferals and the problems associated with nuisance cats, careless feeding and mismanaged colonies.
- **Northern BC, Maple Ridge, Tofino**—All made headlines as native predators such as coyotes, cougar, wolves and wolverine were drawn into town for an opportunistic feast on an abundant supply of free-roaming cats. One local mayor dared to suggest that wolverines were the problem. While in March 2012, a long-time Tofino resident explained that their current problem with wolves coming into town, a first in 30 years, was due to a local cat group feeding ferals.
- **Richmond and Surrey, BC**—A 2012 interview with management at the Richmond Animal Protection Society revealed that Surrey residents struggling with cat problems are requesting help from RAPS. Unable to get help from Animal Control at the City of Surrey, they are driving stray and unwanted cats to Richmond.
- **Chilliwack and Abbotsford**—At a local BC SPCA shelter, cats now account for 76% (up from 72%) of all animals taken in. Resources are stretched and the City of Abbotsford won't help. Yet both cities maintain outdated animal control bylaws that fuel the problem. Interviews revealed that residents don't complain to their city because they know the city won't take action.

There are 161 members (villages, towns, cities and districts) in the Union of BC Municipalities, and many have cat problems.

## Signs of Hope

Despite troubling scenarios in BC municipalities that have failed to respond to cat overpopulation, there are notable successes. Not surprisingly, a number of these successes are due to cat licensing. This is an equitable approach that is almost identical to dog licensing, except that cat license fees are lower and all of the much-needed funds collected go directly to spay-neuter programs, the care and housing of unwanted cats, adoption, and public education. Because this approach works, there is also a growing base of support for program expansion in BC and future progress. Here's what we've accomplished so far:

- **Creston, BC**—Now in its fourth year, Responsible Pet Ownership, which includes Cat Licensing, is a solid success. The program began in 2009 in response to a cat crisis, was modeled after programs in Calgary and Saskatoon, and as of June 2012, Creston has produced solid compliance and results. Creston's mayor stated to journalists, "Cat Licensing has helped to resolve our feral cat problem."
- **Clinton, BC**—Introduced Responsible Pet Ownership where cats and dogs are managed with the same approach. Results are very positive.
- **BC SPCA** publicly stated its support for cat licensing and is asking BC residents to contact their mayor and councillors to request changes to outdated animal control bylaws. The general manager of humane education stated, "Cities should follow the lead of Calgary, where cat licensing has proven successful since it became mandatory in 2007."
- **BC Nature**—Thanks to a submission by the Victoria Natural History Society, Resolution 2011-01 Cat Licensing was passed. The resolution clarifies actions that need to be taken by BC Municipalities and the clear benefits for communities, cats and birds.
- **Richmond and West Vancouver**—After a June 2012 Cat Crisis presentation to the Lower Mainland Animal Control Committee with 12 municipalities represented, these cities stated interest in moving forward. All cities received a research summary and the *Cat Crazy* DVD.

Every e-mail, article, phone call, meeting, resolution, video, and presentation has helped foster these successes. Collectively, we have heightened public awareness about cat overpopulation and its root cause—irresponsible cat owners. Many groups have acknowledged this publicly and are advocating for change. Never has there been a better time to take personal action.

## Personal Action—Ideas and Options

Taking personal action to reduce bird-kills by cats is essential, especially for anyone living near a green belt, refuge, shoreline, or critical habitat.

- **Positive Role Model**—As a BCFO member, you can be an important role model in your neighbourhood—especially if you own cats. Share your knowledge, passion for birds, and the importance of creating safe yards for bird families to feed and nest, with your neighbours and friends; discuss responsible cat ownership and the use of outdoor cat enclosures—a win-win for cats, birds and good neighbour relations.



rabbits. (In the past, free roaming cats had reduced these populations as well.)

At a personal level, we can't stop an oil spill, climate change, or the slaughter of Amur Falcons in India. We can write letters and support larger groups to take action, but the outcome is beyond our personal control. What we do have control over is our own backyard. Taking personal action to reduce the number of bird-kills by irresponsible cat owners works. It also fosters responsible pet ownership and the development of a more sustainable approach to safely co-existing with birds in BC.

**Identify Interested Neighbours and Local Support**—There will be people who are interested in your knowledge and positive actions to reduce bird-kills by cats. Good neighbours and responsible cat owners want to create a better environment for everyone, including cats. So connect, discuss ideas and encourage further action.

- **Advocate for Change**—Become familiar with local animal control bylaws and how they compare to Creston's and other cities that have Responsible Pet Ownership Programs. Contact your local BC SPCA manager or humane society and learn about the cat problem in your municipality. Then connect with your mayor, council or animal control officer to discuss concerns and ideas. Include neighbours and other local supporters. A research summary is available for your use.
- **Take Charge of Your Own Backyard**—Even if your town or city does not currently have a responsible pet ownership program, most animal control bylaws do not permit any domestic animal to roam beyond their owner's property and become a nuisance. If you have neighbours who continue to allow their cats free roam into your yard and around bird feeders, register a complaint with your local animal control officer. If they don't offer assistance, connect with your local BC SPCA shelter and discuss other options. Humane trapping is a viable option. The cat is safely delivered to the shelter where the owner retrieves it. If the cat is not spayed or neutered—often the case—the BC SPCA will address this issue with the owner and offer information about responsible cat ownership.

The problem in my own backyard, with 14 roaming domestic cats and 8 irresponsible cat owners, was resolved by using these steps. Since then, many birds have returned—29 species so far! Without constant feeding stress due to cat predation, the birds nesting and feeding in our yard appear fatter and healthier as breeding season, migration and winter approach. As well, over the past two years the breeding pairs have raised larger families—including the raptors that rely on healthy populations of squirrels, chipmunks and

*A Research Summary outlining the root causes of cat overpopulation and solutions for municipalities is readily available for your town or city. Please contact Sherril Guthrie at [gqgroup@shaw.ca](mailto:gqgroup@shaw.ca) or 604.866.1345 for free copies.*

## **AERIAL FORAGING BY WOOD DUCKS!**

*George Clulow and Derrick Marven*

It is well documented that Wood Ducks are frequent and enthusiastic consumers of fallen acorns. In fact, Birds of North America cites studies from three different states in the eastern US that document acorns making up between 18% and 52% of this species' diet during the fall/winter period. Wood Ducks have also been documented diving up to 1 metre to retrieve sunken acorns. Not too bad for a dabbling duck!

Derrick Marven reported from Duncan this month that he has, over the past 20 years, observed up to 100 Wood Ducks foraging for acorns in the Cowichan Bay area, both on land and by diving in the water to get their food.

*"This species possesses an extremely distensible esophagus, enabling it to swallow acorns up to 1.0 cm wide and 5.7 cm long; as many as 30 small acorns have been found in one esophagus, 20 large ones in another."*

*From: Hepp, Gary R. and Frank C. Bellrose. 1995. Wood Duck (Aix sponsa), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved Oct.2012 from the Birds of North America Online:*

<http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/169>

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October this year, for the first time ever in his experience, Derrick watched a male Wood Duck fly up about 3 meters, and flutter while pulling acorns from the tree. "It did this several times. An amazing feat from a duck, I think," noted Derrick.



## STORYTELLING OF RAVENS ON MOUNT WORK

Ana Simeon

If there is a human pursuit, other than romance, where a lavish investment of patience and devotion is capriciously rewarded with frustration punctuated by brief moments of jubilation, it is surely birding. Birders think nothing of freezing toes and fingers as they wait in the pre-dawn chill for a bittern to emerge from the reeds, or to spot an elusive songster who will as likely as not flit back into the bushes before it can be positively identified. The learning curve, as mathematicians would say, “tends to infinity”. For birders, this is part of the draw: the object of our devotion cannot be mastered, only courted lifelong.

Einstein famously wondered whether the Universe is a friendly place. It must be, for in it there exist Sweet Spots – magical places where the customary rigours are suspended, where the winged ones display for hours to our delectation. One such sweet spot is Mount Work, part of the ridge behind and parallel to Gowlland Tod Provincial Park (near Victoria).

High up Mount Work, in a dell just below the summit, you can sit snug for hours, and observe the ways of ravens to your heart's content. The expanse of the sky, the scudding clouds and the distant views of the Malahat and Finlayson Arm instill a sense of timelessness. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. First to hike in.

The trail starts off Durrance Road, in the cool of the cedar-hemlock forest, with salal and huckleberry providing abundant refreshment through summer and early fall. Halfway up the cedar woods there is a fallen log with a seat cut into it, and a ledge to rest your backpack without taking it off. Accept the invitation – this is a good place for a breather and a sip. As you climb on, the wet-loving cedars give way to Douglas-fir and arbutus; the steep incline soon evens out to a pleasant walk amid ocean spray, dwarf rose, bunchberry, and the occasional columbine or glacier lily. Be sure to yield to the temptation of side-trails off the main trail, and you'll discover delightful glades and exhilarating viewpoints. You will usually be able to complete the loop back to the main trail.

Once you're up on the ridge, the trail leads through a series of viewpoints and dells scattered with rocky outcrops and studded with arbutus and hairy manzanita. Stands of dwarf pines and firs give off a heady fragrance.

Near the summit, which is an inconspicuous rock recently robbed of the plaque proclaiming its status, there are two dells offering expansive views. Head for the one past the summit, which is sheltered

from the wind. There you can settle down and discover the Way of the Raven.

Ravens are fascinating to watch. As members of the order of songbirds (*Passeriformes*), they are highly vocal and expressive, as the phrase “storytelling of ravens” attests. In his book “Mind of the Raven” ornithologist Bernd Heinrich lists an impressive array of “choke sounds, gurgles, bill snaps, grunts, honks and quorks of high and low pitch; inflected nasal quorks, deep rasping quorks and hollow gong sounds”. If you listen carefully, you will hear most or all of those on Mount Work. On one of our previous visits to the site, my husband and I also heard a bonded pair converse in liquid, bell-like tones as they circled overhead. If the more obvious songbirds, such as vireos and warblers, are the lyrical opera divas of the avian world, ravens are the dramatic artists, with an impressive variety of expressions that often resonate with the mood of their human audience.

Yet despite this vocal ability ravens are mavericks among songbirds. Seeing them swoop and soar you could mistake them for birds of prey. They do hunt, although they much prefer to help themselves to other hunters' prey, whether the hunter is a human, a grizzly bear or a pack of wolves. In fact, ravens have a symbiotic relationship with wolves, alerting them to potential prey and sharing the spoils. Ravens' courtship display – a breath-taking freefall, talons locked together – parallels that of eagles and other birds of prey. Like us, ravens are social, intelligent, adaptable, playful, wily and endlessly fascinating. Enjoy!

*Reprinted with permission from “Island Parent Magazine”, where the article first appeared.*

*Raven images by Mark Haldas.*



Summit of Mount Work

Ana Simeon





## ***Photography Tours with Hobbs Photo Images Co.***

Have you ever wanted to learn more about the diverse ecosystems of North America? Do you want to increase your exposure in pursuit of nature photography; or build your photographic portfolio whilst learning how to be a more skilled wildlife photographer? Or are you simply interested in sharing some amazing experiences in some truly unique wilderness areas? If any of these goals sound appealing then I hope you'll visit our website to learn more about the opportunities we offer.

- **Tour Options:** Sonoran Desert (*Arizona*), Great Basin Desert (*Washington*), Bosque Del Apache (*New Mexico*) & Canyonlands (*Utah*)
- **Group Size:** Two guides and four guests (maximum)
- **Pricing:** ~\$340/person/day (all expenses included)

We hope you'll join us for one of our fun-filled photographic excursions...for more details please give us a call (Office: 1-250-889-2071) or visit our website: [www.hobbsphotos.com](http://www.hobbsphotos.com)

**We hope to hear from you soon!!!**

## ***REMINDER***

### ***GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT 2013***

February 15 - 18.

For more information

See <http://bcfo.ca/>

Count the birds in your  
backyard, or a local park, or a  
nearby lake, inlet or beach,  
or along a favourite trail, or....





# TOURS FOR NATURALISTS

## 10th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL 10% OFF ARIZONA TOUR

In 2003 I guided my first tour to Arizona. To celebrate our 10th anniversary we are offering 10% off the 2013 Arizona tour - save \$265

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

**20 Feb. - 3 March 2013 (12 days)**

Cost \$2650 (dbl occup) from Phoenix

**10th Anniversary Special, save 10%**

**NOW PRICED AT \$2385**

Arizona is home to some of the most unique, famous and unforgettable landscapes in the world. The Grand Canyon, the mesas and buttes of Monument Valley and the silhouette of a saguaro against a golden sunset are images so famous that we have grown up with them since childhood. The tour includes **The Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly, Sedona, and the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts**. Join us for a midwinter tour to the blue skies and fascinating deserts of this famous state.



"Thank you for a memorable trip. Canyon de Chelly, Monument Valley & Valley of the Gods are memories to last a lifetime. Thank you, thank you, thank you". Audrey.

"Thank you for an amazing tour through Arizona. First class experience!" Vern & Claire.  
Visit our website for testimonials from all of our tours.



### \*\*\*SOUTHERN UTAH & DEATH VALLEY\*\*\*

**16-27 April 2013 (12 days)**

**Cost \$2750 (dbl occup) from Las Vegas**

Planet Earth contains an infinite variety of landscapes, but in southern Utah random geologic events have conspired to create rare, unexpected and beautiful consequences. The mighty Colorado River, aided by the arid erosion cycle, has waged battle across the eons with the sandstone strata and fashioned landscapes so unique and bizarre that they are more redolent of an extra-terrestrial origin. We visit **Bryce Canyon, Valley of the Gods, Arches NP, Canyonlands NP, Monument Valley, Zion Canyon** and more + **Death Valley**.

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

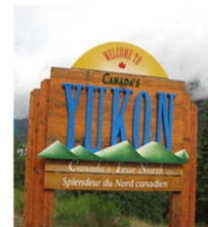
**Land of the Midnight Sun**

**Tour I, 18-29 June 2013 (12 days)**

**Tour II, 1-12 July 2013 (12 days)**

**Cost \$3600 (dbl occup) + GST from Whitehorse**

The Yukon is a fabled land whose very name evokes archetypal images of wilderness and a frontier populated by colourful characters. On this tour we will experience both the natural and human landscapes of this fascinating and beautiful land, visiting **the Klondike, the Dempster Highway, and the Mackenzie Delta**. The Dempster is renowned as a naturalist's paradise with its varied and beautiful landscapes, sought-after bird species, large mammals and we visit at the peak of the wildflower display. **At latitude 66N we cross the Arctic Circle and enter the Land of the Midnight Sun. We also fly across the Mackenzie Delta to Tuktoyaktuk on the Arctic Ocean.**



**Leader: Tony Greenfield**  
**WHISKEYJACK NATURE TOURS**  
**BOX 319, SECHLT, BC, V0N 3A0**  
**Tel: 604-885-5539, E-m: [tony@whiskeyjacknaturetours.com](mailto:tony@whiskeyjacknaturetours.com)**  
**Details & itineraries at website: [www.whiskeyjacknaturetours.com](http://www.whiskeyjacknaturetours.com)**  
**BC reg #34425**



## ***BIG DUCK SHOOT - A SAGA OF 'TICK AND CLICK'***

*Carlo Giovannella – text*

*Peter Candido - photos*

The Lower Mainland of BC is a wonderland for wintering waterfowl, and must surely be one of the foremost waterfowl sites in all of North America. On March 6, 2005, a team of four Lower Mainland twitchers set out to illustrate this claim by finding as many species of waterfowl as we could in a single day. To further document their abundance, we decided that each species should be photographed. Ending up with a total of 31 species, we thought we had established a record that could not be beaten. But we were wrong. In 2007 a group in Washington State tied our tally. Although they had not taken photographs, we felt that our record had been sullied, so consequently set out to rectify the situation.

For our renewed attempt in 2008, we had to re-assemble the team. Our chief photographer from '05 (Walter Ammann) was not available this time around, so we recruited Peter Candido in his place. The other members were hold-overs from '05, namely George, Carlo, and Ilya.

Our quest began just after dawn on Sunday morning, Jan 20. We had of course done some previous scouting. It was clear that our success would depend on some difficult species being present in one particular field, where Tundra Swans (a miss on our '05 effort) were hanging out with a flock that also included White-fronted Geese and Cacklers. With decent weather, some careful planning, and just a tad of good fortune, things went well for most of the day . . . but there were a few uncertain moments! At the White Rock Pier, the Long-tailed Ducks and Ruddy Ducks that had been hanging very close in did not show, but we did manage to locate them offshore and had to settle for more distant photos. Then came the big IF, key to whether or not we would succeed. As we pulled up to the field full of swans and geese, there was fog so thick we couldn't see across the ditch beside the road. It appeared for a moment that our goose was cooked and no record could be possible. However, as we exited from the car, the fog began to lift as if being sucked up by the Birding Gods! All our targets were present, and within a few minutes Peter was able to fire off the required shots. We were on our way.



*In the fog..... three species of geese and a swan*

Next target was the drake Redhead (another miss in '05) at Surrey Lake, which, as it turned out, was not where it usually hung out. But even before we got to the lake, Ilya spotted him in the pond on the adjacent golf course. From then on it was smooth sailing, needing only to tick off more of the 'usual suspects'. Gradually we managed to locate all but one of our targets; the Cinnamon Teal, which had been sporadically sighted from the Westham Island bridge, could not be located on this day despite three tries. Our last 'tick 'n click' was Snow Goose at Reifel at about 2 pm, a mere 6 hours after starting out. All the birds recorded were found in Surrey and Delta, requiring a minimum of driving, hence keeping things as green' as could be expected for such a monumental achievement.

A list of species is presented on the following page. All photos were taken by Peter, who put on a virtual clinic of fast and accurate shooting with his hand-held digital SLR. With a total of 33 species observed and photographed we then reclaimed an American and possibly World Record, and further confirmed that the BC Lower Mainland is indeed the Waterfowl Capital of North America. Alas, once again we were wrong, as it was later brought to our attention that a group in Oregon had recorded 36 species! (More details below).





*Three species of scoter together is extra special.....*

'Team Odd Ducks':

Peter Candido, Vancouver; George Clulow, Burnaby; Carlo Giovanella, Surrey; Ilya Povalyaev, Surrey.

**SPECIES LIST:** Tundra, Trumpeter and Mute swans, Greater White-fronted and Snow geese, Brant, Canada and Cackling geese, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Eurasian and American wigeons, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Greater and Lesser scaup, Harlequin Duck, Long-tailed Duck, Black, Surf and White-winged scoters, Common and Barrow's goldeneyes, Bufflehead, Hooded, Common and Red-breasted mergansers, Ruddy Duck.

**EPILOGUE:** A brief discussion of Waterfowl Big Day records may be of interest here. Our outrageous claims were noted by Wayne Weber, who called our attention to records from the USA side of the border, including the Oregon record, which at 36 species may well be valid a claim on the World record. (It may also be of interest that we took only 6 hours to complete our score, whereas the Oregon record required a marathon of all-day driving, and we were unique in photographing all the species ticked). A bit of research on the subject provided the following summary of records for Waterfowl Big Days.

36 species; 25 Jan 1997; NW Oregon; Gilligan, Johnson, Lillie, Schmidt. Record for America and World (?);  
 33 species; 20 Jan 2008; SW BC, Candido, Clulow, Giovanella, Povalyaev; all species photographed. Record for Canada and for photo-documentation(?);  
 33 species; 28 March 1987; Oregon; Gilligan, Heintz, Pozzo, Schmidt;  
 33 species; Feb 1993; New York. Record for Eastern America (?);  
 33 species; Feb 2002; Oregon; Tod Thurston;  
 31 species, 06 Mar 2005; SW BC; Ammann, Clulow, Giovanella, Povalyaev; all species photographed;  
 31 species, 04 Mar 2007 Skagit Wash; Gary Bletch and Tim McCoy. Record for Wash(?);  
 28 species; 31 Mar 1985, Wash; D Paulson and L Feltne;  
 28 species; 10 May 1986; Oregon; Gilligan, Heintz, Irons, Fix (part of Oregon Big Day)

Our total of 33 is clearly a Canadian record. As a comparison, a few years ago an Ontario birder boasted of having seen 30 species in one weekend, over distances that could not likely be covered in a single day.

*Ed's Notes: This article was previously posted on the former 'Vanbirds' website. Peter's images were shot in 2008; his signature was added recently.*



*White-winged Scoters and one Surf Scoter*



**NESTING BEHAVIOUR OF  
PIED-BILLED GREBES AT  
COLONY FARM  
REGIONAL PARK,  
COQUITLAM, BC**

**PART 1: INFANTICIDE AT THE POND**

*John and Sheila Linn  
text and photos*



As in past years, a pair of Pied-billed Grebes nested on the pond at Colony Farm in 2012. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> there were two adult grebes and six chicks using a nest in the cattails near the centre of the pond.

On May 24<sup>th</sup> just before noon, no chicks were visible. Two adults were piling material on what appeared to be a new nest on the opposite side of the pond from the nest that had been in use. They were approached by a third adult and, shortly after, two of the grebes began to fight fiercely.

The fight lasted about three minutes, while the third bird swam nearby. Near the end of the fight one bird seemed to be the winner, grabbing the other at the back of the head and holding it underwater at times.





There was a brief calm while all three grebes were out of sight behind reeds. Two of the grebes then swam toward the centre area of the pond. One was calling and six chicks came out of the reeds near the adults.

Almost immediately, one of the adults began to attack the chicks with the apparent intent of killing them. The chicks were taken individually by the head in the adult's bill, shaken, and forced violently under water.



This lasted about three minutes, then one adult left, leaving a dead chick floating beside the other adult. No other chicks were visible.

About half an hour later, two adults were in sight, and one was calling. Later, all three adults were seen together. The following day, May 25, two chicks were seen briefly. An adult approached the area where one was seen, and called several times, but the chick did not come out from the shelter of the reeds.

In the days after the attack two adult Grebes built a new nest and hatched eight chicks (see Part 2).





## PART 2: BEFORE AND AFTER

Roy Lammle  
photos and notes from his blog

Other photographers also observed and documented the behaviour of the Pied-billed Grebes on the Colony Farm pond. In particular, a series of photos and blogs by Roy Lammle (summarized very briefly here) allows reconstruction of grebe behaviour before and after the dramatic events of Part 1.



May 28: Adult with first-brood chick begging unsuccessfully for food

On April 9, Roy observed a grebe, possibly a female, on an early nest (nest 1) near the edge of the pond. On May 16, he observed a very young chick being carried by an adult from this early nest, and thought that it was being taken to a new nest site near the centre of the pond (nest 2). As early as the next day however, others had seen as many as six chicks at this new nest. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, Roy witnessed a brief but furious fight between two adult grebes near the new nest site, and he saw a second fight early on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> – prior to the third fight – which is described in Part 1.

Following the events of May 24-25, for a day or two, there may have been three or even four adult grebes on the pond. The two that were now established as the resident pair were observed at nest 2 and also at a new nest (#3) that they constructed near the west end of the pond. Roy judged one of this pair to be a newcomer because of its distinctive and unfamiliar call.

On May 28, Roy was watching the two surviving chicks, now about two weeks old. They appeared to be sheltering in a small reedy inlet. For some time, the two adults were stationed near the entrance to the inlet, and Roy noted that they seemed to be keeping a careful eye on each other. Then, when one of them moved away, the other immediately entered the inlet, moving quickly and calling

gently (“cooing”), and the chicks emerged from the reeds. In an e-mail, Roy wrote:

*“The chicks begged persistently....in response, the adult merely preened and eventually the chicks preened too. I never saw the chicks being fed. On two occasions the adult used its webbed foot to stir up the bottom, then dived ... a few times, [Roy thought the adult was trying to teach the chicks how to find food], and when finished diving, hustled the chicks deep into the cattail bed, making them enter the cattails by submarining – to the extent of forcing one of the chicks underwater with its wing.”*

The other grebe returned, and the two hung about the entrance to the inlet, but when it moved away again, the whole scenario was repeated. Roy went back to the same place for more photos on May 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, but failed to find the chicks, nor did he see any grebe activity there. To his knowledge, the two first-brood chicks were not seen again

Within days however, the two adult grebes started a new nesting cycle at the west end of the pond. On May 30<sup>th</sup>, Roy photographed a grebe with one egg on nest 3 – the first of a clutch of eight. Eight chicks hatched toward the end of June.

Between June 25 and Sept 26, Roy’s photos illustrate the growth and development of the second brood chicks. At the end of July, seven chicks were observed, and from August 19 to Sept 27 (Roy’s last photo in the sequence) there were at least five healthy young grebes. When last recorded, they were getting along independently and “both parents had long gone”.



June 27: The second brood: ...“the whole shooting match – mom and dad, six chicks and at least two eggs...”





July 25: Adult with second-brood chick 4-5 weeks old

The entire sequence of Roy Lammle's photos can be viewed on Flickr at: <http://www.flickr.com/search/?q=Pied-billed+Grebe&w=28031793@N08&s=rec> Click on the small images to enlarge them and read Roy's blog.

### PART 3: COMMENTARY

#### Editors Notes

Infanticide has been recorded for many species of birds, ranging from passerines to waterfowl and raptors. Although the killing of young chicks is a sad event to witness, bear in mind that this is a natural adaptive behaviour designed to increase the reproductive success of the perpetrator. It can involve several different modes of behaviour, including replacement of one member of a pair, which appears to be what happened here. Usually, although not always, the perpetrator is a male interloper. He ousts the father of the chicks, and then kills the young in order to breed with their mother. (The female would otherwise show no interest in a new mate while incubating or caring for her young.)

It is likely that an interloper arrived on the Colony Farm pond sometime prior to the first fight on May 17. Immediately after the third fight – probably the most decisive victory -- (photographed by the Linns), as many as six chicks died, most likely killed by the interloper. Two siblings survived for a few days, until about May 28, after which they were not seen again.

Six days elapsed between the decisive fight (May 24) and the female laying the first egg of her second clutch (May 30). (During this time, Roy's observations indicate that the mother refused to feed her surviving first-brood chicks, yet still felt some attachment to them.) Allowing 8 - 9 days for laying 8 eggs and 23 days (starting from the laying of the first egg) for incubation, then hatching of the new brood would have taken place asynchronously between June 22 and 29, which fits with Roy's observations.

A quick literature scan (courtesy Google) uncovered no previous records of infanticide by Pied-billed Grebes, but there are references to this behaviour in closely related species.

## NATURE VANCOUVER BIRDING SECTION PRESENTS: BASIC FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF DIURNAL RAPTORS WORKSHOP WITH WILLIAM S. CLARK AT REIFEL MIGRATORY BIRD SANCTUARY, DELTA FEBRUARY 16-17, 2013

#### Lectures & Field Trips:

Saturday: All lectures are with PowerPoint  
(walk at Reifel in the afternoon)

Sunday: Field Trip - Boundary Bay and Delta

**Course Instructor:** William S. Clark.

**Cost:** \$150. pPer participant, limit 25.

**Course texts:** (not provided)

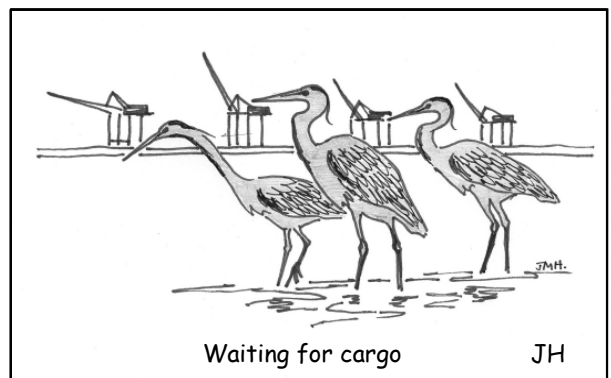
- *Hawks of North America*, Peterson series (Clark & Wheeler, Rev. 2001)
- *Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*. Clark & Wheeler

**Bring:** notebook, lunch and snacks, appropriate outdoor wear, and binoculars.

**Provided:** coffee, tea, hot chocolate and juices.

Please sign up by phoning or emailing  
Jude Grass at 604-538-8774 - [judegrass@shaw.ca](mailto:judegrass@shaw.ca)  
THEN mail a cheque for \$150.00 payable to Nature  
Vancouver - Raptor - Basic Workshop  
Mail to: 17375 27A Ave., Surrey, BC, V3S 0E9  
Registration will not be confirmed  
until the cheque is received.

ALL WELCOME



## PLASTIC FOOD

... a name we often carelessly apply to 'fast food', either because of the copious packaging that comes with it or because the food is particularly bland. But it is a literal and dangerous problem for seabirds. As the result of careless human disposal and accidental loss, vast reservoirs of plastic and closely related synthetic materials have collected in certain areas of the world's oceans. The stuff is persistent, and it floats. The huge North Pacific and Gulf of Alaska gyres (a gyre is a slowly rotating body of water of semi-oceanic extent) are major collecting zones, but plastic is becoming pervasive even outside the gyres. Omnivorous seabirds eat the stuff, which collects in their digestive systems, leading to morbidity or mortality, and they feed it to their young with fatal results.

A new study examined the gut contents of 67 deceased Northern Fulmars (*Fulmaris glacialis rogersii*) found on ocean beaches along western Vancouver Island, Washington and Oregon. Average plastic load was 0.385 grams (highest 3.66 g), consisting, on average, of 37 pieces (highest 454 pieces); 92.5% of the birds carried some plastic. The average load has increased steadily from 0.04 grams over the last 40 years. Current loads are very similar to results found for the highly polluted North Sea (in *F. g. glacialis*) and even the high Arctic. (The latter figure may have more to do with the huge wandering range of these oceanic procellariids than with local pollution there.)



This problem is so pervasive amongst fulmars that their loading has been proposed as an animal standard metric for marine plastic pollution. A target proposed by the European Union is that less than 10% of fulmars should have more than 0.1 g in their gut. 54% of the sampled North Pacific birds exceeded this threshold.

The plastic debris is made up of post-use material, including food wrapping, string, fishing line and rope, synthetic sponge fibre and, especially, polystyrene -- which includes styrofoam. The white, expanded-foam pellet form of this material is particularly dangerous because, in water, it eventually disintegrates into the component pellets, which are of ideal size for the birds to gobble up. Industrial plastic pellets are also encountered but, over the years, their share of the total ingested load has dropped from more than half to only about 4%. Material derives from ships' waste thrown overboard, from fish boat losses, from deliberate rubbish dumping at sea, and escape from shore. There have been international discussions and general agreement about the need to clean up the ocean surface but, thus far, little or no concrete action has occurred.



## BIRDING IN TAIWAN

2013

Nov.18 – Dec.1, 2013

**For BCFO Members.** Prime habitats: good chance for 23 endemic species; migrants and rarities from Japan and Siberia. Leaders: Simon Liao and Jo Ann MacKenzie. Cost: \$3900 (dbl.occup); \$4600 (single); from Taipei.

For details, contact:

[j.a.mackenzie@telus.net](mailto:j.a.mackenzie@telus.net)

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

## Plastic food cont.

Comment: One need only observe the flotsam washed up on our ocean beaches to realise that the problem is important in our inshore and immediately offshore waters. It is a problem that urgently needs action, but can only be tackled effectively on an international basis, wherein lies the difficulty of dealing with it.

## Reference:

Avery-Gomm, S., O'Hara, P., Kleine, L., Bowes, V. Wilson, L.K. and Barry, K.L. 2012. Northern fulmars as biological monitors of trends of plastic pollution in the eastern North Pacific. *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 64: 1176-1181.

Ms.Avery-Gomm is a UBC graduate student. Data from BC's Beached Bird Survey were used in this project.

Summary & Comment by M.Church.

Northern Fulmar image: 10000 birds.com



Plastic found inside one dead fulmar.  
(Note scale 2 cm long, lower right)  
(Dr.Carol Metayer, USGS-NWHC)

## **RAMSAR DESIGNATION FOR FRASER DELTA BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, BUT.....**

*Anne Murray – from Georgia Straight On-Line, November 2012*

.....Roberts Bank, the home of Deltaport, was left out of the Fraser River Delta Ramsar Site.

The Fraser River delta's designation as a UN "Wetland of International Importance", or "Ramsar Site", was welcome news to conservationists. It has taken 40 years. Even now, the designation omits Roberts Bank, a major part of the wetlands frequented by marine mammals, including endangered orcas, and providing feeding habitat for hundreds of thousands of migratory shorebirds and waterfowl, and hundreds of resident herons. Roberts Bank is the location of the Tsawwassen B.C. Ferries terminal. It is also the site of Port Metro Vancouver's proposed Terminal 2, a giant expansion of the existing Deltaport container facility, for which "project definition consultation" got underway October. A world-class wetland, at risk from imminent development, has been passed over for protection.

Wetlands, global and local, are in trouble. According to a report from the recent United Nations Convention on Biodiversity in Hyderabad, India, 50 percent of the world's wetlands have disappeared since 1900. Wetlands regulate climate, store carbon, buffer the land from storms and floods, and provide wildlife habitat. Coastal wetlands produce a quarter of the Earth's biological productivity, and yield 90 percent of the world's fisheries. The Ramsar Convention's deputy secretary general, Nick Davidson, speaking at Hyderabad was unequivocal: "Business as usual is no longer an option....If we continue to undervalue wetlands in our decisions for economic growth, we do so at increasing peril for people's livelihoods and the world's economies."

Yet the increasing loss of wetlands seems to have little impact on public policy. The drawn-out process of the Fraser delta's Ramsar designation illustrates the snail's pace of government conservation action.

By 1971, when the first UN Convention on Wetlands of International Importance met in Ramsar, Iran, the global loss of wetlands was already very high. In B.C.'s Lower Mainland, marshes and bogs had been drained and diked, the Fraser constrained into fixed channels, and port causeways thrust into the outer banks, disrupting the natural flow of river water and tides. As an initial conservation move, convention signatories committed to listing their most important wetlands, now over 2,000 in 163 countries. Canada was relatively slow to react, only signing the



convention 10 years later, and designating B.C.'s first Ramsar Site in 1982. This was the 586-hectare, federally-owned Alaksen National Wildlife Area, which includes Reifel bird sanctuary. The provincially-owned coastal wetlands at Roberts Bank, Boundary Bay, and Sturgeon Bank were left out in the cold.

Another five years passed, and a Canadian Wildlife Service report argued strongly for Ramsar designation of the Fraser delta, showing that it far exceeded all the criteria, by 60-fold for shorebirds and 30-fold for waterfowl. The report concluded: "no comparable sites exist along the Pacific coast between California and Alaska. There is no other site in Canada that supports the diversity and number of birds found in winter in the Fraser River delta."

More than 20 years after the initial Ramsar meeting, only one percent of the most important estuary on the Canadian Pacific coast was protected. Most of the delay was at the provincial level. In the early 1990s, the late Barry Leach, a naturalist closely involved in the creation of Reifel bird sanctuary in Delta and Serpentine Wildlife Management Area in Surrey, was among those who persistently requested that the provincial government designate Boundary Bay both as a WMA and a Ramsar Site. He met with constant rebuffs. However, public pressure, backed by a strong grassroots environmental movement, eventually caused a greener viewpoint to prevail. The Boundary Bay Regional Park was created on part of the old Spetifore property, Boundary Bay and Sturgeon Banks WMAs were declared in 2002, and much of Burns Bog was purchased for an ecological conservancy area in 2004. Roberts Bank WMA took considerably longer to be gazetted, despite the cause being strongly taken up by the Boundary Bay Conservation Committee, a local environmental



group. First proposed by B.C. Ministry of Environment staff in 1996, Roberts Bank was only designated a WMA this year, and portions of the wetland remain excluded.

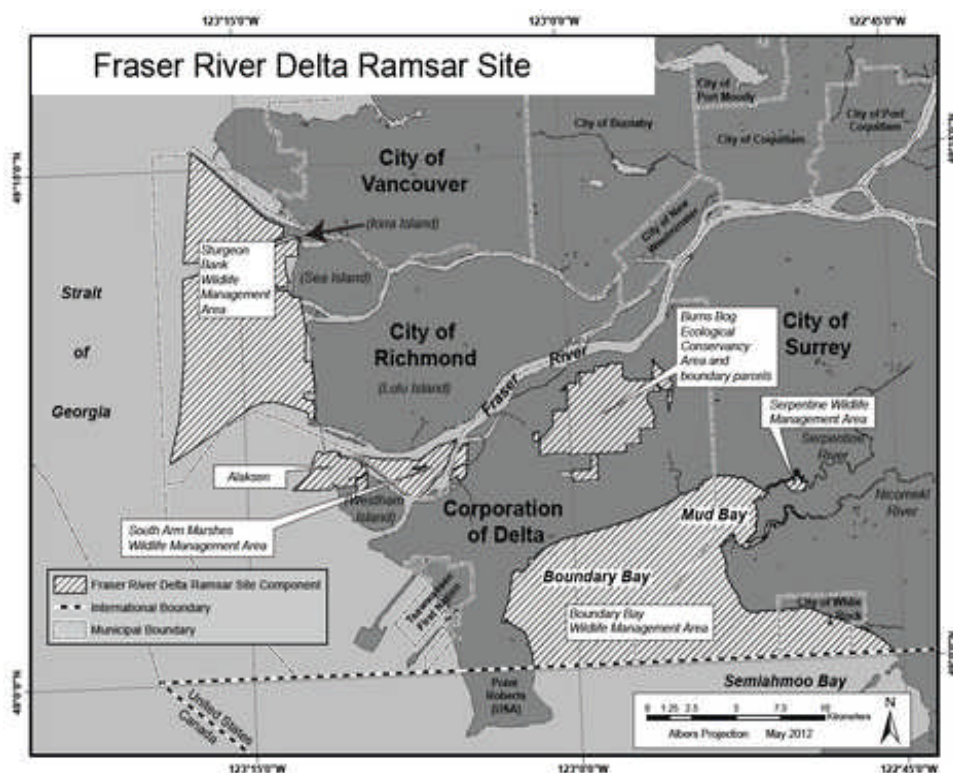
Fast forward to October 2012, and Ramsar Site designation finally takes place, 41 years after the original convention. The site is 20,682 hectares of wetland, encompassing Sturgeon Bank, Boundary Bay, Mud Bay, Semiahmoo Bay, Serpentine, South Arm Marshes, and Burns Bog. The only key wetland area missing is Roberts Bank. The lack of its provincial WMA designation prior to 2010, when the Ramsar application was initiated, is now blamed by politicians for Roberts Bank's omission from the new Ramsar Site. This questionable bureaucratic anomaly must be swiftly corrected, as it makes no sense ecologically.

What difference will the Ramsar designation make? That remains to be seen. Although it is not supported with legislation in Canada, it draws the eyes of the world to our shores. The recognition of Burns Bog as part of the Ramsar Site has already had an impact on developer MK Delta Lands Group. A recent public meeting on a proposed large-scale development on bog lands immediately to the east of the ecological reserve, was rescheduled "in order to incorporate some of the broader based thinking being undertaken

with the North Delta Area Plan review and the recent Ramsar designation for large parts of Delta's wetlands.

Business as usual is no longer an option when the world's wetlands are in peril.

Anne Murray is a writer and naturalist, and the author of two books on the Fraser River delta—*Tracing Our Past: A Heritage Guide to Boundary Bay* and *A Nature Guide to Boundary Bay*—both available at bookstores and from [Nature Guides B.C.](http://Nature Guides B.C.) She blogs at [natureguidesbc.wordpress.com](http://natureguidesbc.wordpress.com).



## **RECENT PUBLICATION – SPECIES AT RISK & CONSERVATION OF LOCAL AREAS**

### **Working Together to Protect Species at Risk -- Strategies Recommended to Improve Conservation on Municipal, Regional and Private Lands in BC**

.... based on the collective input from B.C.'s local government elected officials and environmental staff (The Species At Risk Local Government Working Group)... primary focus is to recommend how provincial and local governments can work together to achieve shared conservation goals.

.... more than 1,597 species at risk in BC — plants, vertebrates and invertebrates that are close to becoming locally or globally extinct. Significant threats ..... include habitat loss caused by human activities (urbanization, roads, logging, agriculture) and invasive alien species that displace native plants and animals...compounded by cumulative impacts... Species loss is impacting humans in ways we might not realize. ...Healthy ecosystems clean our air and water, and support resource-based economies...

See: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/documents/SAR%20Paper%20January%202011%20FINAL.pdf>

## NO CONTEST HERE: SEX TRUMPS SLEEP

It is often said that dogs are interested in three things – sex, food, and sleep (in that order). The claim probably applies to most beings, including the birds. The reasons for sex and food are self-evident, but interesting questions are raised about the necessity for sleep. In some mammals (including humans) sleep is an obvious necessity for reinvigorating brain performance (things like attention, memory, and physical coordination). One simply needs to recall how one's alertness fades after 18 or 20 hours of continuous wakefulness (or much sooner under activities requiring concentrated attention) to realise that. But in some creatures, sleep seems to be simply a means to reduce energy consumption during periods when food is difficult to find. In the extreme, this situation leads to torpor (e.g., the overnight state of hummingbirds) and hibernation (many small mammals, for example, ground squirrels, and some big ones).

Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*) present an interesting example of how lack of the need for sleep can actually lead to certain advantage. These sandpipers are polygamous – the males attempt to mate with as many females as they can and subsequently take no part in brood rearing (i.e., there is no pair bonding). So presumably, the male's success in passing on his genes is simply determined by how many females he can mate with, and that amounts to the question of how dominant he can be over competing males. An important part of that issue, in turn, is for how much of the time when females are receptive can he remain active (Down time at night does not pose a constraint here – Pectoral Sandpipers breed on Arctic tundra).

A group of researchers studied a population of 149 individuals, some of whom they wired up with tiny radios that telemetered activity level, in particular active time, quiet resting time, and sleep time.

Astonishingly, during the female receptive period, males were active nearly 90% of the time; the champion remained active for more than 95% of the time for 19 days! During this period females were active about 70% of the time (comparable with many humans) and male activity declined to that level after the end of breeding. During incubation, female activity declined to 40% of the time. No loss of performance was detected during the long periods of activity. The researchers confirmed the correlation between level of male breeding period activity and breeding success by determining the paternity of the chicks. Given the appropriate stimulus, it seems that these birds can dispense with sleep for serious lengths of time. They also determined that successful breeders had a higher return rate and better breeding success in the subsequent year than did the 'sleepers' among them.

This last observation raises a new problem: if those birds who can remain active longest dominate breeding, hence succession, why are there any birds left whose genes predispose them to longer periods of inactivity? Though they did not observe it in their inter-annual comparison, the researchers speculate that those birds who rest longer retain higher fitness for year-round survival so, in the long run, the odds on gene transmission must even out.

Reference: Lesku, J.A., Rattenborg, N.C., Valcu, M., Vyssotski, A.L., Kuhn, S., Kuenmeth, F., Heidrich, W. and Kempenaers, B. 2012. Adaptive sleep loss in polygamous Pectoral Sandpipers. *Science* 337:1654-8

Image: Birds-of-North-America.net

Summary by M.Church



American Dippers in the spawning channels alongside the Mamquam River, Squamish. These dippers were feeding on eggs from spawning salmon (Coho and Chum) as well as the usual invertebrates.  
Image: Mark Haldas

### BACK COVER

Collages by Mark Haldas:  
"Snow Geese"  
"Northern Pintail (female)  
and other waterfowl"



