BC BIRDING

Newsletter of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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British Columbia Field Ornithologists (BCFO)

. **PO Box 45507, Westside RPO,
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A subscription to this quarterly is a benefit of membership in the society. Members will also receive a copy of the annual journal, *British Columbia Birds*. Membership in BCFO is open to anyone interested in the study and enjoyment of wild birds in British Columbia.
BCFO objectives include fostering cooperation between amateur and professional ornithologists, promoting cooperative bird surveys and research projects, and supporting conservation organizations in their efforts to preserve birds and their habitats.
Since November, 2003, BCFO has maintained an official partnership with the Changhwa Wild Bird Society, Changhwa, Taiwan.

Membership Dues

Please send membership requests or requests for further information to:

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

Annual Membership Dues:

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

Newsletter Submissions

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

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

Advertising Rates

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

BCFO Website: http://bcfo.ca/

IN THIS ISSUE

COVER STORY: HERMIT THRUSH
Photo by Carlo Giovanella
April 20, 2012, Surrey

Carlo writes: This is one of the most common of our songbirds, breeding in the forests of Canada from coast to coast. Its haunting, ethereal song is a favourite among nature-lovers, an auditory icon of the north woods. It does not nest in lowland areas of BC such as the Lower Mainland, but good numbers pass through on migration in spring and fall. Regrettably, they don't usually sing in migration, and tend to be reclusive, so they are not often heard or observed by people who are not looking for them. On occasion, one will unexpectedly pop out in the open, as did the one that spent an afternoon in our little rock garden, allowing me to approach close enough to get this portrait.

BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS

Needs submissions

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

www.bcfo.ca/journal-author-invitation.php

BCFO RESEARCH GRANTS

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

1. Requests for funding must be for planned, rather than completed, projects.

2. Under normal circumstances applicants should be, or be willing to become, members of BCFO.

3. Projects and their results are to be reported in BCFO's journal ***British Columbia Birds.***

4. In order for BCFO Directors to give a timely response to project proposals, deadlines for submission are January 1 and July 1.

5. All reasonable requests up to a $1000 limit and within the financial strength of the organization will be considered, with any larger requests requiring approval at the AGM.

6. Applicants should obtain a copy of the grant policy and the application guidelines from a member of the executive before making a submission.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SIDNEY SUCCESSES and FUTURE PLANS

As you'll see from reports elsewhere in this issue of *BC Birding*, we enjoyed a very successful and busy AGM in Sidney on May 10, 11, and 12. Field trips turned up good numbers and some high "quality" species for members in attendance. Our thanks go to the expert leaders from the Victoria Natural History Society.

Our Saturday afternoon talks were highly engaging, and covered a diversity of topics from the Rocky Point Bird Observatory to nesting Turkey Vultures on Pender Island, and the re-introduction program for Western Bluebirds on the east coast of the Island. Our banquet address by Dr Sean Boyd detailed the critical importance of the Salish Sea to waterfowl nesting from the Interior of BC to the western Arctic. Notes of thanks, books, and an honorarium have been sent to to express our gratitude to those who took their time to make our conference a success.

While the number of attendees was a little lower this year, the smaller conference enabled everyone to get acquainted very quickly. Lively conversations and laughter were frequent at the tables, and the reinstituted bird tallies board was a magnet for participants who wanted to know what was seen, and from that information decide what they wanted to see on Sunday's field trips. Thank you Brian Self and Peter Candido for taking this on. It was a hit.

Members elected Jude Grass to the Board after a hiatus as Past President, and Adrian Leather was elected to the Board for the first time. Congratulations to both.

In my President's Report to members at the AGM business meeting, I said, and want to reinforce it here, that your Board of Directors is an extremely hard-working group. The professional footing on which the organisation now operates is thanks to them. Timeliness, attention to detail, and a sense of attending to what members want is evident. There is also a feeling that BCFO is moving forward as an organisation with direction and a sense of the future.

Also working hard on our behalf have been Wayne Diakow and Jude Grass – Jude in her role as Past President, and Wayne as conference facilities organiser. Our thanks go to both of them.

I also noted that our annual directors' strategic planning meeting is paying dividends. Last year we focussed on three main areas: enhancing the BCFO website, establishing a Bird Records Committee, and establishing a Future Directions Committee. The website is continuing to add new features, and news for members regularly appears there first. We have established, thanks to Neil Dawe, and Les Gyug, an extensive archive of back issues of *BC Birding* and *British Columbia Birds*. The 2012 Christmas Bird Count received extensive coverage this season, and the BCFO website became the place to find up-to-date reports from around the Province. The Bird Records Committee has been established, and we are making some final fine-tuning before reporting out to members on this long-awaited front. The Future Directions Committee met via Skype. A follow-up to members about the committee's work will be coming out to you soon.

Finally, we have also decided to advance our AGM planning considerably from what we have done previously. For 2014, we want to go to Pemberton – a first for BCFO. Since we announced this intention at the AGM, we have received an enthusiastic response from members. We are working to assess accommodation possibilities in the valley, and a suitable location to hold the AGM and banquet. Look for updates on our website.

OK, time to go birding!

George Clulow
President

The Bird Tallies Board at the AGM Photo: Gloria Candido

EDITORS' NOTES

Welcome to the June issue of BCFO's newsletter. Here you will find several accounts of the activities at our annual conference in Sidney, including accounts of field trips in the Saanich Peninsula and Victoria areas. (Species lists for these field trips will appear shortly on the BCFO website as appendices to this issue.) Also included is an account by Chris Charlesworth of the Kelowna-area "BCFO Two-Day Field Trip" that he led in April. A feature article contributed by Dr. Kathy Martin provides insights into tree cavities and their importance for the maintenance of our wildlife – even in cities. Unfortunately, one of our regular features, "B.C.Birding News Briefs", was not available for this issue; we hope it will reappear in September.

Enjoy your summer, and please consider sharing some of it with other members by contributing to the next issue of *your* Newsletter. (Items can be as short as a couple of sentences with an interesting photo.) Material for the next (September) issue will be accepted any time from now until mid-August.

OK, time to go and count loons!

June Ryder, Editor

LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor, March 27th, 2013

Re the occurrence of the Red-flanked Bluetail in the Vancouver area.

Many years ago in the late 1950s, a White-crested Laughing Thrush became resident in our neighbourhood of South Vancouver for several years. I would see it infrequently, possibly two or three times per year. I have also visited a few of the orient's wild bird markets, particularly in Hong Kong, noting the fascination for cage birds, particularly song birds, among the Asian Community.

Extrapolating from these observations and in consideration of Vancouver's considerable Asian population, one cannot help but wonder on the exact origin of the recently arrived Red-flanked Bluetail in Queen's Park, New Westminster.

The field guide, "Birds in Japan" (Yamashina, 1961) though old, mentions this species has a good song, described as "loud and fluty" and is "one of the most consistent singers in Japan".

What the foregoing information suggests is that in addition to the excitement this individual bird has generated, considerable caution and 'leg work' are likewise required to fully evaluate its authenticity. Let's not forget the Hasting's Rarities (visit Wikipedia), but I am not suggesting for a moment that fraud is at play with the Red-flanked Bluetail. The threshold for acceptance of 'first records must be exceedingly high.

Bill Merilees

***Reply from George Clulow*:** May 21st, 2013

Thank you Bill for expressing your concern, but I'm sure that the BCFO Bird Records Committee will fully examine the issue raised here, along with consideration of other such important matters as the pattern of vagrancy of this species in North America.

OMISSION

There was an omission in *Bird Listers' Corner 2012* as published in the March issue of BC Birding.
I neglected to include Brian Self's 346 total for the Vancouver Area. My apologies to Brian for the oversight.

Larry Cowan

Green Heron with new family members at Ambleside Park, West Vancouver *MH*

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.

EVENTS IN 2013:

June 14-16 - - MANNING PARK BIRD BLITZ, Manning Provincial Park. Contact: no address or phone number yet announced; e-mail: info@hopemountain.org; web-site: www.hopemountain.org .

June 18 – 22 - - BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL WORLD CONGRESS, Ottawa, Ont. Contact [no individual, address or phone number yet announced]; e-mail: kmakela@birdscanada.org.; web-site: www.birdlife.org/community/2011/09/the-birdlife-world-congress-2013-information/ .

Aug. 13-17 - - 131ST STATED MEETING, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION and 83RD 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.

Aug. 26-28 - - 5th INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS IN FLIGHT CONFERENCE, Snowbird, Utah. Contact (no individual, address, phone number or e-mail yet announced); web-site: www.partnersinflight.org/PIF%20V%20-Save%20date%20-%17%Sept%2020.pdf.

Sep. 12-14 - - 2013 WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Sky Islands Bird Observatory, Arizona. Contact: Pat Leitner, 1805 South Ceylon Pl., Tucson, AZ 95748-7602; phone (520) 256-7147; e-mail: pat@pleitnercpa.com; web-site: http://www.arizonafolklore.com/nature.org .

FRED C. ZWICKEL WINS THE STEVE CANNINGS AWARD

The Steve Cannings award is presented annually by the BC Field Ornithologists for exceptional contributions to ornithology in British Columbia. It honours the memory of the late Steve Cannings of Penticton, who was a renowned amateur ornithologist, nature photographer and conservationist. The award was presented to Dr. Zwickel during the banquet at the BCFO Annual Conference in Sidney on May 11th.

Citation read by Martin K. McNicholl:

Fred C. Zwickel is nominated for long-range research, primarily near Courtenay from 1961 through 1978 but also on Hardwicke Island from 1979 through 1984, on population dynamics of the Sooty Grouse (long classified as a race of Blue Grouse, but currently recognized as a separate species). These studies were in collaboration with his Ph.D. supervisor, James F. Bendell and their numerous graduate students, with individuals studying various aspects of anatomy, behaviour, diet, disease, dispersal, ecology, growth, habitat, history, hunting effects, moult, nesting, parasites, plumage, population dynamics, predation, weather and other aspects of the life history of this species. These studies emphasize the importance of long-term approaches to the understanding of the population dynamics of individual species and their ecological relations with other species. They also combined their findings with those of other researchers throughout the range of the Blue Grouse complex into a 2004 book that received The Wildlife Society's 2005 Wildlife Publication Award for Outstanding Monograph. Their studies include pioneering efforts on the use of colour-bands and later, radio-telemetry, to enable researchers to monitor the behaviour and fate of individual birds, catching birds with noosing poles, and the use of trained pointing dogs in monitoring bird populations. Fred is also a co-author of a check-list of the birds of Cortes Island, and he was a warden on Mitlenatch Island. Several of his students have served ornithology prominently, including two Presidents of the Society of Canadian Ornithology and a Canadian Chair of the former International Council for Bird Preservation (now Birdlife International).

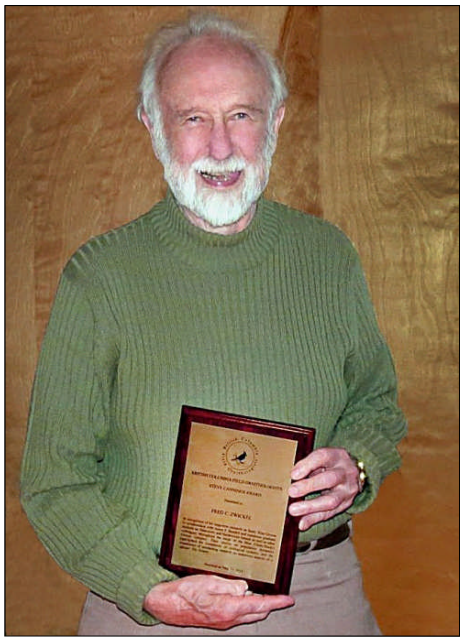


Photo: George Clulow

UPCOMING… continued

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

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

Oct. 21 – 24 - - 2013 RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE with 3RD NEOTROPICAL RAPTOR CONFERENCE and 7TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BIRDS OF PREY AND OWLS, Bariloche, Argentina. Contact: Miguel D. Saggese, College of Western Medicine – Western Univ. of Health Sci., Calif.; no phone number indicated; e-mail: msaggese@westernu.edu OR barilocheraptors2013@gmail.com ; web-site: http://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org/conferences/current-conference.

EVENTS IN 2014:

July 31-Aug. 5 - - INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR BEHAVIORAL ECOLOGY, New York, NY. Contact [no person, address or phone number yet indicated]; e-mail: ISBE2014@gmail.com; web-site: http://cabi.hunter.cuny.edu/ .

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

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

The Reflective Birder #4

Are There Such Things as Boring Birds?

Clive Keen

When I first took up birding, I had no doubt at all that there were such things as boring birds. In fact, there were so many boring birds that I felt the need for categories of boringness. "Plain Boring" covered all common birds that anybody could tick with little effort. "Irritatingly Boring" covered all the birds that were too hard to tell apart: LBJs, peeps, fall warblers, and above all, Empidonax Flycatchers. Finally, "Staggeringly Boring" covered all those females and juveniles with plumage designed for anonymity.

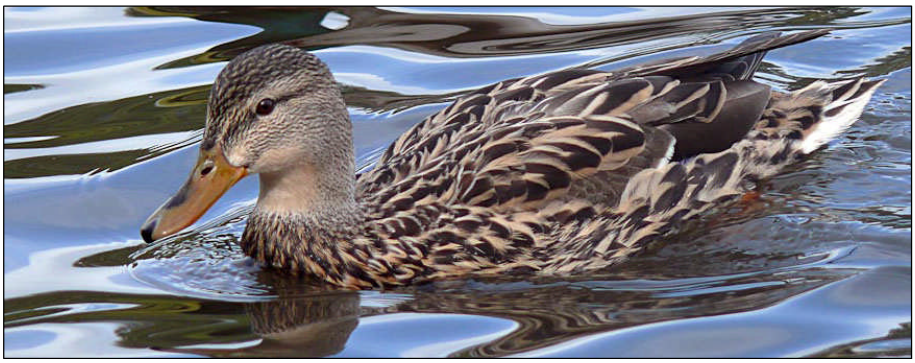
The other day, though, I heard myself say "Oh, look over there, it's a Lincoln's Sparrow! Man, it's gorgeous! Oh, I LOVE Lincoln's Sparrows!" Now, for someone who had devised three categories of boringness, this was a bit of a turn-round. It made me think that perhaps, after all these years, I'd made the transition into being a real birder. On further reflection, it seemed to me that a gradual reduction in one's boredom quotient could be used as a direct measure of birding progress.

Take Boringness Category One: common birds that anyone can tick with little effort. Even though the freshman birder is focussed on new ticks, it's just not possible to ignore the fact that some birds are worth a second and third look. It's most evident for the flashiest of birds: the Blue Jays, Lazuli Buntings and so forth. But even ten-a-penny birds like male Mallards can't really be described as boring. "Oh, it's just another blasted Mallard" might be a ticker's first thought, but it's hard not to admit that when the sunlight catches them at the height of the breeding season, they really are a splendid sight. Such experiences grow more frequent as knowledge and field experience grow, and before long it's realized that the category "Boring Because Common" is based on a mistake and has to be deleted.

It's the compulsion to tick, though, that can lead to deletion of the "Irritatingly Boring" category. Take the Tennessee Warbler, which might seem deadly dull, as it's remarkably lacking in any field marks. But that is exactly what makes it grist to the sophomore ticker's mill: no field marks, not even the blurry streaks of the Orange-crowned Warbler, so ka-ching! Another tick; another lifer! And if we can get delighted by a bird whose field marks are the absence of any field marks, the other Irritatingly Boring birds will soon be found to be far from it. Peeps start getting interesting precisely because they present a challenge.

Which leaves us with all those females and juveniles with plumage designed for anonymity. These are surely the ultimate challenge for those who want to argue that no bird is boring. I'm not talking about female Wood Ducks or Ring-necked Ducks and the like, as they deserve fan clubs all of their own. Nor do I mean the female American Redstarts or Pine Grosbeaks, which many would argue are more interesting in their greater subtlety than the over-dressed males. No, what I have in mind are birds such as the female Mallards and House Sparrows and all those junior gulls. It's really not easy springing to their defence. The most featureless peep can give you a species tick, but there are none for these females and juveniles. Nor will anyone gasp with admiration at the photographs you take of them. There's not even the moment of superiority when someone asks what they are and you correctly name them, because hardly anyone ever asks you to ID featureless females and juveniles. My defence, as you can see, is flagging. The ink in my pen is running dry. But perhaps I haven't made it to the higher echelons of birding. If I ever say " Oh, look over there, it's a female Mallard! Man, it's gorgeous! Oh, I LOVE female Mallards!" perhaps then I'll know I've made it.

NOTE This and another 39 of these essays are now available from Amazon in the eBook *Birding: A Flock of Irreverent Essays*. See http://traybonbooks.com for details.



TREE CAVITIES: VITAL HABITAT FOR COMPLEX WILDLIFE COMMUNITIES

Kathy Martin

Over 1000 bird species and many mammals, amphibians and reptiles worldwide depend on using tree cavities for nesting and shelter. In interior British Columba, about 25% of forest birds and mammals use tree cavities to conduct their critical life activities.

Wildlife tree cavities are formed in two ways: a few cavity-dependent species are able to excavate holes in trees, and normal decay processes in senescing trees gradually form holes, some of which become suitable for nesting and roosting. Cavity-using species are classified into three guilds (or functional groups) according to how they acquire cavities. Woodpeckers and some chickadees are primary excavators that create cavities in living or recently dead trees. Secondary cavity nesters that use, but cannot excavate cavities include a variety of songbirds, ducks, birds of prey, and medium-sized mammals such as flying squirrels or pine marten. This guild relies on cavities created by excavators or by decay. A third guild, weak excavators such as red-breasted nuthatches, may create their own cavities in decayed (i.e., soft) trees or use existing decay-formed or excavated cavities for nesting. I have coined the term 'nest web' to describe the interdependence among the three groups with respect to the creation and use of tree cavities for nesting and roosting. Nest web wildlife communities occur on all continents except Antarctica where there are no trees.

Amanda Adams

Saw-whet Owl: a secondary cavity nester in nest-hole in aspen

Woodpeckers and Aspen

When I started my research on cavity-using vertebrates in interior British Columbia in 1995, it was immediately obvious to me that aspen, especially decayed trees, were a very important resource for cavity nesters. Although aspen comprised only 15% of the trees on my study sites, over 95% of 4850 nests of 32 species of cavity-using birds and mammals were in aspen. In British Columbia, about 90% of secondary cavity nesters use excavated cavities, with the rest in decay-formed holes. The Northern Flicker is the most important of the 10 excavating birds at my sites because it is abundant and produces many medium to large cavities that can be used by species ranging from bluebirds and swallows to squirrels and ducks. The less abundant Pileated Woodpecker provides large, long-lasting cavities for owls, kestrels, goldeneye, fisher and pine marten. Woodpeckers prefer to excavate cavities in trees that are still alive but with some internal decay or damage, but they regularly excavate in aspen that are recently dead or with advanced decay. To support cavity-dependent wildlife communities, it is important to preserve aspen and other deciduous trees in a range of conditions, especially live unhealthy trees (hard wood with soft spots of decay) and dead trees.

JMR

Dry interior forest near Merritt: aspen with Ponderosa and Lodgepole pine. Most of these aspen are old but still alive, with soft spots where holes can be excavated with relative ease. At least six species of birds were observed at nest cavities in the aspen here R

Woodpecker Legacies

Woodpeckers can produce several cavities annually but use only one for nesting each year. Since tree cavities can last for 10 to 15 years or longer, these holes are available to use by over 30 other species. My research group followed the lives of tree cavities and found that over its lifetime, a cavity may be used by such different species as flickers, red squirrels, northern flying squirrels, Saw-whet Owls, kestrels, Tree Swallows, chickadees, and several duck species. One venerable cavity was used 17 times in 13 years (cavities can be reused sequentially within a year). Because they form high quality cavities that are suitable for use by many cavity users, woodpeckers in North America are considered to be keystone species or

ecosystem engineers. In our research, we also discovered that woodpeckers are excellent indicators of biodiversity as forests with more woodpeckers also support high overall avian biodiversity.

Decay Legacies

When we monitored the abundance and use of excavated and decay-formed cavities on various continents, we found striking geographic differences. In North America, woodpeckers are responsible for a large proportion of functional cavities, and both excavated and decay-formed cavities have a similar lifespan. In South America there are many cavity-nesting birds and mammals, including colourful species like toucans, trogons and parrots. In Argentina, about 80% of the secondary cavity users nest in decay-formed cavities, despite the presence of many woodpecker species. Generally, this extensive use of decay-formed cavities is found in South America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia. In contrast to North America, decay-formed cavities elsewhere persist for much longer than the woodpecker-excavated cavities. But tree decay is a very slow process. Trees can be 100 years old before decay advances enough for cavities to form, and they are usually several centuries old before a number of suitable cavities are formed. Thus, wildlife species using decay-formed cavities rely on large old living trees, but these valuable cavity trees are also targeted for harvest in South America and across much of the tropics. Our results suggest that excavating species may be able to ameliorate some impacts of tree harvest on cavity-users in North America, but that this approach does not work so well on other continents.

High quality cavities are limiting in almost all ecosystems and this research supports the need to ensure an ongoing supply of tree cavities for cavity-using wildlife. In North America, management for woodpecker friendly forests is recommended, and this involves retaining as much aspen as possible in a range of live and dead, mid-aged and older trees.

Tree decay facilitates selection by woodpeckers to excavate a new cavity. The Phellinus bracket fungus is a good indicator of a potentially suitable tree cavity.

Photo: Lori Blanc.

Globally, the majority of cavity-using species live in South America and other continents. In many tropical forest communities where cavity-nesters depend on decay-formed cavities in large live trees, there is the dual problem of loss of critical cavity-bearing trees due to forest harvesting and the illegal wildlife trade. Poaching efforts for parrots and other tropical forest wildlife may involve cutting down or burning the cavity tree to obtain the young birds in the nest. The loss of a valuable cavity tree that takes more than a century to replace may sometimes have more detrimental consequences to the population than the loss of individual animals because suitable cavity nesting sites can be so limited.

Northern Flicker excavating cavity in an old cherry tree MH

Take Home Message:

Many cavity nesters are able to live in altered habitats if these contain a few cavity trees and foraging areas. Thus, retaining cavity-using wildlife does not require action solely from forestry or land managers. The average citizen can make decisions in their backyards, urban areas and farmlands to retain as many mature and senescing trees as possible to support this fascinating and diverse group of tree cavity using birds. There is a lot of life supported by ***dead and dying trees!!!***

Dr Kathy Martin is a professor in UBC's Dept. of Forest and Conservation Sciences and a senior research scientist with Environment Canada. For further information: kathy.martin@ubc.ca or kathy.martin@ec.gc.ca

This report has been adapted from an earlier article published in Branchlines, UBC Forestry Newsletter, 2011. Vol 22, #4, pp 14-15.

See also p. 11

Amanda Adams

Pileated Woodpeckers excavate large cavities in older trees (aspen shown here) which they only use once for nesting. Subsequently, these sites can be used for nesting by larger birds, such as Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser, and mammals.

EVEN SMOKERS HAVE THEIR USES (if you are a small urban bird)

Here's one for the books! It turns out that urban birds are prone to line their nests with cigarette butts. Why ever would they do that? Researchers at the Universidad National Autónoma de México investigated the nests of House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*: 28 nests) and House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*: 29 nests) and found a distinct negative correlation between the weight of cellulose acetate from cigarette butts and the number of ectoparasites recovered from the nest. (An ectoparasite is a parasite that lives on the skin of its host; most typically mites.) In fact, there is a notable drop in parasite occurrence at about 3 grams weight of cellulose, and a further drop at about 5 grams. Cigarette butts were found in 89 percent of House Sparrow nests and 86 percent of House Finch nests. Mean weights of acetate in the nests were 2.45 g and 3.06 g, respectively.

To learn more about the role of the cigarette butts in repelling parasites, the researchers placed simple 'heat traps' (to attract the parasites) in nests, with cellulose fibre from smoked or unsmoked cigarettes and sticky tape (to hold the mites). They found that non-smoked butts collected significantly greater numbers of mites regardless of whether the nest was empty, held eggs or held chicks. Evidently the contents of the smoked butts repels the parasites. A prominent component of smoked butts is nicotine, a known antiherbivore chemical that has been used as arthropod repellent in some crops and for the control of ectoparasites in domestic poultry (here in British Columbia). It seems likely that this is the active ingredient.

Birds are known to line their nests with aromatic plant leaves to discourage parasites. The authors speculate that the urban birds, deprived of plant sources for suitable aromatics, have discovered that smoked cigarette ends serve a similar purpose. It is supposed the birds that take advantage of parasite repellent substances may gain reproductive and fitness advantage over birds that don't, hence that this may be an adaptively advantageous behaviour. But there are other issues here. It is possible that the birds seek the cellulose for its insulating properties. Conversely, by placing the material in their nests, they come into close contact with other toxic chemicals contained in the butts, which may nullify any fitness advantage they might gain. Further experimental work will be necessary to pursue these speculations.

*Source: Suárez-Rodríguez, M., López-Rull, I. and Macías Garcia, C. 2012. Incorporation of cigarette butts into nests reduces nest ectoparasite load in urban birds: new ingredients for an old recipe? Biology Letters **9**: 20120931.*
url: http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2012.0931.

(The research was the lead author's undergraduate thesis).
Readers interested in poultry in British Columbia may consult: *Lans, C. and Turner, N. 2011. Organic parasite control for poultry and rabbits in British Columbia. Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine **7**: 21. Doi: 10.1186/1746-4269-7-21*

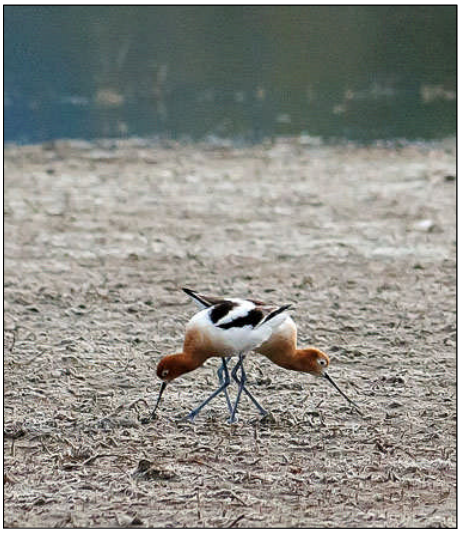
Summary by M.Church

BCFO TWO-DAY FIELD TRIP REPORT, KELOWNA ~ APRIL 21 & 22, 2013

Chris Charlesworth (Leader) -- Text
Paul Whalen – Bird Photos

April 21

I met the five BCFO trip participants at the Parkinson's Rec Centre in Kelowna this morning. Dave and Agnes Lynn, Paul Whalen, Barbara Beasley and Janice Wilson joined me on this two day tour around the Central Okanagan Valley where I live. We started off at Robert Lake where it was certainly a little bit chilly. The birds didn't disappoint though, and we enjoyed watching half a dozen American Avocets fairly close to the parking area. Two of the birds appeared to be inspecting a potential nesting site. Three Lesser Yellowlegs were waiting for us on the close shore when we arrived. They flew off and were replaced by a single Greater Yellowlegs shortly thereafter. Just about every duck on the list could be picked off on the lake, including Ruddy and Ring-necked ducks, Cinnamon and Green-winged teal, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Mallard, Barrow's Goldeneye and Bufflehead. A pair of Say's Phoebes was seen fly-catching over long grass to the north of the lake. Overhead our first accipiter of numerous ones today, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, glided by. A Bald Eagle was noted north of the lake toward the landfill. An American Pipit called as it flew overhead, while Western Meadowlark and Yellow-headed Blackbird were heard but not seen here.



Avocet pas de deux at Robert Lake

Next stop was on the Beaver Lake Road grasslands in Lake Country. It was lovely up there this morning, but again a little chilly. Raptors were excellent overhead. We tallied singles of Sharp-shinned, Cooper's and Northern Goshawk. Red-tailed Hawk, Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel and Northern Harrier were also about. Western Bluebirds were around in small numbers, while Mountain Bluebirds appeared in a great flock of over 50 birds! The grasslands were dotted with little blue specks. The usual Western Meadowlarks sat on fence-posts, and we had good views of a few more Say's Phoebes. A single Vesper Sparrow sang a couple of times but then disappeared into thin air. We added our first mammals to the list: Yellow-bellied Marmot, Columbian Ground-Squirrel, Yellow Pine Chipmunk and Red Squirrel.

Northern Pygmy-Owl

As we entered the woods, beginning around km 5, we began to tally some different species, notably woodpeckers. We had excellent views of several territorial male Red-naped Sapsuckers chasing each other in an aspen copse. We found both Hairy and Downy woodpeckers at the same place. A little higher up the road we watched a male Pileated Woodpecker excavate a nest hole, while its mate could be heard in the distance. Try as we might, we found no signs of any Three-toeds up there today. We did hear several Ruffed Grouse, and I caught a glimpse of one. A lovely Northern Pygmy-Owl with a blood-stained bill was watched at length through the scope. He sat there so long we had to turn around and leave him after about 15 minutes. Both Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned kinglets moved about with flocks of Mountain and Black-capped chickadees. Near the Beaver Lake Road / Dee Lake Road intersection there were two Chestnut-backed Chickadees, which are fairly rare in the area. As we ate lunch in a sheltered spot at a frigid Beaver Lake Lodge, we saw our only Steller's Jay for the day.

We decided to return to the valley bottom where temperatures were considerably more enjoyable. Roaming around the pine forests of Sutherland Hills Park gave us great views of male Rufous and Calliope hummingbirds. A Sora was heard and briefly seen dashing across the edge of a pond, thanks to young birder Logan Lalonde who happened to be there also. Another Pileated Woodpecker flew by, our third for the day. Our collective total today was 81 species.

April 22
The second day of the field trip went well. Weather was great. We started off at Robert Lake, which was much the same as yesterday, with the addition of alone Sandhill Crane, a Lincoln's Sparrow and a Brown-headed Cowbird. Next stop was at Munson Pond where, with a hundred or more American Wigeon, we noted a single male Eurasian Wigeon. Our first Common Merganser and Wood Duck were seen up here, while lovely, bright yellow American Goldfinches sang from the willows.

Yellow-headed Blackbird

We then headed for Maude Roxby Bird Sanctuary, an area of beach and willows along the shore of Okanagan Lake. Scanning the waters of the lake we noted Common Loon, Horned Grebe and Red-necked Grebe, as well as a little group of Greater Scaup. Things were pretty quiet along the boardwalk through the marsh however. At Thomson Marshes we had some great birding with young 'brancher' Great Horned Owls sitting near their nest in a spruce tree. In the marsh itself we had great looks at a Sora and some up close and personal Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Our final tally for the two day outing was 98 species.

Great Horned Owls (adult and 'chick)

Chris Charlesworth, Avocet Tours
725 Richards Rd, Kelowna, BC, V1X 2X5

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), Glenn Ryder 2012, and Fred Zwickle 2013.

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.

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

SEABIRDS CONTRIBUTE TO GLOBAL WARMING!

Seabirds are mainly colonial nesters. A colony may contain many thousands of birds, whose activities collectively have a significant impact on the local environment. Chinese investigators have discovered that seabird colonies in the Arctic have a significant effect on local emissions of greenhouse gases. They made measurements at a seabird colony at Ny-Ålesund, on the northwest coast of Spitsbergen in the Svalbard archipelago (80ºN). Species in the colony reportedly include Razor-billed Auk (*Alca torda*) [probably, in fact, Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*)], Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*), Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) and Northern Fulmar (*Fulmaris glacialis*). [The authors also report the presence of Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), but this must be an error; only the Black-browed Albatross (*Diomedea melanophris*) is apt to be found in North Atlantic waters and it is vagrant. The most likely bird is the Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*), although it is difficult to understand how such a mistake could be made, and this gull is itself uncommon at Svalbard – well, they are geochemists, after all, not ornithologists.] The authors compared emissions of methane (CH_4) and nitrous oxide (N_2O) between the colony and two pristine tundra sites.

CH_4 and N_2O are both significant 'greenhouse' gases. CH_4 is the second most important such gas. It is 20x more effective than carbon dioxide (CO_2) at trapping long-wave radiation but has a relatively short atmospheric life of 12 years. It enters the atmosphere largely from livestock flatulence and natural gas recovery and is currently is 2.5x more abundant in the atmosphere than in pre-industrial times. N_2O is 300x more efficient than CO_2, and has an atmospheric lifetime of 120 years, but is currently only 1.2x more abundant than in pre-industrial times. It is derived from agricultural, transport and industrial activity. (For comparison, CO_2 has an atmospheric lifetime of 200 years and is currently 1.4x more abundant than pre-industrially.)

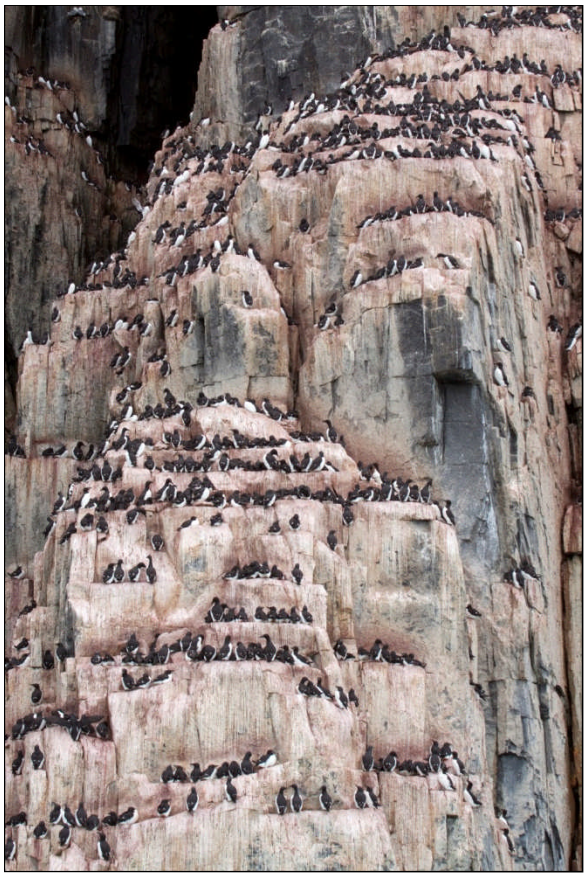
The researchers found that CH_4 emissions in the seabird colony in summer averaged 54 µg $m^{-2}hr^{-1}$ (micrograms per square metre per hour), compared with -83 µg $m^{-2}hr^{-1}$ (i.e., a strong net sink) on pristine tundra. N_2O was evolved at a rate of 18 µg $m^{-2}hr^{-1}$ in the colony compared with 8.3 µg $m^{-2}hr^{-1}$ elsewhere. Seabird activity was the strongest control over these rates (compared with soil temperature and moisture), and resulted from soil physical and chemical processes stimulated by the deposition of seabird guano, seabird tramping, and appropriate moisture levels.

Similar results have been reported from Antarctic penguin and mammal (seal, sea lion) colonies. As concentrated 'hotspots' of terrestrial degassing, they merit closer attention, especially as further polar warming (polar regions are experiencing more rapid climate change than the rest of the world) may enhance the effect. Of course, this activity was a part of environmental chemical cycles before the present era of concern for the effects of human activity on atmospheric composition and climate. Today, permafrost degradation and the resulting oxidation of organic material is orders of magnitude more important as an subarctic-arctic source of greenhouse gases, but the seabird roosts remain significant sites the effect of which must be determined if we are to arrive at an accurate picture of the net rate of change of the atmosphere and of likely further climate change. It appears that we are all involved in changing the planet.

*Zhu, R., Chen, Q., Wei, D. and Xu, H. 2012. Impact of seabird activity on nitrous oxide and methane fluxes from High Arctic tundra in Svalbard, Norway. Journal of Geophysical Research **117**: G04015*. doi: 10.1029/2012JG002130.*

** Paper number: replaces page numbers. Paper number and doi (document identifier) identify the paper. Note that the paper contains significant errors in bird and plant names.*

Thanks to Alan Burger for local knowledge that helped with the proposed species corrections.



Thick-billed Murre colony, Svalbard *Alan Burger*

A BCFO WEEKEND and the 'VICTORIA WEST' FIELD TRIP

Brian Self

Mike Fung and I attended the Sidney annual general meeting in May. On Friday we caught the 11 a.m. ferry out of Tsawwassen to Swartz Bay under sunny skies, and stood on deck for the crossing. Usually at this time of year birding can be productive but even Active Pass was quiet, producing good numbers of Pigeon Guillemot and the obligatory Bald Eagle but only a few gulls otherwise. I always look forward to seeing Pacific Loons and Bonaparte's Gulls, often in the hundreds at one end of the Pass or the other, but on this trip we were blanked. Swanson Channel had only a handful of Rhinoceros Auklets also.

Our first imperative on landing was to find Mike his life Sky Lark so we headed for the tiny family cemetery at the northern end of Canora Road by the Victoria Airport fence. Within minutes we could hear the song of a bird in flight, that liquid continuous jumble of notes, fast paced like a Pacific Wren and a joy to listen to. Spotting the bird is something else though; they climb while singing, as high as 150 metres, and are just fluttery specks up there. Eventually we did spot a couple of birds high up, but in the 30 minutes we spent there could not see a bird perched on any of the airport signage or light fixtures. We think there were probably four birds at our location. The song took me back to my teens and early 20's in northeastern England.

For a couple of hours in the afternoon we walked in Horth Hill Regional Park before heading to Sidney and the Mary Winspear Community Centre to meet the other attendees.

The Saturday field trips offered three differing locations. We opted for 'Victoria West', carpooled in the parking lot, and set off at 6 a.m. promptly for Francis King Regional Park. We were 19 birders including our two leaders, Mike McGrenere and Dannie Carsen. This is a large park, new to both Mike and me, with a confusing system of narrow twisting trails in a mixture of dense deciduous-coniferous habitat. We both agreed that, visiting here on our own, the chances of us getting lost would have been quite high.

There was a lot of birdsong in the park, Cassin's Vireo, Olive-sided and Pacific-slope flycatchers, Townsend's and MacGillivray's warblers and Black-headed Grosbeak were just a few. Getting a look at many of these birds was difficult. Light was poor under very low cloud cover with light rain showers, trails were narrow, and we were 19 birders in a long snaking line with the rear of the party a good way behind the leading group. I don't think I got a really good look at anything in the time we spent here, but it's a site I will come back to for a more leisurely walk around. This is one of the attractions of a BCFO annual meeting: you are introduced to new birding areas that you knew nothing about.

After leaving Francis King we drove a few hundred metres down the road to our second stop. It was advertised as Pike Lake but when I entered the site into eBird it was listed as a Hotspot called Munn Rd/Pike Lake Power Lines. We started at a shallow pond/lake beside a hydro sub-station then walked good trails through more open habitat than Francis King. Again this was mixed deciduous-coniferous but the understory was more open, the light better and the rain had stopped. Spirits rose. In the 90 minutes we spent here I listed 35 species with nice looks at Orange-crowned, Townsend's, Yellow-rumped, Wilson's and Black-throated Gray warblers, three species of woodpeckers and two species of flycatchers. Cassin's and Hutton's vireos were singing along with many other species. This is another new site to be revisited in the future.

Next, we drove for 20 minutes westward across Saanich to Panama Flats, an area of flooded farm fields which now produces a nice mixture of waterfowl and shorebirds. According to Mike McGrenere the history of this site is complicated, it has changed hands more than once and its future is unsettled. Today it lived up to its reputation. We found Greater White-fronted Geese, three species of teal, a female American Wigeon (which must be a late date for the species still to be lingering here), and five other species of ducks and geese. Shorebirds seen were Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted and Western sandpipers and Long-billed Dowitcher.

I would recommend all three of these sites to anyone visiting the Victoria-Saanich area.

Back at the Winspear Centre we tallied the mornings birding. Our group found 74 species and the three groups combined saw or heard 104. There was a Solitary Sandpiper at Swan Lake and two Wandering Tattlers out on the Ogden Point breakwater in Victoria.

I enjoyed the week-end, I don't get over to Victoria a lot and we were introduced to some new places to visit, caught up with birding friends we rarely see, and treated to good meals and excellent hospitality by the Victoria birding community. This is very much what a BCFO annual meeting is all about. Thanks guys.

Solitary sandpiper at Swan Lake *Peter Candido*

CONFERENCE FIELDTRIP: SAANICH PENINSULA

Peter and Gloria Candido

This trip covered Victoria Airport, Patricia Bay, Newton Heights, and Panama Flats from Carey Road.

Trip Leader: Agnes Lynn

This was one of three field trips on Saturday, May 11th. Starting out at the Victoria Airport, the group needed only a few minutes of listening to detect the main object of this stop: a Sky Lark singing high in the sky. Soon two birds were seen on the ground and viewed through telescopes as well. Patricia Bay yielded Purple Martins, Common Loon and a small pod of Harbour Porpoises showing well on the glassy, calm waters. In Newton Heights, along a quiet road through a wooded area, we followed the signals of some very excited American Robins and located a Barred Owl perched low in a western redcedar. A Red-breasted Sapsucker, several California Quail and a lovely male MacGillivray's Warbler singing in the open were also enjoyed by all.

Other species which were first of the year for many mainlanders were House Wren, Swainson's Thrush and Chipping Sparrow. Though originally the plan had been to bird Martindale Flats, this area had dried out due to the long spell of sunny weather, and was very quiet birdwise. It was therefore decided to go instead to the Carey Road side of Panama Flats. A highlight of this wetland area was a flock of 19 Greater White-fronted Geese that flew in to join another two birds already present, and which gave very good views. Spotted and Least Sandpipers, Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, Marsh Wren and four swallow species were also present. In all an impressive 77 species were recorded on this very enjoyable morning.

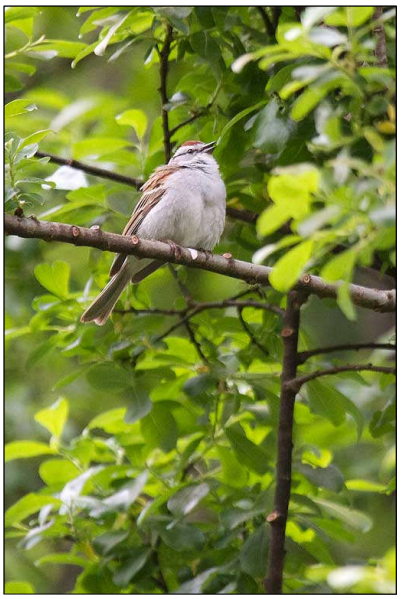


Photo Credits
Tattler in flight: Peter
Barred Owl: Peter
Chipping Sparrow: Peter
Birding a quiet road in Saanich: Gloria
Panama Flats: Gloria

CONFERENCE FIELD TRIP: VICTORIA EAST

June Ryder

Due to the unforeseen popularity of the other two field trips, there were only three of us signed up for 'Victoria East' on Saturday morning (Adrian Leather, Dave Boyd and myself). We had two good leaders -- Aziza Cooper and Mary Robichaud -- hence a ratio of 2/3rds of a guide to each participant -- not bad! We departed the parking lot at 0600, leaving behind the inevitable White-crowned Sparrow, and headed for Elk Lake (officially Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park). I have passed by this lake many times while travelling the Pat Bay highway, but have never explored it further. We parked near the rowing centre, and then spent the next couple of hours following good walking (and jogging) trails through varied habitats, ranging from open fields to deciduous/coniferous woodland, and including small grassy openings and riparian woodland alongside Elk Lake.

Birds of many woodland species were easy to find – many by ear. There were several singing Black-headed Grosbeaks; Olive-sided and Pacific-slope flycatchers; Hairy Woodpecker; Wilson's, Yellow, and Orange-crowned warblers; Tree, Violet-green and Barn swallows; House and Purple finches and American Goldfinch; and, of course, Chestnut-backed Chickadee. There were very few waterfowl on the lake: just Wood Duck and Mallard.

Next, we visited Swan Lake (Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary). This is a small lake with extensive marginal marshes and good access for viewing. Once again there were few waterbirds, but we were rewarded by a Solitary Sandpiper and quick glimpses of a Spotted Sandpiper, and a Killdeer with a chick; while an Osprey flew overhead. There were many singing Common Yellowthroats and Marsh Wrens. We found a pair of Bushtits coming and going from their nest – especially pleasing to Adrian due to their absence in his home territory of interior BC. Our return to the car park coincided nicely with the passage of a small flock of Red Crossbills.

Then we headed for the southern shoreline of Victoria and the Ogden Point breakwater where Mary had found a Wandering Tattler on Friday. The breakwater, which extends 750 m into the Strait of Juan de Fuca and protects a small harbour, has vertical walls about 6 m high and a walkway along the top. The structure is protected from erosion by a long, narrow apron of rip-rap (large rock fragments). We headed out along the breakwater, scanning the rip-rap closely because this is where we expected to find the tattler foraging. We knew it would be hard to see because it is so well camouflaged in its rocky habitats. But before we had time to worry too much, Aziza and Mary spotted our bird and we breathed sighs of relief as we focused in on it, very happy to see this big, elusive shorebird.

We found that we could look down on it from directly above – excellent views -- but not an easy angle for photography. When the Tattler suddenly flew a short distance along the rip-rap, it disappeared as it landed, the bird's brown mantle blending with the multiple browns and shadows of the seaweed-covered rocks – and it took a few moments to spot it again. At one point, when a tourist looked over the railing and spoke loudly, the bird took off and flew across the harbour…..but not just one bird, there were two tattlers!

Other birds of note at Ogden Point and nearby Clover Point were a single Western Gull, all three cormorant species, Common Loon, several Pigeon Guillemots, many Rhinoceros Auklets, a Black Oystercatcher. Finally, a small flock of Brant flying off-shore at Clover Point provided a satisfactory finishing touch to a very enjoyable morning.

Photo credits : Wandering Tattler: Aziza Cooper
Marsh Wren at Swan Lake: Mike Fung.

ADRIAN'S CONFERENCE

Adrian Leather

I cashed-in some Air Miles and boarded a 6 a.m. flight from Prince George on Friday May10. Rick Schortinghuis very kindly met me at the airport in Victoria and a chance conversation had us hiking up a steep mountain in the heat where we quickly found a Sooty Grouse hooting from a tree, the first one I've actually *seen*. That made the weekend for me and I'd have been more than happy with that, but luck was on my side again on Saturday when, not one, but 2 Wandering Tattlers showed-up on Ogden Point Breakwater. Scope views of in-breeding-plumage tattlers relished, I was floating on air by now. Other highlights were Black-headed Grosbeaks, Harlequins, Rhinoceros Auklets, all three cormorants, and a single Western Gull, Hey, I even enjoyed seeing the Chestnut-backed Chickadees.

Due to everybody wanting to see the tattlers on the Sunday, only Dave Boyd, a kiwi from Vancouver, and myself, were signed-up for another trip, so we teamed-up with local birders, Val George, Rick Schortinghuis, and Agnes Lynn for a very enjoyable bird tour, hampered somewhat by rain, which almost seemed surprising given the heat of the first few days. First stop was near Victoria Airport where we had a SKY LARK perched on the perimeter fence! It wasn't full-song weather just yet but we did hear the odd gurgle, splutter, and other lark-borne phrases.

Eurasian Skylark *Rafael Merchante*
The Internet Bird Collection

Plenty of birds were at Francis King Park, with MacGillivray's Warbler and Anna's Hummingbird in the mix. The "powerlines" area was unusually quiet due to the rain, but we enjoyed seeing Wood Ducks, and just as we were leaving the site, had sumptuous looks at a Black-throated Grey Warbler, which was sharing a low tree with a MacGillivray's. No sign of the Hutton's Vireos from the previous day.

Panama Flats served-up a good variety of waterfowl and shorebirds. A Semi-palmated Plover was a nice bird, and some Dunlin in breeding plumage drew approval. The theme continued on shorebirds when Rick received a call about a flock of Whimbrel with a Long-billed Curlew. But by the time Rick and myself had walked along the beach from Albert Head Lagoon, all we saw was the flock flying away in the mist, spooked by a guy walking his dog. We caught-up with four Whimbrel later.

Mute Swans evoked memories of England. We stopped-by a colony of Purple Martins. Some other information from a local birder led us to a flock of Band-tailed Pigeons resting atop an oak tree. Six Sandhill Cranes at the same location were a good find for the area.

Another highlight was seeing and hearing a Sky Lark in its song-flight, and watching it parachute, or helicopter as Rick puts it, down to earth. More memories of England.

Conference participants came from as far afield as Prince Rupert! The catering was excellent! Guest speakers covered the reintroduction of Western Bluebirds on Vancouver Island, observations of nesting sites of Turkey Vultures on Pender Island, and work on migrants at Rocky Point Bird Observatory, and Pedder Bay; Dr.Sean Boyd gave a fascinating talk on the travels of Barrow's Goldeneye.

I'm really grateful to Rick Schortinghuis for taking the time to join myself for some pre- and post-conference birding, and for dropping me off at Victoria Airport. Many thanks again Rick! It brought back memories of the trip in 2008 and created some great new ones as well! Thanks also to all the other trip leaders, the ones I recall being: Val George; Aziza Cooper; Mary Robichaud; Mike McGrenere; and Agnes Lynn.

The 2014 Conference venue was announced as Pemberton, in June.

REPORTS FROM THE BCFO AGM
SIDNEY, MAY 11th 2013

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The President's AGM report has been combined with 'Presidents Message' . Please see p.4.

MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR'S REPORT

As of December 31/2012, the BCFO had two hundred and eighteen (218) regular members, four (4) honourary members, and seven (7) institutional members, for a total of two hundred and twenty-nine (229) members. We had twenty-six (26) new members joined during 2012 and twenty-three (23) 2012 members did not renew.

As of May 9, 2013, the BCFO has two hundred and twelve (212) regular members, one junior member (1), four (4) honourary members, and seven (7) institutional members, for a total of two hundred and twenty-four (224) members. There are seventeen (17) new members so far for 2013. Twenty-three (23) members from 2012 failed to renew their membership.

Forty-two (42) members have pre-paid their dues for 2014, six (6) for 2015, two (2) for 2016, and one (1) for 2017.

Of the two hundred and six (206) regular, junior and honourary members providing an email address, one hundred and seventy-five (175) or 85% opted to access the newsletter via PDF from the BCFO website or a web link compared to one hundred and seventy-one (171) or 86% in 2012. Eleven (11) members have not provided an email address.

Memberships for 2013 categorized by region using the Province of BC's Tourism Zones:

35% Vancouver Coast & Mountains
24% Vancouver Island (52)
18% Thompson/Okanagan (40)
8% Northern BC (17)
6% BC Rockies (13)
2.8% Cariboo/Chilcotin Coast (6)
2.8% Alberta
0.5 % Saskatchewan (1)
0.5% Ontario (1)
2.8% United States (6)
(Washington 4, Idaho 1, New Jersey 1).

Respectfully submitted,

Larry Cowan, Membership Coordinator
604-465-1402, lawrencecowan@shaw.ca

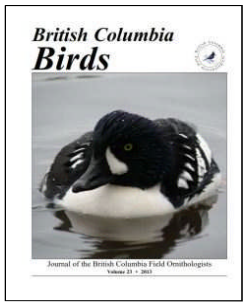
TREASURER'S REPORT

Financial Statements

as of December 31	2011	2012
Revenue		
Membership	4,388.50	8,920.34
Conference fees	6,600.00	8,700.00
Conference extension trip	9,100.00	3,900.00
Other conference income	130.50	688.00
Donations	130.00	1,039.46
Field trips	330.00	250.00
Bank interest (Coast Capital only)	10.92	13.39
(GST) HST rebate	367.73	826.87
Advertising	150.00	40.00
Newsletter hardcopy fee		463.56
Total	**21,233.65**	**24,841.62**
Expenditures		
Newsletter printing	824.81	417.17
Newsletter postage	648.80	458.66
Newsletter miscellaneous	39.19	
Conference	5,397.20	8,644.38
Conference honouraria	500.00	200.00
Conference extension trip	7,109.73	1,704.14
Extension honouraria	800.00	750.00
Journal printing	911.57	2,103.85
Journal postage	553.39	1,115.53
Miscellaneaous journal expenses	58.51	
Officers' travel	13.85	
Misc. postage	66.46	214.04
Photocopying	9.80	
Materials & equipment	9.90	
Bank fees	5.00	20.31
Insurance	750.00	750.00
Website	546.52	749.85
Memberships & society fees	25.00	25.00
Post office box	151.20	156.80
Research grant		2,500.00
BCFO Award		61.54
Total	**18,420.93**	**19,871.27**
Surplus / (Deficit)	**2,812.72**	**4,970.35**
ING Direct (savings)	35,382.97	35,747.39
Coast Capital (chequing)	10,136.24	15,136.59
Total	**45,519.21**	**50,883.98**

Submitted by
Mike Fung, Treasurer

REPORT OF THE EDITOR OF BRITISH COLUMBIA BIRDS



Volume 23 (2013) of *British Columbia Birds* was produced in January 2013. I am currently working on manuscripts for Volume 24, and with a steady flow, we can continue to have *British Columbia Birds* published regularly. All members are encouraged to submit manuscripts and to encourage friends and colleagues to do likewise. This is your journal, and it has room for a diversity of papers on wild birds in British Columbia.

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

Art Martell
Editor, *British Columbia Bird*

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REPORT OF THE EDITOR OF BC BIRDING

This was a successful year for *BC Birding*. Volume 23 of the newsletter consisted of the usual four quarterly issues, all sent out in the first week of the appropriate month (March, June, September and December). Each issue contained between 28 and 40 pages, totaling 136 pages of news and articles.

There were 18 regular news articles (e.g., Birding News Briefs) and 15 notices for upcoming BCFO events, plus miscellaneous advertisements for BC birders (e.g., bird blitzes). There were 11 reports from members about BCFO field trips, Christmas Counts, and a WildResearch pelagic trip. We published 18 volunteered articles, mostly by members, on a variety topics including conservation issues, such as avoiding bird kill by windows and reduction of cat predation on songbirds. Also of note are the thoughtful messages in “The Reflective Birder” series, several birding humor articles, summaries of articles from mainline scientific journals, and Chris Charlesworth’s Rare Bird Reports from North American Birds..

J.M.Ryder
Editor, *BC Birding*

BIRD REACTIONS: NOISE . . .

It is well-known that various bird species react differently to persistent ambient noise. Some species – perhaps predators, such as owls, that rely on noise clues to locate prey – avoid noisy areas; others – perhaps the intended prey – may be attracted to the 'cover' that persistent noise provides. Less well-known are the knock-on effects that these divergent responses may have on aspects of the ecosystem of which the birds are a part. In carefully constructed experiments near gas wells in the New Mexico desert, researchers studied the effect of noise on the flower-pollinating activity of Black-chinned Hummingbirds (*Archilochus alexandri*) and the seed dispersal activities of Western Scrub Jays (*Aphelocoma californica*): both are important ecological 'services'.

The researchers paired sets of gas wells, one of each pair having a noisy compressor and the other not. Ambient noise difference was, on average, 12-14 decibels. In one set of experiments they set out artificial flowers designed to mimic Scarlet Trumpet (*Ipomopsis aggregate,* also known as Scarlet Gilia and found from the US southwest into interior BC), which relies on animal pollination and is frequented by the hummers. (Artificial flowers were used so that 'flower' abundance could be strictly controlled at each site.) The birds visited the 'flowers' at the noisy sites significantly more frequently than at the 'quiet' sites (0 to 3 visits in 15 min. per site, compared to 0 or 1 visits). Furthermore, they effected pollination of up to 18% of noisy site flowers vs. 5% of quiet site flowers. The results are consistent with the birds' observed preference for noisy nest sites.

At another set of sites, seeds of Piñon Pine (*Pinus edulis*) were scattered on the ground and video cameras set up to record who made off with the seeds. Amongst nine customers, *Peromyscus* mice came more frequently to the noisy sites (63% vs. 45%), while Spotted Towhees (*Pipilo maculatus)* and Scrub Jays preferred the quiet sites; in fact, the Scrub Jays visited only the quiet sites. Scrub Jays are important dispersers of seeds as the consequence of their propensity to cache them for intended future recovery. From counts of Piñon Pine seedlings (established since the gas wells appeared) around noisy and quiet sites, the researchers found that the young trees were four times more abundant on quiet sites. The number of mature trees (seed sources) did not differ. The researchers ascribed the difference to reduced caching around noisy sites by the Scrub Jays and increased cache pilfering there by the mice.

In the long term, these differing activities – an indirect effect of human-generated noise – might significantly change the plant ecology of the adjacent desert landscape through the effect of bird response to noise. It is estimated that up to one-fifth of the American landscape is affected by persistent human-generated noise. The figure is probably similar for the settled southern fringe of Canada. In the long term, the ecological consequences of persistent noise may cause significantly changes in these landscapes.

Francis, C.D., Kleist, N.J., Ortega, C.P. and Cruz, A. 2012. Noise pollution alters ecological services: enhanced pollination and disrupted seed dispersal. Proceedings of the Royal Society B, 279: 2727-2735.
doi: 10.1098/rspb.2012.0230.

. . . AND LIGHT

Coastal areas are increasingly heavily settled, leading to enhanced levels of nocturnal light due to artificial illumination. The effect is particularly strong around heavy-industry complexes. Negative effects on bird migration and on bird movement between land and sea are well-known. But might there also be salutary effects?

Shorebirds wintering on mid-latitude coasts and estuaries feed copiously to build fat reserves to sustain them through the spring migration and the early days of the breeding season in high latitudes. It has been found that short winter days provide insufficient time for the birds to feed fully, so they continue to forage when darkness descends. Most of the birds prefer 'visual' feeding (seeking out prey by direct observation or by observation of surface disturbance that betrays a tasty morsel in the mud) to 'tactile' feeding (bill probing and sweeping in the mud to search for food). Visual feeding is more efficient and permits selection of more nourishing grub. In darkness, the birds continue to feed visually in full moonlight, but must resort to tactile feeding under cloudy or moonless conditions.

Researchers studied the foraging behaviour of the Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) in the Forth estuary of Scotland, a heavily industrialized shore. An oil refinery and a power station provide powerful night lighting in the area. They affixed small radio transmitters to the backs of 20 birds, of which 13 returned useable signals. The transmitters were

designed to change signal frequency when the birds leaned forward to probe for or grab food, so the researchers could determine what the birds were up to even in darkness. Ambient light levels at the field site were measured by using data about surface illumination returned by the U.S. Air Force Defence Meteorological Satellite (even the military has a few constructive uses).

The researchers found that ambient light levels at night influenced feeding behaviour. The birds spent more time foraging at night when ambient light levels were greater – that is, near full moon on clear nights *and* within the orbit of industrial light illumination on all nights. Furthermore, birds foraging at night under low light illumination returned the highest frequency of 'feeding posture' signals, which the researchers interpreted to indicate a switch from visual to less efficient tactile feeding behaviour (i.e. probing more frequently but less successfully). The birds evidently attempt to optimize food intake by making maximum use of times – including illuminated night time, however lit – when they can feed visually.

Comment:
One may conclude that the bright lights of industry and urbanization on our coasts return some benefit to the birds. It might be a double-edged effect, however. Heavy industrial areas with high illumination often are areas of significant soil pollution; what the birds eat may, in the long run, not be so good for them.

Dwyer, R.G., Bearhop, S., Campbell, H.A. and Bryant, D.M. 2012. Shedding light on light: benefits of anthropogenic illumination to a nocturnally foraging shorebird. Journal of Animal Ecology 81: 1-8. doi: 10.1111/1365-2656.12012

Photo credits: Black-chinned Hummingbird by Erik Breden, The Internet Bird Collection; Scrub Jay by Justin Watts; Redshank by Marco Valentino;

Summaries by M.Church.

AVOIDING MORTALITY

Cliff swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) in south-western Nebraska have taken to nesting under road bridges, bringing them into juxtaposition with road traffic. They are also inclined to sit on the road, perhaps attracted by the warm surface. This leads to road kill. The nesting preference for bridges began in the early 1980s, probably the result of significant extension of the road system, and so did a long-term study of the swallows.

The 30-year record now accumulated shows, remarkably, that whilst the population has increased from about 10 000 to around 25 000 birds, the number of recoverable road kills per season has declined from 20 to 3*. Both trends are coherent and continuous. The investigators can discount both avian and animal scavengers as reasons for the reduction in number of recovered kills and consider that, if anything, the aggressiveness of traffic has probably increased (consider the advent, during the period, of SUVs and large pickup trucks). They conclude that the birds have learned traffic avoidance, probably by social learning. (The birds do exhibit learning behaviour, as in responding to observations of foraging success by their neighbours.) But if this were the sole factor, one would expect road kills to weigh more heavily on young birds, which is not the observed case. A surprising possible factor is evolutionary pressure. Road-killed birds are observed to have, on average, longer wings than the population in general. Furthermore, wing length between the unfortunate birds and the general population has steadily diverged, so that there is now about 4 mm difference, on average. Longer wings apparently reduce the bird's flying manoeuvrability, in particular reducing its ability to take off vertically. So the road hazard may be exerting evolutionary pressure to favour shorter-winged birds because they can more nimbly escape oncoming traffic. Most remarkable, perhaps, is the appearance that such a small difference in wingspan (3.7% of an initial overall average wingspan of 109 mm) can make such a marked difference to the birds' survival in the road environment.

*In comparison, it is estimated that about 80 million birds are killed annually by vehicles in the US.

*Brown, C.R. and Brown, M.B. 2013. Where has all the road kill gone? Current Biology **23**(6): R233-4. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2013.02.023.*

Photo: Cliff Swallow about to enter nest by Guy Poisson The Internet Bird Collection

Rare Bird Report
1 June to 31 July, 2012
From North American Birds

British Columbia

by Chris Charlesworth

WATERFOWL THROUGH ALCIDS

Rare in the interior during the summer months, a male Eurasian Wigeon was at Jacko Lake near Kamloops 17 Jun (RH). Continuing the trend of increased sightings on the West Coast of the continent, a Manx Shearwater was noted off Nootka Island, 20 Jun (Jared Towers). Brown Pelicans are more regular in BC waters in the fall season, so several reports this summer were of note. Nine were counted off Amphitrite Point near Ucluelet on Vancouver I, 28 Jun (AD). Another Brown Pelican was seen from a BC Ferry near Pender Island, 2 Jul (Ian Thomas), while another was seen well from the tip of the Iona South Jetty in Richmond, 7 Jul (James Hutchison). A **Snowy Egret**, found in May at Panama Flats near Victoria remained until at least 1 Jun (JK). Very rare in southern BC in June, a Broad-winged Hawk was noted at Observatory Hill near Victoria 3 Jun (Ed Pellizon & Rob Gowan). An adult Willet at the Iona Sewage Ponds in Richmond, 4 Jul provided a good record for this locally rare species (Peter Candido). Definitely the best report for the summer period, and a first for the province if accepted, an adult breeding plumage **Common Greenshank** was well described near Sandspit on Haida Gwaii 18 Jul (Peter Hamel). Black-necked Stilts nested for the first time on Vancouver Island this summer. At Panama Flats in Victoria, 4 adults remained in early June from the previous period, and up to 7 chicks from two broods were seen by observers throughout the summer. Summer records of Hudsonian Godwits in southern BC are scarce, so one at the Tofino Mudflats 14 Jun was of note (AD). In late June and early July, up to 2 Hudsonian Godwits were seen at Boundary Bay, near Vancouver, these birds possibly representing early southbound migrants. One Hudsonian Godwit was at Boundary Bay 30 Jun (KL), and 2 were present 21 Jul (KL). An adult breeding plumage **Red-necked Stint** was photographed at Boundary Bay 27 & 28 Jul (KL, m.ob). Rare but annual in the southern portion of BC, a single Franklin's Gull was noted at Alki Lk, Kelowna 26 Jul to end of period (GW, m.ob). Also at Alki Lk, Kelowna was a Forster's Tern 8 Jun (DC, RT).

DOVES TO BUNTINGS

A male **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** was photographed at a feeder near Cranbrook in the Kootenays and remained from 22 to 26 Jun (Alan Barnard). This is one of just a handful of records of this species for BC. On the other hand, Costa's Hummingbird reports seem to be increasing over recent years. The male Costa's that has been frequenting the Dunbar neighbourhood of Vancouver has been present since June 2010. It was reported again on 24 Jul (fide Meg Brown). The Sunshine Coast hosted its first Costa's Hummingbird ever, with a male visiting a feeder in Gibsons, 20 Jul to 24 at least (Barry Janyk). In the Fraser Valley, an Ash-throated Flycatcher was found at Agassiz, 13 Jul (RT). Rare west of the Coast Mountain Range, a Black-billed Magpie was a nice find in Burnaby, 20 Jun (Greg Stuart). Three reports of Northern Mockingbirds came in this period, with two from the interior and one from a coastal location. In the interior, a Northern Mockingbird was at Princeton, 5 Jul (Amanda Lahaie). In the Okanagan, a Northern Mockingbird was at the Summerland Research Stn 6 Jul (Tom Lowery), while on Vancouver I., a Northern Mockingbird was found at the south end of Long Beach near Tofino, 21 Jun (George Bradd). The only reports of the federally endangered Sage Thrasher to come in from its breeding grounds in the Okanagan were of 2 birds at Nighthawk in the Richter Pass, where they sang on territory from 3 July, remaining several weeks to be seen by numerous observers (JK). A male **Northern Parula** was at Loon Lk between Cache Ck and Clinton from 6 to 9 Jun (DT, RTy). Rare in summer, a Palm Warbler was at the Tofino Golf Course, 1 Jun (AD). Exceptionally rare on Vancouver Is, a singing male Ovenbird was a nice find at Beaver Lk near Victoria 11 & 12 Jun (Jeff Gaskin, et al). Two reports of Black-and-white Warbler came in from south-coastal BC with 1 banded at Witty's Lagoon near Victoria 24 Jun (Ann Nightingale). A singing male Black-and-white Warbler

was at Maplewood Flats in North Vancouver 8 Jun (Rob Lyske, et al). BC experienced an 'irruption' of Black-throated Sparrow records this spring and summer. In the interior, a Black-throated Sparrow was at Tranquille near Kamloops 14 Jun (Ellie Hill). Also in the interior, one was at Chutter Ranch near Merritt 26 Jun (Jarrod Hobbs). Numerous reports of Black-throated Sparrows also came from the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley, with a single bird noted at Pitt Meadows 9 Jun (RF, AF, m.ob). The original bird was joined by a second individual 10 Jun (BD, WD, m.ob). At least one the birds remained until 12 Jun. Near the Hope Airport a Black-throated Sparrow was seen 13 Jun (RT). Also in Hope, another was at a feeder 11 Jun (RT). At the University of BC, a Black-throated Sparrow was found 11 Jun (Tracy Lau). In Howe Sound, a Black-throated Sparrow was found and video recorded at the Squamish Estuary 11 Jun (Chris Dale). Rare in BC outside of the NE corner of the province, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was at a feeder at the Little Qualicum River Village on Vancouver I, 9 Jun (Neil Robins). Another male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was at Pitt Meadows 13 Jun (Brian Self). Three male Indigo Buntings turned up in the province, with a singing male near Courtenay 10 to 15 Jul (Dave & Adele Routledge). One was banded at Colony Farm in Port Coquitlam 2 Jun (Derek Matthews). A singing male Indigo Bunting was near the Revelstoke Airport 24 Jul (Devon Anderson). BC's 4th **Painted Bunting** was at a feeder in Ucluelet on the West Coast of Vancouver Is, 23 & 24 Jul (Jerry Herst & Julie Dorfman).

OBSERVERS: RC – Russell Cannings; DC – Don Cecile; BD – Brent Daikow; WD – Wayne Daikow; AD – Adrian Dorst; AF – Andrew Foxall; RF – Roger Foxall; RH – Rick Howie; JK – Jeremy Kimm; KL – Kevin Louth; RT – Rick Toochin; DT – Danny Tyson; RTy – Rick Tyson; GW – Gwynneth Wilson

Chris Charlesworth, 725 Richards Road, Kelowna, British Columbia, V1X 2x5
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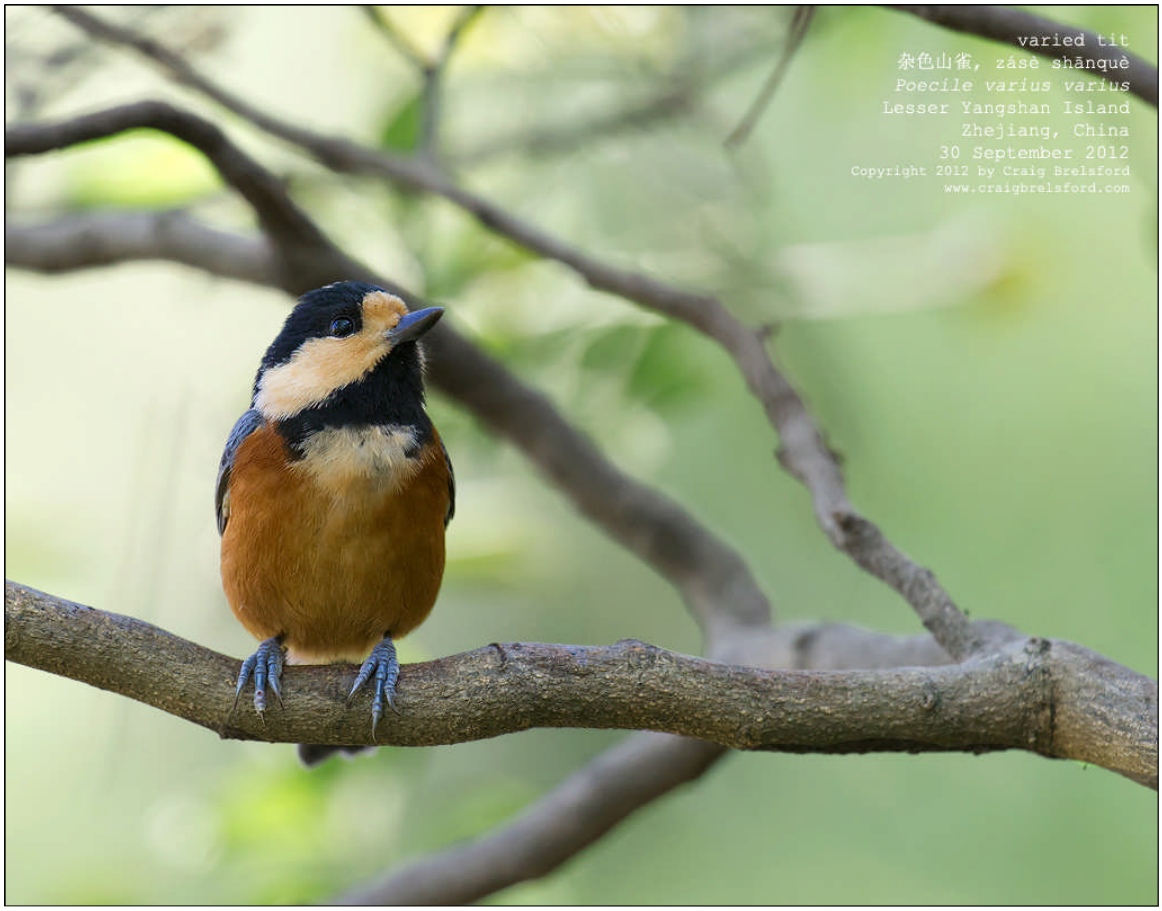


Varied Tit, Zhejiang, China by Craig Brelsford. (This image should have been included in Lee Harding's "Ode to Chickadees" In BC Birding, March 2013). For more image of China's birds, go to http://craigbrelsford.com/index.html .

DRAT THE DROUGHT

Long distance migration is fraught with perils. A notable example occurred in northern Europe in 201l when the Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) and Thrush Nightingale (*Luscinia luscinia*) arrived on breeding grounds in southern Sweden 12 and 16 days late, respectively. This one of the latest arrivals recorded in 63 years. Both birds follow a similar migration route. From wintering grounds in southeastern Africa they move north along the east coast to the Horn of Africa, then cross the Strait of Bab el Mandeb (southern end of the Red Sea) and proceed up the Red Sea coast of Arabia, through Palestine to Anatolia, thence into Europe.

Red-backed Shrike *Fran Trabalon*
The Internet Bird Collection

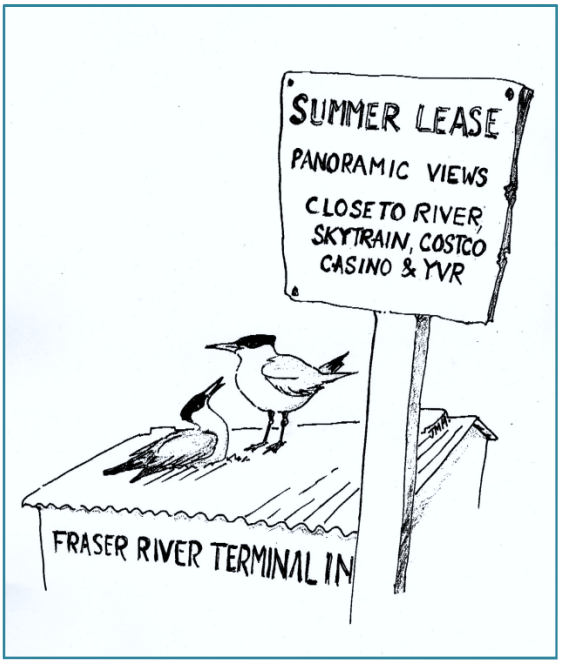
Researchers attached miniature 'geolocators' (which work by recording daylight length) to 18 shrikes and 8 nightingales, so were able to track their migratory progress over several years. Before crossing the Red Sea into Arabia, the birds spend some days feeding in the Horn of Africa. In 2010 and 2012, the birds on average spent 9 days (shrike) and 21 days (nightingale) there. In 2011, they spent 18 days (shrike) and 29 days (nightingale). The reason for this is inferred to be extreme drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011, making food supplies scarce and so delaying their 'refueling'.

The birds' entire breeding cycle in 2011 was therefore delayed by about 2 weeks. Other species that move through the Horn of Africa were observed to be similarly delayed whereas those not relying on this area for feeding were not. This might be critical for breeding success and later life history of the birds, especially as the trend in recent years in northern Europe has been for an earlier spring and correspondingly earlier arrival of the birds (both these species show an advance in spring arrival of about 4 days, on average, over half a century – there being, of course, considerable year-to-year variation). As it happens, the breeding success of the shrikes was about average in 2011: summer conditions enabled them to recover from the effect of the lost days.

There is a more general lesson here. As human activity becomes more and more pervasive everywhere in the landscape, there is greater and greater loss of space and resources used by birds on long migratory journeys – a semi-annual event during which they are particularly exposed to misadventure. The result is similar to that of the 2011 drought in northeastern Africa, only it is not just a one-time event, it is a permanent change that is bound to affect the bird population in the long term.

*Tøttrup, A.P., Klaassen, R.H.G., Kristensen, M.W., Strandberg, R., Vardanis, Y., Lindström, Å., Rahbek, C., Alerstam, T. and Thorup, K. 2012. Drought in Africa caused delayed arrival of European songbirds. Science **338**: 1307.*
Summary by M.Church

Thrush Nightingale *jmdebruyn*
The Internet Bird Collection



(For Non-Metro-Vancouverites: this comment refers to the Caspian Terns that nest on warehouse roofs in north Richmond) *Cartoon: JMH*

BCFO Two Day Field Trip

SUNSHINE COAST - November 23-24, 2013

As a place to see rocky coastline shorebirds on the southern Mainland Coast, the Sunshine Coast is the destination of choice. Combining Black Oystercatchers, Black Turnstones, Surfbirds and Rock Sandpipers on the shores with possibly 5 species of alcids, including Ancient and Marbled Murrelets, offshore, this trip promises a feast of wintering water-birds that can be tough to find elsewhere.

Leader: Tony Greenfield tony@whiskeyjacknaturetours.com 604 885-5539

How the Trips Work: BCFO two-day field trips are member-led, but participants make their own arrangements for accommodation, food and travel. *Carpooling* is encouraged and, will be arranged on the morning of Day 1.

Schedule: Day 1: am birding; pm birding; evening get-together (see below); Day 2: am birding; pm *optional* birding.

Register in Advance: **Important --** Register at least two weeks in advance. E-mail or phone the trip leader with names and numbers of participants. The leader will give you specific details of when and where to meet. If needed, additional leaders may be recruited to keep group sizes small.

Cost per Two-day Event: Members $10. per person; Non-members- $40. per person (includes BCFO membership).

The Social Side: At the end of Day1, where possible, leaders will make arrangements for participants to meet for dinner to recap the day, tally species, and .confirm arrangements for the following day.

Join with Fellow Members – Great Birding in Great Locations

BIRDING IN TAIWAN

Nov.19 – 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: $3700 (dbl.occup); $4400 (single); from Taipei

For details, see BCFO website or contact:
j.a.mackenzie@telus.net
www.birdingintaiwan.org

BIRD TRACKING TECHNOLOGY – SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES

Excerpts from a Blog post by Matt Mendenhall of Bird Watching magazine.

http://cs.birdwatchingdaily.com/brd/b/field_of_view/archive/2013/02/25/10-huge-discoveries-uncovered-with-small-geolocators.aspx

This is a follow-up to an article in Bird Watching magazine: "The Golden Age of Tracking" (April 2013) by Anne Murray (which you may have seen).It also relates to Anne's article about new technologies for tracking birds that appeared in BC Birding, Sept 2012.

Northern Wheatear

Three birds have confirmed the astonishing migratory routes of Northern Wheatear. A bird from Baffin Island in northeastern Canada crossed the Atlantic to winter in western sub-Saharan Africa, and two wheatears tagged north of Fairbanks, Alaska, flew over the Bering Sea and through northern Russia and Kazakhstan before crossing the Arabian Desert to wintering areas in Sudan, Uganda, or Kenya. The Alaskan birds' average round-trip distance — 18,640 miles (30,000 km) — is the longest known migration of any songbird.

Researchers Franz Bairlein and Heiko Schmaljohann of the Institute of Avian Research in Germany and colleagues described the study in August 2012 in the journal *Biology Letters*. (Schmaljohann took the above photo of a wheatear wearing a geolocator.) In a September 2012 paper in *Animal Behaviour*, they explain the biological mechanisms at work when wheatears fly halfway around the world. The scientists have also used geolocators to track wheatears that nest in Europe; they described the birds' routes to and from Africa in the journal *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*.

Burrowing Owl

Males and females that breed in Washington and Oregon spend winters far apart. In a study in which 25 geolocators were recovered from 93 tagged owls, researchers found that most females flew south to California for winter, while most males wintered in eastern Washington; males that nested in Oregon flew north in fall. The scientists say males choose to stay close to their breeding areas so they can get back to their territories quickly in spring.

David H. Johnson, director of the Global Owl Project, and Troy I. Wellicome, a Species At Risk biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service, conducted the study and will describe it in a forthcoming research paper. We're looking forward to learning more after they publish their results. (Their colleague Greg Green photographed the owl at right wearing a geolocator.)

Purple Martin

Birds of the eastern subis subspecies were tagged in far-flung breeding sites in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Minnesota, Virginia, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Texas. When their geolocators were retrieved, the data revealed a surprise: The birds share a broad, overlapping wintering area along the Amazon River in northern Brazil. In contrast, martins from the western arboricola subspecies appear to have a distinct wintering region in southeastern Brazil, approximately 1,800 miles (3,000 km) from the core wintering region of the eastern subspecies.

Fraser and Stutchbury of York University and 12 colleagues published the research in December 2012 in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. – *Matt Mendenhall, Managing Edito*

Pacific Golden-Plover

The large shorebirds set groundspeed records of 60 mph as they flew 9,900 to 14,900 miles (16,000 to 24,000 km) on a previously unknown circular migration route around the Pacific Ocean. The birds flew from American Samoa in the South Pacific to a stopover in Japan before completing their trip to Alaska. The return flight from Alaska to American Samoa lasted just six and a half days.

A group of 14 researchers from four nations announced the findings in July 2012 in the *Wader Study Group Bulletin*. Lead author Oscar "Wally" Johnson, an ornithologist at Montana State University, has been studying the shorebird and its migratory habits for decades and co-authored the Pacific Golden-Plover account (No. 202) in the Birds of North America reference series.

Rusty Blackbird

A previously unknown migration route was uncovered when three tagged blackbirds were recaptured in 2010 at nesting areas near Anchorage, Alaska. The birds migrated through the central provinces and states and used stopover sites in Saskatchewan, the Dakotas, and Iowa. Fall migration lasted 72 to 84 days, while the spring trip was completed in 16 to 30 days.

James A. Johnson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and colleagues reported the results in the December 2012 issue of *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*.

COVER STORY FOR IMAGE ON PAGE 32

Collage by Mark Habdas of images from his recent visit to Texas and Arizona. You can find Verdin, Scott's Oriole, Acorn Woodpecker, Prothonotary Warbler, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Phainopepla, Anhinga, Pyrrhuloxia, American Avocet, Willet and Red-faced Warbler.