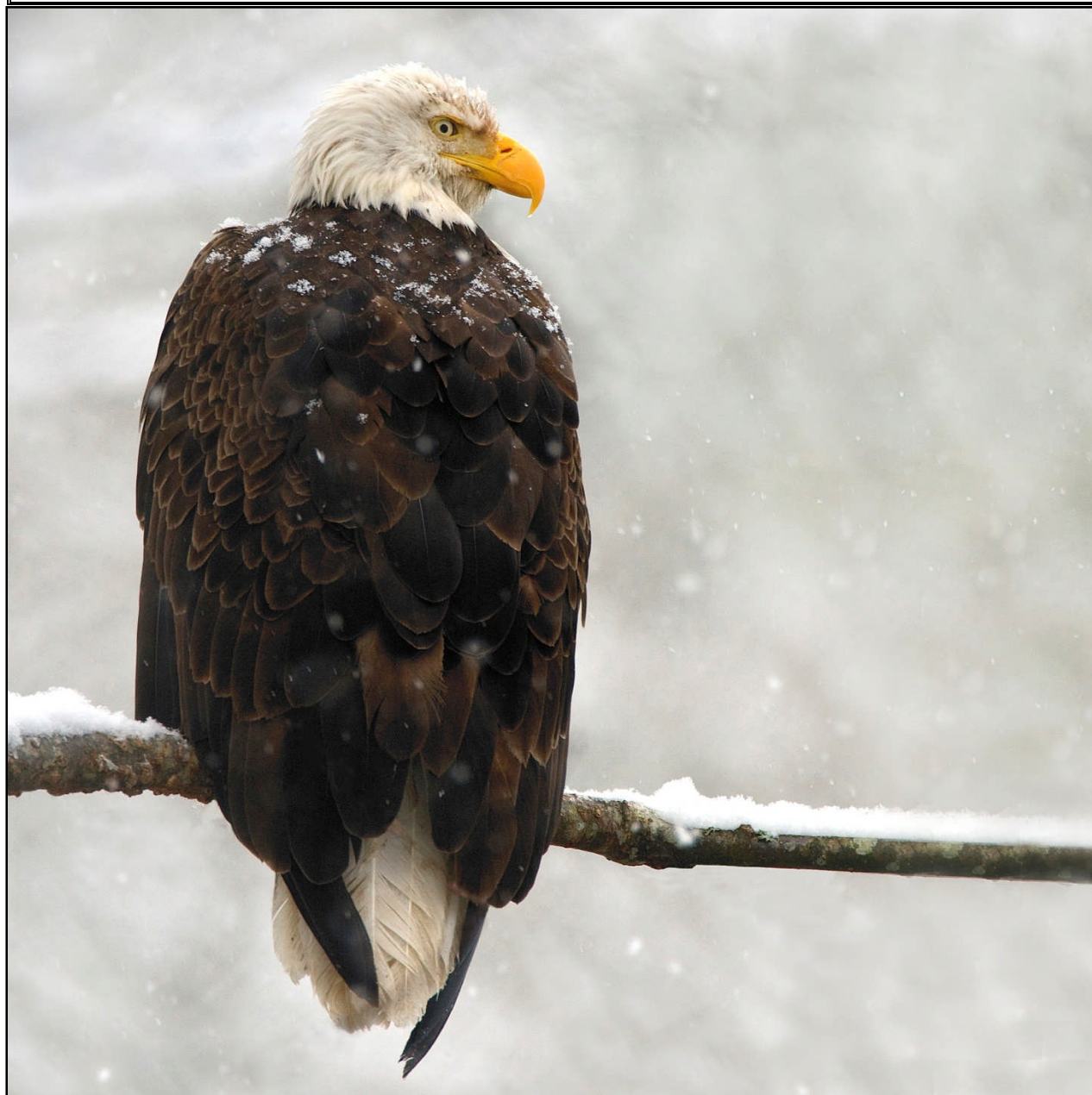


B_C BIRDING

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**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 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 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/>

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COVER STORY: BALD EAGLE

Photographer: John Lowman

This photo was taken at the Tenderfoot Creek Fish Hatchery near Squamish. We were lucky enough to choose a day when it was snowing, hence the light dusting on this Eagle's shoulders.

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

WINTER BIRDING

For many of our non-birding friends and family members, our love of birds and birding is just about unfathomable. They just don't seem to really "get it." And during the coming Christmas Bird Count season, it seems they "get it" even less than usual. But let's be honest, it can be a challenge to explain ourselves convincingly. We've all had conversations that go like this:

'You're not really going to spend the day outside counting birds are you?' *That's right.* But why?'
It's great; it's outdoors; it contributes to science, and it's not in the mall. 'So, you're going down to the lake to count the ducks, and geese, and little dickey birds?' *Correct.* 'In this weather?' Yes.
'Why didn't you do it last week when it was sunny?' *There's a set day.* 'How do you know if you've counted 'em all?' *That's not quite how it works.* 'All right then, how do you know you haven't counted the same birds twice?' *We dab each one with a little drop of red paint.* You must be crazy?' Yes. 'You don't really use red paint, do you?' *No of course not, it's yellow*
Just kidding!

Really, we can only offer so much explanation to the uninitiated, and I suspect, jokes aside, that we still leave our questioners baffled or bemused. Nonetheless, it is the season to be out there in our local patches, or helping others in theirs. It's the traditional way to bring a year's birding to a close, and perhaps add a few more final species to those year lists. Of course the counts taking place over the holidays provide that nice circularity – old lists wrapped, new lists started – a birder's year.

We may be in the depths of winter now, but as the solstice rolls past us in late December we can look forward to spring once again. Spring is an exciting time to bird, and for some fantastic spring birding we're absolutely delighted to confirm Pemberton for our 2014 AGM, June 13th to 15th. Please mark the dates in your calendar, and join us for what promises to be a great weekend of quality birding and fascinating workshops. Bird some new areas, and through our local contacts, get access into areas that are otherwise closed. Thanks to Wayne Diakow for making all the facilities and food arrangements. Extension Trip planning is underway.

In other news, the BCFO Bird Records Committee is hard at work and rolling along after a bit of a hiatus over the summer. Birders will travel! Expect a full report from the committee in January that will add a list of firsts to the BC Checklist. See last issue's Presidents Message for the birds under consideration.

Our publications, *BC Birding* and *British Columbia Birds* continue to deliver high quality material in a timely fashion due to the hard work of our editors: June Ryder (Newsletter), and Art Martell (Journal). Thank you Art and June.

Your other directors are not exactly slacking-off either. Adrian Leather is learning the ropes as a new director, and keeping his eyes on our Future Directions. Mary Taitt keeps the minutes of our meetings up to date, and Jude Grass is currently doing sterling work on the Christmas Bird Count calendar and AGM preparations. Wayne Weber has produced a tremendous list of links to birding and bird related websites that will appear very shortly on our website, and Mike Fung continues the vital work to keep our books in order. And last but not least, you all heard from Larry Cowan in November in his role as Membership Secretary. Larry reports that membership in BCFO is growing modestly, but steadily. Please remember to renew.

As we all head out into the snowy forests and fields (rainy on the Coast), the Board wishes you and your families the Best of the Season, in all its aspects, and a Happy New Year.

Good Winter Birding everyone!

George Clulow
President



EDITORS' NOTES

Greetings to fellow birders and welcome to the December issue of your newsletter. This includes a variety of articles and notes, ranging from the excitement of a noteworthy pelagic trip to tropical birding, a stray jay, a very cooperative sparrow, an appeal for dead ravens, and information about the next AGM – in a wonderful location, and where we hope to see you.

The splendid images on the covers of this issue were provided by guest photographer John Lowman. John is a Professor in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University. He tells me that he took up bird (and nature) photography to provide a counterbalance to his professional life.

We pass onto you the sad news of the death of Glenn Ryder (p.9), who was a renowned field naturalist and talented artist. You may recall that Glenn was the recipient of BCFO's Cannings Award in 2012 (BC Birding, Sept. 2012).

My apologies to Colin Clasen and Derek Killby for omitting the table that was part of their article: "Surprise Discovery of American Redstart....." p.20 in the September issue of the newsletter. This table will be available as an "appendix" to this newsletter on the website and will be included as an insert for members receiving the newsletter by Canada Post.

Also accompanying this issue are forms for Listers' Corner. 'Electronic members' can download them from the website and 'Canada Post members' will find an insert. Some membership renewal forms (selected members) are also included as paper inserts.

And, as always, please send in items, short or long, for our newsletter. (See Sept. '13 issue, p.31 for suggestions.)

Now is the time to get ready for your local Christmas Bird Counts. There are about 108 CBCs listed for British Columbia on the BCFO website! -- I'm not sure if they are all "active" – but a remarkable effort.

Best wishes to everyone for the holiday season, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and take care when travelling, and enjoy the winter birding.

June Ryder
Editor



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS 2013-2014

See the CBC section of BCFO's website at <http://bcfo.ca/> for information about locations, dates, and contact persons. During and following the count period, results will be once again be compiled on our website as they come in.



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 internet access, on BIRDNET at www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/ornithol/birdmeet.html. Many thanks to Jude Grass for her additions and updates.

EVENTS IN 2013:

Nov. 16 - Dec. 8 - - Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival, Harrison Mills. Contact: Jo-Anne Chadwick, Mission Chamber of Commerce, Mission, B.C. V2V 5X8; phone (604) 826-7361; email: info@fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca; website: <http://fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca>.

Dec. 14 2013 - Jan. 5, 2014 - - Christmas Bird Counts, various locations: for details or check the B.C.F.O. website: <http://bcfo.ca/british-columbia-christmas-bird-counts/> OR National Audubon Society website: <http://birds.audubon.org/chritmas-bird-count>.

EVENTS IN 2014:

Feb. 3 - 7 - - SOCIETY FOR NORTHWESTERN VERTEBRATE BIOLOGY, WASHINGTON CHAPTER, THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY & 4TH ANNUAL BURROWING OWL CONFERENCE, Pasco, Washington. Contact: phone: (541) 231-9653; email: infojointconference@gmail.com; website: <http://thesnwb.org/annualmeeting.html>.

Feb. 19 – 22 - - PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP'S 41ST MEETING, Juneau, Alaska. Contact: No individual, address or phone number yet announced; website: <http://www.regonline.com/psg2014>.

March 1 - April 21 - - BRANT WILDLIFE FESTIVAL, Qualicum. Contact: Robin Rivers, phone (866) 288-7878 or in Greater Vancouver (604) 924-9771; email: rivers@naturetrust.bc.ca; website: <http://brantfestival.bc.ca>.

March 13 - 16 - - WINGS OVER WATER BIRDING FESTIVAL, Blaine, Washington. Contact: Blaine Visitor Information Center, phone: (800) 624-3555; email: vic@cityofblaine.com; website: <http://www.blainechamber.com.wow>.

April 4 - 6 - - OLYMPIC BIRDFEST, Sequim, Washington. Contact: Dungeness River Audubon Center, phone (360) 681-4076; email: info@olympicbirdfest.org; website: <http://www.olympicbirdfest.org>.

April 11 - 14 - - JOHN SCHARF MIGRATORY BIRD FESTIVAL, Burns, Oregon. Contact: Festival, 484 North Broadway, Burns, OR 97220; phone: (541) 573-2636; email: info@migratorybirdfestival.com; website: <http://www.migratorybirdfestival.com>. Registration opens on Feb. 4, 2014.

April 22 - 27 - - AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION, Corpus Christi, Texas. Contact: American Birding Association, 1618 West Colorado, Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80904; phone (800) 850-2473; email: member@aba.org; website: <http://events.aba.org/aba-convention-corpus-christi-texas>.

April 24 - 27 - - 40TH ANNIVERSARY, HAWK MIGRATION ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA, Braddock Bay, New York. Contact: Deana Ford OR Julie Brown; email: membership@hmana.org; website: <http://www.hmana.org/event/hmanas-40th-anniversary-conference>.

April 25 - 27 - - GRAYS HARBOR SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL, Aberdeen, Washington. Contact: Box 470, Montesano, WA 98563; phone (360) 289-5048; website: <http://www.shorebirdfestival.com>.

May 1 - 4 - - B.C. NATURE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, VICTORIA, hosted by Rocky Point Bird Observatory & Victoria Natural History Society. Contact: no individual, mailing address or phone number yet announced; website: <http://rpbo.org/bcnatureagm.php>.

May 5 - 11 - - 18TH ANNUAL WINGS OVER THE ROCKIES FESTIVAL, Invermere. Contact: Pynelogs Cultural Centre, Box 2633, Invermere, B.C. V0A 1K0; phone: (855) 342-2473; email: info@wingsovertherockies.org.

May 9 - 11 - - 4TH ANNUAL SKAGIT BIRD BLITZ, Skagit Provincial Park. Contact details to follow in next *B.C. Birding*; website: <http://www.hopemountain.org/programdetails.html>.

May 15 - 18 - - LEAVENWORTH SPRING BIRD FEST, Leavenworth, Washington. Contact: email: info@leavenworthspringbirdfest.com; website: <http://www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com>.

May 15 - 19 - - MEADOWLARK NATURE FESTIVAL, Penticton. Contact: Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Alliance, 113-437 Martin St., Penticton, B.C. V2A 5L1; phone (250) 492-4422; website: <http://www.meadowlarkfestival.ca/okanagan/nature/festival/267-Home>.

May 29 - June 1 - - 2014 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS & ANNUAL MEETING, WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, Newport, Rhode Island. Contact: Jameson (Jim) Chase, Dept. Biol. & Biomed. Sci., Salve Regina Univ., 100 Ochre Point Ave., Newport, RI 02841; phone: (401) 341-3204; email: jameson.chase@salve.edu.

June 13 - 15 - - B.C.F.O. AGM, Pemberton, B.C.: see also p. 12, and keep an eye on the BCFO website for additional information as it becomes available.

June 13 - 15 - - WASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING, Yakima, Washington. Contact: information not yet available; website: <http://www.wos.org>.

June 20 - 22 - - MANNING PARK BIRD BLITZ, Manning Provincial Park. Contact details to follow in next *B.C. Birding*; website: <http://hopemountain.org/programdetails.html>.

July 31 - Aug. 5 - - INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR BEHAVIORAL ECOLOGY, New York, NY. Contact [no person, address or phone number yet indicated]; email: ISBE2014@gmail.com; website: <http://www.isbe2014.com/registration.html>.

Aug. 18 - 24 - - 26TH INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS, Tokyo, Japan. Contact: Erik Matthysen [address and phone number not yet announced] email: erik.matthysen@ua.ac.be OR Keisuke Ueda [address and phone number not yet announced]; email: keisuke@rikkyo.ac.jp; website: <http://ioc26.jp/>.

Sep. 23 - 27 - - 132ND STATED MEETING, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, 84TH ANNUAL MEETING, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY & 32ND ANNUAL MEETING, SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS, Estes Park, Colorado. Contact details [no address or phone number yet announced]; website: <http://birdmeetings.org/aoucssco2014/>.

Sep. 25 - 28 - - B.C. NATURE FALL GENERAL MEETING, Salmon Arm. Contact: Betty Davison, B.C. Nature, Heritage Centre, 1620 Mount Seymour Rd., North Vancouver, B.C. V7G 2R9; phone: (604) 985-3057; manager@bcnature.ca.; website: www.bcnature.ca .

Oct. 8 - 12 - - WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL MEETING, San Diego, California. Contact details not yet announced; website <http://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php> .

B.C. BIRDING NEWS BRIEFS

Compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

Wandering Birds

Bands applied to birds in B.C. continue to supply us with information on their movements. Five Dark-eyed Juncos of both Oregon and Slate-colored races recaptured at Mugaha Marsh on 16 April 2012 had all been banded there in 2011 or earlier in 2012, whereas a Pine Siskin banded there on 9 Aug. 2011 had wandered over 3140 km. east to appear at Cabot Head Bird Observatory on Lake Huron in Ontario on 3 Oct. 2011. A female Rufous Hummingbird banded on 19 July 2011 at Dunster, B.C. was recaptured 2,250 miles (3620 km.) southeast in Foley, Alabama on 28 December 2011. Colour bands on Caspian Terns nesting on a building in Richmond, B.C. in 2012 indicated that they had been banded as one adult and some chicks at a colony on East Sand Islands at the mouth of the Columbia River, Oregon. A band on an adult Bald Eagle found nearly dead of poisoning near its Abbotsford nest showed that it had been released near there after rehabilitation in 1994, raising several young in the interim. –based on R. W. Campbell and L. M. Van Damme. 2012. *Wildlife Afield* 9:77-88.

Speedy Sandpiper

A Western Sandpiper banded as a chick on 28 June 2013 at Nome, Alaska was recovered over 3000 km. south on Sidney Island, B.C. 50 days later on 17 August 2013! –based on Anonymous. *Bird Studies Canada Latest News* 13 Sept. 2013:3.

Bank Swallow Declared Threatened

During a meeting of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada in April-May 2013, Bank Swallow was added to the Threatened category of Canadian bird species, with declines in Canada estimated at 98% since 1970. The Queen Charlotte Islands race of Northern Goshawk was also reconfirmed as Threatened and the Northern Bobwhite as Endangered. –based on Anonymous. *Bird Studies Canada Latest News* 17 May 2013:2.

B.C. Bird Atlas Awarded

During May 2013, the Habitat Conservation Trust Association gave its silver award (Conservation Category) to the B.C. Breeding Bird Atlas project at the B.C. Nature AGM in Abbotsford for its contribution to conservation. The atlas also received continued funding from the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation –based on two announcements by Anonymous. *Bird Studies Canada Latest News* 17 May 2013:3.

Greater Sage-Grouse Protection

In Sept. 2013, federal Environment Minister Leona Aglukkag announced an Emergency Protective Order to conserve Greater Sage-Grouse and their habitat on provincial and federal lands in Alberta and Saskatchewan without requiring protection of their habitat on private lands. “Over one million dollars” is committed over three years to protecting this “and other species at risk” in those two provinces. –based on Anonymous. 2013. *Wandering Tattler* 37(2):15.

Rat Eradication Continues

A highlight of the 1990 meeting of the International Council for Bird Protection meeting in New Zealand was the advances that New Zealand had made in eradicating rats from some of its islands. Parks Canada staff has used some of their techniques successfully in clearing two small islets in Gwaii Hannas National Park of introduced rats. These efforts have been expanded to additional islands, hoping to halt declines of Cassin's Auklets, Ancient Murrelets and other seabirds. –based on N. Langley. 2013. *Wandering Tattler* 37(3):14.



Glenn Roderick Ryder (1938-2013)

Glenn R. Ryder, 75, died on Wednesday, October 2, 2013, of respiratory seizure at his home in Aldergrove, British Columbia. He was born in Vancouver, BC, on January 31, 1938 to Elizabeth Ryder [*née* McDonald] and Delbert G. R. Ryder. Glenn was predeceased by his older brother Donald G. and was estranged from his eldest sibling Helen. Glenn never married nor had children. His early life was unsettled. Glenn was moved between orphanages and foster homes and separated from his brother and sister while living in Marpole, Penticton, Kelowna, Celista, and Scotch Creek.

Glenn never completed his formal elementary school education because he was more lured by Nature than to a single-room school house. He was born a naturalist and before he could write was identifying wildlife that was then recorded by his brother and foster parents. He had an acute sense of observation and passion for Nature, which guided the rest of his life.

In 1954, when he was 17 years old, Glenn moved to the southwest mainland coast and lived in Abbotsford, Aldergrove, Bradner, Langley, Mount Lehman, and Surrey until his death. During this period, he carried on exploring and collecting. He spent most of his time in the field observing and recording wildlife, collecting artifacts, and exploring new habitats near home and around the province. He treasured his time in the field. For many decades he participated in volunteer surveys such as Christmas Bird Counts. He was recognized for his commitment to build, erect, and monitor nest boxes for cavity-nesting owls, especially the threatened Western Screech-Owl, in woodlands throughout the Lower Mainland.

Glenn was an accomplished artist. His line drawings and watercolours were meticulously executed. Frequently his field notes were adorned with his drawings that greatly added value to his observations. His artwork appeared in many publications over the years.

Occasionally Glenn accepted work as a consulting naturalist. For four years, he was employed by the BC Parks Branch as the summer warden and naturalist at Stum Lake, near Alexis Creek, where his presence helped protect the only colony of nesting American White Pelicans in British Columbia from human disturbance. Glenn's many friends supported him in his endeavours and often accompanied the renowned naturalist on trips. He was dubbed "The finest field naturalist in British Columbia." Glenn's legacy will endure in his collection of detailed field notes, artwork, and written works that will help us understand and ultimately conserve wildlife in British Columbia, the goal of his quiet and determined efforts.

Over the past nine years, Glenn published many accounts of his wildlife observations in *Wildlife Afield*, the bi-annual journal of the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies (BCFWS). These contributed significantly to previously unknown life history information about rare, endangered, and even extirpated species in British Columbia. In 2012, Glenn was the recipient of the Steve Cannings Award for contributions to ornithology in British Columbia from the BC Field Ornithologists.

If you wish to make a donation in Glenn's memory, please consider giving to a conservation organization or program of your choice. Contributions will also be accepted by the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies and will be used to help publish and distribute a 100-page memorial volume of *Wildlife Afield* high-lighting Glenn's fascinating and challenging life and his significant contributions to natural history in British Columbia. BCFWS is a provincially registered non-profit society and federally approved charitable organization located at 3825 Cadboro Bay Road, PO Box 55053, Victoria, BC V8N 6L8. Tax receipts can be issued for all donations. Whatever you choose, please indicate clearly that the donation is being made for Glenn Ryder.

An outdoor memorial service will be held in spring 2014. The date, as well as updates on progress of the special memorial publication, will be posted at www.wildlifebc.org.

R. Wayne Campbell and Phil Henderson



Photo: Phil Henderson, North Alouette River, BC, March 23, 2006

The Reflective Birder #6

I Vont to be Alone

Clive Keen

Ninety percent of my birding is done alone, and I like it that way.

Well, sort of. In an ideal world I'd spend a lot of time birding with one or two others whose expertise is at the same level as mine. But since I live in an obscure part of the world where birders are few, this isn't often an option. In practice, the choice is between birding alone, or in groups of a dozen or so. In this situation, I find it's best to do at least ninety percent of my birding alone.

Don't I like groups? Am I a misanthrope? No, it's not that at all. It's great to talk bird with other knowledgeable people, and birders, by and large, are a congenial bunch. There are also huge advantages to birding as part of a group. All those pairs of eyes mean you don't miss much: you get 360 degree vision, often employing eyes a lot sharper than your own. All that expertise also means that you learn a lot, and sometimes learn things you'd never pick up on your own: systematic mistakes, in particular, can finally get sorted out. Some misidentifications can persist for years if there's no-one authoritative around to double-check one's judgement. The expert in charge of the group also gives you much-above-average chances of locating rarities. My acquisition of lifers certainly increases dramatically whenever one of birding's stars is leading a group. I well remember the time that one such star pished down a Connecticut Warbler to my feet, and my bottom jaw bounced off the ground.

So, what's the problem? It's not – just in case you were thinking uncharitable thoughts – due to any sense of inferiority when being guided by someone who can hear the chip-note of a Nelson's Sparrow in the next hemisphere, and can tell a Short-billed from a Long-billed Dowitcher by the way it yawns. Humility is good for you. And it really is great to see true expertise in action, and to find that the superstars are actually very decent human beings who do what they do because they love it.

No, the problem is quite different. I'll give an example. Recently I'd heard that a birding group was heading off to a place well south of my usual haunts, which gave me a chance of finally seeing a Heermann's Gull. I told the trip leader about my interest in a Heermann's, and he assured me I'd see one on the trip, so I tagged along. About ten minutes into the day, he asked me to look at a particular spot, where he said a Heermann's was hiding among a few hundred gulls of the Glaucous-winged persuasion. I followed his directions, stared, and saw it was indeed a HEGU, a very attractive bird, and my first. It was all very pleasing. Nice, yes, definitely nice. I've no complaints at all. But compare this

pleasing experience to one that might have come if I'd gone looking for the bird on my own.

I'd have heard that a particular location gave me prospects of finding this bird, which I'd wanted to see for a long time, and so I'd have set out, not in the least sure if I'd succeed. I'd have gone on the long journey hoping, doubting; on tenterhooks. I'd then have looked at first in the wrong places, but had kept at it, because such a beautiful and distinctive bird is surely worth some perseverance. And I'd have kept looking hopefully, notwithstanding continuing disappointments. Over there, for example, are another few hundred Glaucous-winged Gulls, so let's have a careful look at this lot, just in case. You never know. Hold on. Wait a minute. Darker form there. Probably just a juvenile Glaucous-winged. But it really is darker! And oh! Is that a red bill? YES!? Damn, get out the way, you stupid crow. Perhaps it wasn't red. Oh, it's moving out. Good God, look at that spectacular dark coat! RED BILL!! Man, it's sensational!!!! AND THERE'S ANOTHER ONE COMING CLOSER!!!!



Heermann's Gull

Clive Keen

Now at this stage, I'd be having trouble holding the binoculars steady, and only refraining from jumping up and down because I'd not want to waste a second in looking at this spectacular, gorgeous, stunning, creature.

Point made?

And let's give another example. It's an hour later on the group trip when the leader points to a spot and announces the presence of a pair of Rhinoceros Auklets. I've not seen Rhinos before, so I look immediately. But hang on, I say, I thought Rhinos have a nob on the bill and white lines on the face, and neither of them are evident here. The leader replies that it's outside breeding season, and Rhinos then lose the nob

and lines; he digs out his iPhone, and shows me a drawing of the non-breeding Rhino. Yes, I think, no doubt about it, the ones in the water are clearly Rhinos.

At this stage, I've got myself another lifer, and I'm feeling quite pleased about it, but there's a remarkable lack of celebration. I've got a hefty tick. Shouldn't I be excited? Why am I not?

Let's look again at what would have happened if I'd been on my own.

I look at a pair of seabirds bobbing in the water. Er? What the heck are they? I can't remember learning about anything that looks like that! I look at them long and hard without being able to come to a conclusion and finally dig out the field guide. Hm. Definitely not Puffins. Cassin's have a shorter neck. No chance of them being Marbled: quite different. Nothing else fits at all. Rhinos? Surely not. There's that bill nob and two lines on the face. But hang on, you idiot, it's not breeding season. Are the birds still there? Yes. OK, let's see. Chunky yellowish bill. Check. All grey, but darker back. Check. Wedge-shaped head. Check. Smaller than those Murres behind them. Blimey. Can't be anything else! Not seen these guys before! Wow, I've got me a second lifer!

Now, I'll have a sense of achievement in the observation, because I've worked it out for myself. Being told the identity in advance is like having someone else put in the final pieces of your jigsaw puzzle. Sure, the jigsaw's finished, but the culminating sense of achievement is lost. I'll also have learnt less. When you're told in advance what you are seeing, you don't need to think through all the options and check on all the details. When I've done that, and can truly recognize the bird by myself, this time and in the future, I can tick it with a glee that is impossible when the work is done for me.

There's a kicker here, though. Whenever I've seen something that gives me great joy, I find I have to tell someone. I tell my wife, who pretends to care, or my close friend, who doesn't, but I'll tell him anyway. I might even tell you by writing an article on it. There's limits to the desire to be alone.

*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.*



LINCOLN'S SPARROW

Carlo Giovanella (text and photos)



Although lacking bright gaudy colours, most birders would agree that Lincoln's Sparrow is a subtly handsome bird. It breeds right across the boreal forests of North America, and passes through southern BC in migration both spring and fall. Since it tends to be rather reclusive, it is not often seen unless one is looking for it. Interestingly, it was fairly uncommon a few decades ago, and is one of a very few of our songbirds that is not declining, in fact, even increasing in numbers. The reason for this appears to be that they can utilize regenerating clear-cuts for nesting, and goodness knows we have plenty of those.

To get photos of this skulker can be challenging. Fortunately they sometimes respond well to pishing, and will pose briefly in the open -- like this one.



!!! ANNOUNCING !!!

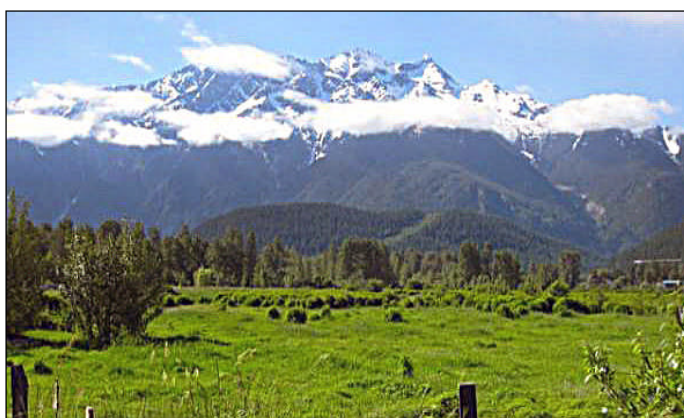
Pemberton 2014 – Birding the Transition

BCFO Annual General Meeting

June 13th to 15th, 2014

The Pemberton Valley is spectacular, surprisingly lightly birded, and under-explored. Lying in the heart of the Coast Mountains, within the transition zone between the wet western ranges and the drier ranges to the east, our 2014 AGM location offers a wide diversity of habitats spanning both coastal and interior ecozones: rich, lowland riparian cottonwood forests and agricultural lands; wetlands, rivers, lakes; forested mountainsides and alpine uplands.

With such a varied selection of habitats on offer, the Pemberton Valley and its surroundings support a matching diversity of breeding birds for us to find. While Black and Vaux's swifts carve the sky, a notable variety of flycatchers, warblers, and songbirds throng the forests and riverbanks. Sooty Grouse provide a steady back-beat from the hillsides. Pemberton is an exciting place to go birding.



GC

Our base of operations for meetings, presentations, and banquet will be Pemberton's deluxe new community centre.

Accommodation in and around Pemberton varies from luxurious to straightforward.



Pemberton Realtors



JMR

MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW!
JOIN US TO BIRD AN AREA THAT IS
UNFAMILIAR TO MANY AND
FULL OF SURPRISES!

SEPTEMBER 2013 PELAGIC TRIP WITH WILDRESEARCH

Adrian Leather

WildResearch acquired the services of the MV Frances Barkley for a fundraiser in the form of a Fall pelagic birding excursion, sailing from Ucluelet at 7 am on September 15. This event, which has quickly established itself as a must-do trip of the year in BC, sold out rapidly leaving some frustrated birders in its wake. The MV Frances Barkley chugs its way out to La Perouse Bank, approximately 40 km from shore, where a sudden drop-off results in an upwelling rich in nutrients. This attracts seabirds from such far-away places as Chile and New Zealand!

Clive Keen, Rod Sargent and myself left Quesnel at 5 am. We shared the 8 hour drive to Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal. Clive had been informing us that he was entitled to all sorts of breaks as a senior including a free ferry trip to Nanaimo, but as the lady in the ticket booth announced, "Seniors don't go free on weekends", Rod and myself burst into ironic laughter. Even Clive allowed himself a smile. "There you go", I said. "BC Ferries don't give a damn about seniors".....! It's not easy to bird anymore at the jetty. We were pretty well fenced in. Just a postage stamp of a lawn and half-a-dozen trees, but it was migration time and this tiny isolated patch of 'habitat' yielded six species including a Pacific Wren.

A two hour sojourn across to Nanaimo, a further three hour drive to Ucluelet, and we arrived at the Pacific Rim Motel. The alarm clock was set to 5 am, though I doubt birders achieved any quality sleep with all the excitement and anticipation of the pelagic. We'd been looking forward to this trip for months, and counting down the days for some weeks.

We arose in the dark with a misty light rain falling: nothing too concerning other than the potential for spending a lot of the voyage wiping binocular and camera lenses. Unfortunately, The Grey Whale didn't open until 7:00 and we were boarding the boat at 6.30, so we had to purchase some overpriced impressions of food for breakfast at a local gas bar, but it was just about better than nothing. We bumped into Ian there, and started to talk pelagic birds. The ante was well and truly up due to very recent reports of Great Shearwater, Laysan Albatross, and Crested Auklet in BC waters!

WildResearch staff greeted all the birders, and completed registration, including the inevitable name tags. With 96 enthusiastic birders onboard, including some from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, it was time for the MV Frances Barkley to leave the harbour. Pablo Jost was the official chum master, and dressed for the part, complete with WildResearch shirt, and fish processing pants. We were introduced to Paul Levesque, Russ Cannings, and Mike Boyd, who were going to call-out the birds.

Leaving the harbour we already had a mass following of California Gulls, and they did a fine job of attracting a variety of other species. The first real bit of excitement was a juvenile Black-legged Kittiwake, a delicate-looking bird, but resplendent with its super-stripey wings. Good numbers of Sooty Shearwaters began to show, and then Pink-footed Shearwaters joined the fray. Somebody called-out a Fork-tailed Storm Petrel but I don't think anybody else got onto it. That's my second consecutive pelagic miss for this species, not helped by Russ telling us he'd seen 900 on a self-arranged pelagic out to 70 kilometres the day before, nothing to do with the exotic seabirds reported, of course. Pink-footed Shearwaters became quite numerous and for a short time seemed to outnumber 'sooties'. A call went out that a Flesh-footed Shearwater was on the water with a group of Sooty Shearwaters, and as we got closer it was possible to note the diagnostic features. "Albatross!" was another call that increased the excitement level even more as a majestic 'albert' cruised by effortlessly and so impressively.



MV Frances Barkley
www.vancouverisland.com



Sooty Shearwater
Len Jellicoe



Pink-footed Shearwater
Len Jellicoe



Black-footed Albatross
Len Jellicoe

"Fulmar" was heard loud and clear and a Northern Fulmar glided across our wake, looking like some sort of sea pigeon in its dark phase plumage.

The boat was also being tracked by passerines lost at sea. Very sadly, we saw some drop into the ocean. Others landed on the boat and fed on insects, providing some interesting photo opportunities. The sharp eyes of Russ Cannings spotted something unusual with one particular bird. Russ appealed for photographers to get shots of this bird, and to our delight, a hatch year female Chestnut-sided Warbler was revealed! By now, the excitement level had gone into overdrive! The warbler flew inside the cabin where it was placed carefully in a bag for a well-earned rest. Other passerines included Yellow Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and White-throated Sparrow. One bird landed momentarily on a ladies hat.

"Skuuuuaaa" came a loud elongated call from Paul Levesque and Russ Cannings, and a South Polar Skua showed itself, menacingly manoeuvring at seven o'clock. "Jaeger" was a call that went out numerous times as we enjoyed some excellent views of Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers creating havoc among the seabirds in our wake. "Manx" was called! I saw the Manx Shearwater on the last pelagic and could hardly believe another was present. This proved a tricky one for me as it had zipped by the boat. I quickly ran up the stairs to the upper deck and just caught the Manx with a Sooty Shearwater flying away together. A Leach's Storm Petrel was spotted, another great find as Russ mentioned only about 5% of petrels seen in these waters are Leach's. We enjoyed incredibly calm conditions. Only briefly did the boat start to rock n'roll, and on occasions birds could be lost behind waves, but most of the time we relished really good viewing conditions, despite a rather overcast sky, and fog bands threatening to limit our viewing. Amazingly nobody succumbed to seasickness. On the last pelagic the lower deck resembled a morgue in waiting, with various groans of intense pain and discomfort audible.

Another Black-legged Kittiwake was spotted, this time an adult, but it flew rapidly ahead of the boat and out of sight. Numerous sightings of whales and other oceanic critters enhanced our experience.

Five species of shearwater later, we returned to Ucluelet Harbour, feeling rather victorious. A Western Gull greeted us from a nearby roof. Somebody on the Government Wharf called out, "Did you see much"? They seemed a little taken aback when the reply came, "A Chestnut-sided Warbler"! Everyone laughed! Mike Boyd provided a quick look at the Chestnut-sided Warbler prior to releasing it in a local park.

This pelagic was very high on satisfaction, and was well organized, with Paul, Russ, and Mike doing a great job of calling, and pointing-out key species. Mixed with the gratification of a wonderful day, was a tinge of melancholy hanging in the air. A truly enjoyable adventure was over. Some folks could not believe the time had gone so fast. Whenever a trip list is published following a pelagic, there always seem to be species I missed, and this was no exception, with a Red-throated Loon listed.

Pelagic trips are a fantastic way to enjoy birding. I guess the random element of surprise is a lot of it, and quickly scanning through a number of birds trying to spot that rarity. A must for adrenaline-junkie birders. Congratulations to the WildResearch staff on a job well done! Definitely a day to remember!

PS I did leave some things out -- e.g. the several Buller's Shearwaters we enjoyed, It was one of those days where you could write a small book.



Northern Fulmar
Len Jellico



Yellow Warbler on board
Len Jellicoe



Chestnut-sided Warbler on board
Mike Fung



Pomarine Jaeger
Len Jellicoe

COSTA RICA BIRDING

John Vooy's – text and photos

"Want to see lots of birds? Go to Costa Rica!" I had often heard this mantra, so my birding friend Ed Klassen and I made plans to visit this Central American country in the spring of 2013. Our wives and a lady friend wanted to tag along, so we ended up doing a 10-day group tour of the country, followed by a week on our own and then, having waved goodbye to the ladies, Ed and I would bird in various parts of the country for another week.

We decided to leave for Costa Rica a day earlier than needed and booked into the same hotel where the tour was to begin. On the grounds of the hotel we picked up such cool birds as Orange-chinned and Crimson-fronted Parakeets, Montezuma Oropendola, Blue-crowned Motmot, Green-breasted Mango, and White-eared Ground-Sparrow.

Caravan Tours was inexpensive, well organized, had a great leader, and exposed us to many of the various regions of the country. Although this was not specifically a birding tour, Ed and I ended up seeing some 160 species. We also saw quite a variety of other wildlife, including monkeys, sloths and alligators.

Part One: A General Tour of Costa Rica.....

Caravan took us to the Rio Frio -- Cano Negro National Refuge near Nicaragua, Poas Volcano National Park in the Upper Mountains, the Guanacaste area on the North Pacific Slope and, our favourite area, Tortuguero National Park in the Caribbean Lowlands. During those ten days we became acquainted with a great deal of the country.



Keel-billed Toucan

Some of the bird highlights were: Large-footed Finch and Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager on Poas Volcano; Streaked-backed Oriole, Crested Bobwhite, Rufous-naped Wren and Double-striped Thick-Knee on the North Pacific Lowlands; Olive-throated Parakeet, Gray-

necked Wood-Rail, and Great Potoo on a Rio Frio boat trip; and Scarlet Macaw, Mangrove (Yellow) Warbler and American Pygmy Kingfisher on the Tarcoles River near Carara National Park. In Tortuguero National Park, in the Caribbean Lowlands, we had, among other lifers, the following: Keel-billed Toucan, Sungrebe, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Squirrel Cuckoo, five (!) Great Green Macaws, Black-cowled Oriole, Lineated Woodpecker, and a snapping, popping, White-collared Manakin. One of my favourites of the common birds in the Caribbean Lowlands was the Passerini's Tanager -- black with a brilliant red rump!



Passerini's/Cherrie's Tanager

Part Two: A Week on Our Own.....

We rented an SUV from USAVE, as recommended by some BC birders. (Ed and I were certainly thankful we had 4 wheel drive vehicle for some of the roads we explored in the last week.) Then we headed down to the south Pacific coast where we had arranged for a couple of nights at Hacienda Baru National Wildlife Refuge (enjoyed the zip-lines), then two nights near Samuel Antonio National Park (enjoyed the beautiful beaches), and ending with a couple of nights near Carara National Park at an all-inclusive resort (again awesome beaches).

At Hacienda Baru our first treat was a Gray-headed Tanager, followed by the brilliant Violet-crowned Woodnymph. Garrigues and Dean's field guide certainly does not do justice to the latter (and many of the other illustrated birds) due to poor colouration. Several of the local birding guides we met still favoured Stiles and Skutch's field guide. Some other beauties at this refuge were Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Red-legged Honeycreeper and Yellow-headed Caracara. We also saw a number of the red-rumped and black Cherrie's Tanagers, the males of which look identical to the Passerini's Tanager of the Caribbean Lowlands. The females are different however, and their ranges do not overlap. Lawson's *Bird-finding Guide to Costa Rica* had alerted Ed and me to check the common vultures

soaring over this area of Costa Rica, since among them one might find a King Vulture. And we did, in fact, see two of these great creatures!

We next lodged in the town near Manuel Antonio National Park, with its excellent beaches. We had been told by a BC birder that this park was not very birdy, but we did bring our bins. A young guide, noticing that we were birders, kindly informed us that a young Common Potoo was roosting nearby. He gave us directions and showed us a picture on his cell phone of the bird and the peculiar tree it was in. After some beach time, Ed and I found the Potoo just where the guide had indicated.

Finally, at Punta Leona Resort, near Carara National Park, we found lots of birds on the resort's huge grounds with highlights being Orange-billed Sparrow, Golden-naped Woodpecker and Violaceous Trogon. While the ladies had a guide show off the natural wonders of Carara, Ed and I birded some of the trails. Highlights were Dot-winged Antwren, Ruddy Quail Dove and Muscovy Duck (a duck not yet on my ABA list even though I have tried for it along the Rio Grande in Texas five times!). It was then back to San Jose in preparation for the ladies' return home. Ed and I would then spend the next week birding.

Part Three: Birding, Birding, Birding.....

Some BC birders had informed us that even though it is not difficult to bird Costa Rica on your own, one should visit places that birding tours frequent. Our first was Rancho Naturalista on the Caribbean Slope where we stayed for three days. This is a real hotspot for birders, with over 430 species recorded in the surrounding area. We actually had the place to ourselves with huge rooms adjacent to a large balcony with many hummingbird feeders. The first afternoon we basically tried to sort out all the hummers frequenting the feeders and nearby flowering shrubs. We ended up with 12 species, the commonest being the White-necked Jacobin. We also had excellent looks at the prized Snowcap, Green Thorntail and Black-crested Coquette.

We had arranged to hire a local birding guide for the next morning, having been told that if you hire a local guide you will end up with more lifers. This certainly was true. The young guide not only knew the area

thoroughly, he also knew the birds and where to find them, and he excelled at showing us the birds. We ended up with 39 new species, 24 of which were lifers. Highlights of these Caribbean Slope specialties were: Bicolored Hawk, Collared Trogon, Ruddy Pigeon,



White-necked Jacobin

Brown-billed Scythebill, Scale-crested Pygmy Tyrant and White-crowned Manakin. We gave the guide a ride to his home to a nearby village. He took us a round-about way in order to check out the nearby Tuis River where we found a Sunbittern, Torrent Tyrannulet and Buff-rumped Warbler.

The folks at Rancho Naturalista encouraged us to make our next stop Tapanti National Park. We did, and stayed at Kiri Lodge, near the entrance. At the lodge we discovered what we were to see again and again in the mountainous areas: commercial Rainbow Trout ponds build in descending stages into the rushing streams. No surprise that we had fresh trout for supper that evening.



Resplendent Quetzal

Ed and I managed to find quite a few birds around the lodge and in the park, among them Double-toothed Kite, two new hummingbirds (Black-bellied Hummingbird and White-bellied Mountaingem), and Chestnut-headed Oropendola. Having done quite well on our own, it encouraged us for our next venture, the search for our most prized target bird, the Resplendent Quetzal!

We chose an area on the Pacific face of the Talamanca Mountains, the gorgeous valley of the Savegre River, with a road that turned out to be the most challenging and steepest road of our whole trip! We would be looking for the Quetzal in an area called San Gerardo de Dota, which Lawson, in his Bird Finding Guide, calls "one of the most reliable places in Costa Rica to find this stunning bird." We sure hoped so.

We stayed at the Trogon Lodge, with its beautiful grounds, trout pools and comfortable cabins. We spent the first day getting acquainted with the area surrounding the lodge which afforded us another hummingbird -- White-throated Mountain-gem -- and several other fascinating birds, including Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Mountain Robin and Slaty Flowerpiercer. After that evening's wonderful meal of the lodge's fresh Rainbow Trout, we learned that trout 'farming' in these mountain streams was actually introduced by an expat Canadian.

The next morning, we were shown (for a small fee) where a male quetzal often visited some wild Avocado Trees. We became part of a group that gathered, hoping, wishing (and praying) for a glimpse of this prized bird. After scanning the trees, for what seemed like a frustratingly long time, we caught sight of the first Resplendent Quetzal landed in a nearby tree where, for a long time, we had great views as it moved about from limb to limb. What an awesome creature!

We did manage to find another 18 mid to high elevation birds, among them Black Guan, Yellow-thighed Finch, Yellow-bellied Siskin, Flame-colored Tanager and three warblers: Black-cheeked, Flame-throated, and the beautiful Collared Redstart (nicknamed by Costa Ricans "amigo de hombre"—friend of man).



Sooty Robin

On the morning of our departure back to San Jose and return to Canada, we took a quick trip to the highest point along the Pan-American Highway, up a gravel road to some communication towers at the top of a mountain called Cerro de la Muerte (Hill of Death) at roughly 3450 metres elevation. In the brief time we had there we managed to see a few of the specialties: Volcano Junco, Volcano Hummingbird, Sooty Robin and Peg-billed Finch. What a way to 'top-off' a wonderful trip.

John Vooy's, mvars@shaw.ca

A BLUE JAY IN VANCOUVER

Peter Candido (text and photo)



During a bird count on October 12, 2013 at the Sea Island Conservation Area (SICA), Max Gotz spotted a Blue Jay near some oak trees bordering the North Arm of the Fraser River. The Blue Jay is resident in the Peace River Lowlands in extreme northeastern B.C. as well as in the Kootenays of southeastern B.C. (1), but rare on the coast. Over the following days, a number of birders searched for this local rarity, but the bird appeared only erratically, sometimes on the opposite side of the river in Vancouver Southlands. After five tries looking for the bird on both sides of the river I was unsuccessful until the morning of October 29, 2013.

After a fruitless search for almost two hours in Southlands near the river, I heard a distant Steller's Jay call. Reasoning that the Blue Jay might be in the company of its near relatives, I tried to locate the source of the call. Suddenly the Blue Jay flew in, dropping out of the sky nearby and landing on the top of a Douglas fir in front of me. It called a few times, then disappeared for a few minutes but soon reappeared, calling from the yard of a nearby house. It was cooperative enough to allow me to get a few photos. Interestingly, there was no sign of any Steller's Jays - the Blue Jay had been doing an imitation of their call in addition to the typical Blue Jay calls!

Reference:

(1). Campbell, R. W., Dawe, N. K., McTaggart-Cowan, I., Cooper, J. M., Kaiser, G. W., McNall, M. C. E. and Smith, G. E. J., "The Birds of British Columbia" Vol. 3 pp. 202-207, 1997.

CONTEMPLATIVE CROWS

Some years ago researchers at the University of Washington (Seattle) captured groups of American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) at five sites near the university, banded them and then released them. During this activity, the researchers wore face masks, so the crows saw the mask-face, not the person's real face. Afterward, when walking through the capture area with the mask on, the captor was invariably mobbed by the local crows, but when walking unmasked, they were left alone. Nor did the crows react to a new mask. Over the following five years the mobbing behaviour expanded: juvenile crows (not alive at the time of capture) independently scolded the 'dangerous' mask, as did lone crows that had not been involved in the capture incident. Furthermore, the area in which a capture-masked person was apt to be mobbed expanded by more than a kilometre. All this demonstrates both 'vertical' (i.e., familial) and lateral (social) learning about the dangerous being (the captor). (It also shows why it is a good idea to wear a mask if you are going to insult a crow.) What mental activities lie behind this learning?



Until only a few years ago, the question might have been regarded as nonsensical. Birds were thought to have very simple brains – well, 'bird brains'. We have already in these columns related several examples that give the lie to that conceit. But neuroanatomical studies have now shown that the structure of birds' brains is quite similar to our own. Birds ought to be capable of quite complex learning behaviours.

The Washington researchers followed up their field experience with a laboratory study designed to reveal how the crows process information in the face of perceived danger. They captured a group of crows and, after habituating them to their situation, exposed them to one of several stimuli, some of which were threatening in different ways. Safe in its cage, a crow was exposed for a minute or less several times over to one of a 'friendly face' (the crows' daily keeper, masked as usual); an 'unfriendly face' (the masked captor); a novel mask face; a novel face holding a dead crow; a stuffed Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaciensis*), but animated by a motor so the head turned realistically; or

the lab room with no other apparent presence (a control). The immediate reaction of the crow was gauged by counting its rate of eye blinking, normally 36/minute but slower when contemplating a threat. In the wild, the crow would probably caw and mob the threat as well, but it could not fly from its cage and, without other crows, apparently realised the futility of vocalising. After the exposure, the crow was sedated and subjected to a brain scan by PET (positron emission tomography) to reveal principal areas of brain activity.

The crow's blinking rate declined significantly when faced with the captor or the dead crow in comparison with the caring face or novel face (reaction to the buteo could not be visually observed). These results are consistent with the field experience. What is more startling is that the buteo (an innately known danger), the captor (a previously learned threat), and the dead crow (a novel threat) all activated different areas of the brain. One supposes that these involved motor response in the first case, memory recollection and response in the second, and learning of a new threat in the third case. The researchers learned something else about crow learning, too: when one of their released, formerly captive crows approached a trap set out to ensnare a new set of experimental subjects, he succeeded to make off with the bait – but he avoided recapture.

These results enrich our knowledge of the bases for animal learning and behaviour, and provide information that may help to gauge animal responses to natural challenges.

Cornell, H.N., Marzluff, J.M. and Pecoraro, S. 2012. Social learning spreads knowledge about dangerous humans among American crows. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 279: 499-508.

Cross, D.J., Marzluff, J.M., Palmquist, I., Minoshima, S., Shimizu, T. and Miyaoka, R. 2013. Distinct neural circuits underlie assessment of a diversity of natural dangers by American crows. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 280: Paper 2013.1046. This article gives details of the laboratory experimental protocols and the neuroanatomical interpretations. It is, accordingly, highly technical.

Morell, V. 2013. Into the minds of birds. *Science* 341: 22-24. A summary, plain-language review of the above work.

Summary by M.Church

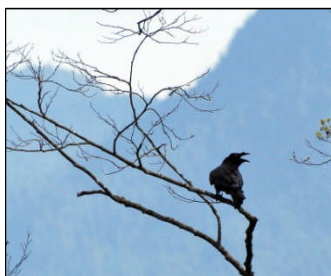
Photos: MH



ARE YOU SEEING TWO TYPES OF COMMON RAVENS?

Ildiko Szabo

Common Ravens (**Corvus corax**) vary little in morphology and behaviour across their wide range in North America, Europe, Asia and northern Africa. But genetic studies have revealed that ravens in California are genetically distinct from the rest of the world. This distinct 'California' DNA-type has now been found throughout the western US in roughly equal frequencies with the DNA-type that occurs in the rest of the raven's range. This strongly suggests that ravens were once two distinct species that are now freely interbreeding and re-merging. Research on splitting species is the norm these days – this project is looking at the opposite phenomenon: speciation in reverse!



We need help studying this phenomenon in ravens by using mtDNA and nuclear genes. Of highest importance is mapping how far north this "California" DNA-type is found. No "California" DNA-type has been found in Alaska, but the two DNA-types are present in equal frequency in Washington

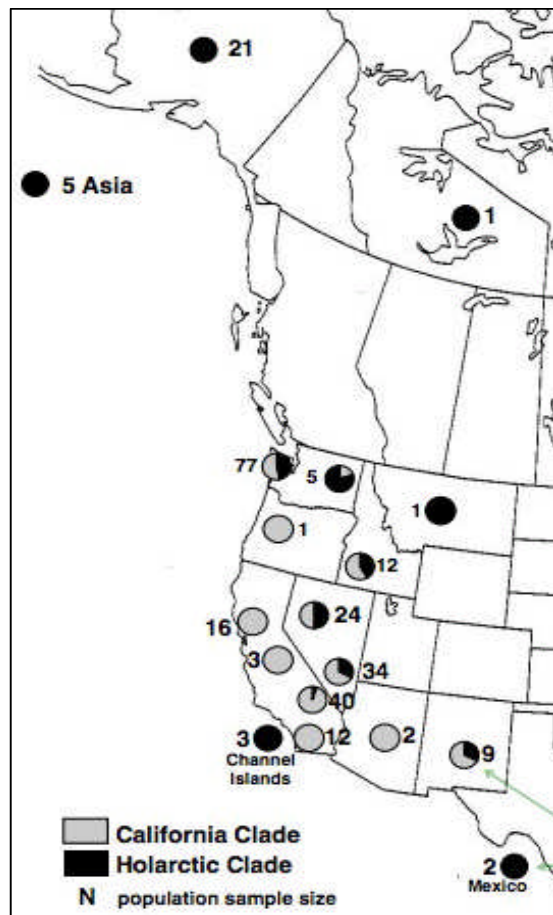
State. Thus the northern extent of the hybrid zone almost certainly lies within British Columbia – but where?

You may be able to help answer this question. If you find a "road kill" raven or a dead one anywhere in BC, could you please salvage it and email Ildiko Szabo, Assistant Curator of the Cowan Tetrapod Collection, UBC Beatty Biodiversity Museum ildiko@zoology.ubc.ca. If it is in good shape, it will be turned into a museum specimen. If you find a dried up or disgusting bird, please salvage a foot. If you catch a raven at a banding station, plucking 3 breast feathers will do the trick. (Less than 0.5 grams of muscle or toe pad or feathers is needed.)

Most important – be sure to include your email address along with the date and location where you found the bird inside the bag with the raven. Next, fire off an email to Ildiko so that she can arrange shipping. After the genetics work is finished on your raven, you will receive an email with the answer. Strange as it may sound, this is the only way to add the Cryptic California Raven subspecies to your bird list.

I totally appreciate that not everyone wants wildlife in their freezer. Another option is to drop off the raven at your regional office of BC Ministry of Forest, Lands, and Natural Resources and ask them to hold it for UBC.

More information and a full range map for the two



Range map for western North America

cryptic raven species is available at:
<http://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/3323854/Random-interbreeding-between-cryptic-lineages-of-the-Common-Raven>

***RUSTY BLACKBIRD SPRING MIGRATION BLITZ:
COORDINATOR NEEDED FOR INTERIOR BRITISH COLUMBIA***

Dear BC Birders,

My name is Judith Scarl and I'm coordinating a Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz. This Blitz is a collaboration between the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group, the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, eBird, and several local state/provincial organizations. We're recruiting coordinators for each of the 38 states, 9 provinces, and 3 territories that will be involved in the Blitz. Gord Gadsden has generously offered to coordinate this initiative in the Fraser Valley region, but we're looking for someone to coordinate this effort throughout the rest of British Columbia, especially focusing on the interior. That coordinator would take the lead on outreach within the province, including encouraging birders to participate and submit their data to eBird. You can learn more about this Blitz at:

<http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>, or check out our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/rustyblackbirdspringblitz>

Might anyone be interested in learning more about what being a coordinator for BC would entail, or could anyone point me towards someone that might be interested in coordinating in your region? Thanks so much, and I hope that many of you will participate in our Blitz when the Rusties come back North this April/May!

All the best,

Judith Scarl Conservation Biologist
Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz Coordinator

--

Dr. Judith Scarl Vermont Center for Ecostudies P.O. Box 420, Norwich, VT 05055
(802) 649 1431 x7 jscarl@vtecostudies.org

UPCOMING EVENTS.....MARK YOUR CALENDAR--- --



MORE ON THOSE LARCENOUS JAYS (AND THEIR OBSERVERS)

We recently (*BC Birding*, March 2013) reported experiments with Eurasian Jays (*Garrulus glandarius*) in which it became clear that the birds watch each other and seemingly anticipate each other's behaviour. This suggests that they possess something like a 'theory of mind' (the ability to conceptualise and respond to another animal's point of view). The subject was food-caching behaviour and the propensity of the jays to raid each other's caches. The same Cambridge University research group has now teased more and more spectacular evidence from their jays.



Eurasian Jay: Josep del Hoyo, *The Internet Bird Collection*

A prominent aspect of Eurasian Jay courtship behaviour is food sharing; specifically, the male presents food to the female (think of a fellow presenting chocolates to his girl). The researchers wondered 'can the male anticipate his female's preferred choice of food?' (chocolates your girlfriend goes for will get you farther faster than ones to which she is indifferent). If so, it must be admitted that the birds are capable of conceptualizing another bird's desire (or 'desire state', as the researchers would have it), which is pretty advanced behaviour. So they set up experiments using three foods: a standard diet, wax moth larvae, and mealworm larvae. Then they allowed the female to feed while the male was allowed to watch her. Subsequently the male was permitted to give food to the female. The expectation was that when the female pre-fed on one of moth larvae or mealworm larvae (both having the status of chocolate if you are a Eurasian Jay) she would become satiated with that food and would subsequently prefer the other treat. Would the males, observing the females eat, tumble to this and, when given the opportunity, present the other preferred food? Yes they did!

The researchers carefully excluded interpretations other than cognitive anticipation of the female's desired treat by running control experiments to show, first, that these

birds really do experience food satiation (without which the experiments could not be expected to return clearly interpretable results), that when the males could not see the females pre-feeding, they did not anticipate what would be her preference, and that the males were not projecting their own food preference onto the females. The 'standard diet' was used as an additional control for individual variations amongst the birds in food preference (i.e., the researchers had to know how strongly an individual female would prefer either of the 'preferred' foods over the standard maintenance diet).

There seems to be little room left to doubt that these birds can, on observational grounds, attribute mental states to other birds. It is increasingly obvious that our concept of animal intelligence needs to be radically rethought.

Ostojic, L., Shaw, R.C., Cheke, L.G. and Clayton, N.S. 2013. Evidence suggesting that desire-state attribution may govern food sharing in Eurasian jays. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (U.S.A.)*
www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1209926110
(from advance, online publication) Summary: M.Church

GANNET GEOGRAPHY

Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*) are colonial nesters and non-territorial pelagic foragers. This raises the question of how they divide foraging sea space. Ecologists have thought of two simple possibilities: perhaps, since they are not territorial, the foraging ranges of Gannets from neighbouring colonies overlap indiscriminately; alternately, perhaps they divide sea space at the halfway point between colonies. In the latter case, the space available to an individual colony would presumably limit food availability, hence colony size. But it turns out that the Gannets, not having attended elementary biology classes, do neither.



A group of 22 ornithologists in the United Kingdom attached satellite-tracked GPS devices to 184 chick-rearing Gannets from 12 of the 26 colonies surrounding the British islands. These 12 colonies account for 80% of the region's breeding birds. They thereby recorded a large number of foraging journeys from each colony. They found that larger colonies push the boundaries of their foraging areas outward toward neighbouring, smaller colonies, so that foraging space becomes divided in proportion to the size of the colony, hence the foraging need. More specifically, the researchers found that the area within which 95% of foraging occurred from a particular colony varied positively with colony size (as the square root of number of birds in the colony, for the mathematically inclined). At the boundary of each colony's range, there was scarcely any overlap in foraging. This corresponds

with the need to maintain a level of foraging intensity over the sea that will guarantee all members of each colony a roughly equivalent chance to find food (supposing that, food sources are roughly evenly distributed over the area).

However, the researchers also found that the number of foraging trips per day was negatively correlated with colony size (again as the square root!), implying that food delivery rate to the colony becomes more limited as the colony grows. This would at least in part be a consequence of the greater distance to the colony's 'boundary' so that more time is taken up on individual journeys. (Gannets split their time equally between foraging and chick-tending, so the need to make longer journeys does not translate into greater foraging time.) Therefore, colony size ultimately is, after all, limited by the total sea space it can command – which will depend on the proximity and size of neighbouring colonies. All this suggests that the Gannets are eminently sensible about food provision: the ecologists' musings probably tell you more about scientists' strange ways of thinking than they tell you about Gannets.



Within the sea space of an individual colony, however, potential prey (primarily shoaling fish) is not evenly distributed, so a new question is how do Gannets optimise their foraging effort? Observations of their behaviour strongly suggest that social learning occurs between individuals, so experienced birds who know where prey is to be found as the result of previous successful trips 'show the way' to others, who thereby learn. When leaving the colony, groups of Gannets characteristically alight on the water nearby, then depart in groups, presumably led by those who know. Upon returning, they signal visually and audibly. Young Gannets, in particular, who slowly integrate themselves into a colony over their pre-breeding period (of four or more years) may learn essential survival skills in this way. This is an increasingly commonly recognised aspect of behaviour in many species.

Wakefield, E.D. + 21 others (but no Gannets). 2013. Space partition without territoriality in Gannets. *Science* 341: 68-70.

Photos: p.21: Jacques Erard; above Mary Tremaine (Cornell Lab. Of Ornithology); both from The Internet Bird Collection

Summary by M.Church

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.

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 will be gratefully received.



Another survivor (see p. 13-14) on board the MV Frances Barkley. Photo by Clive Keen, who wrote: "....about 40 km offshore we started noticing passerines flying around the boat: a White-throated Sparrow, and one Yellow-rumped, one Chestnut-sided, one Townsend's (this photo), and three Yellow Warblers. They were having a tough time, and at least three hit the waves and disappeared. The Chestnut -sided was the biggest star, and was fortunately rescued and released on land.

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FOLLOW MY NEIGHBOUR

Every birdwatcher has thrilled to the spectacle of 'pack' flight in certain flocking birds. Think of the flashing light and dark display of a thousand massed dunlin at the sea shore, or the wheeling, malleable ball formed in the sky by a thousand starlings. Two questions arise: why do they do it? and how do they do it? The former question is the easier one: often, they are seeking escape from a menacing winged predator – most often, a falcon, which can match their speed and agility. But that cannot be the whole story; sometimes there is no obvious threat.



Dunlin respond to Peregrine (see dot top left) attack

MH

The second question is much more difficult, hence more interesting. Pieces of the answer are being assembled by diverse teams of physicists (!) and fish biologists (!!). The physicists have filmed the famous starling flocks that regularly display their balled flight on winter evenings over the Rome (Italy) railway station (one of the unexplained 'why's'). Using methods adapted from particle tracking, they have reduced the behaviour of individual birds to statistics and have discovered that each bird cues its flight from the behaviour of only six or seven neighbours. Furthermore, it is lateral neighbours, not ones ahead or behind, that guide the behaviour of the individual bird (a result that is derived from the vision field of the bird). Each bird adopts the average flight speed and direction of its effective neighbours: there is a flock-wide signal of what to do next only insofar as information travels, and is progressively modified, from 'neighbourhood' to neighbourhood. This accounts for the smoothly varying shape and pattern of the flight.

It is likely that this sort of cue controls the behaviour of all animal mass movements, including those of swarming insects, stampeding herd animals (perhaps including human crowds seeking escape from some threat), and schooling fish. We turn to the fish to learn more about the trajectory of the entire group because, unlike birds, the group behaviour of small fish can be stimulated and observed under control in a limited space in a fish tank. Scientists have tracked school behaviour in response to an avoidance stimulus and find, not surprisingly, that the individuals on the side of

the school closest to the threat swim fastest in the effort to avoid it. Combined with their intuition to remain in close proximity to their neighbours, the effect is to turn the school (or, in birds, the flock) away from the threat. School (flock; herd) steering is controlled by the most exposed animals. And so we have the remarkable aerial display of the birds.

There is more to this story yet. Presumably, in response to a threat, the core of the flock is the safest place to be. Who gets to be there and how? This much remains the subject of speculation, but it appears that the stronger, more experienced animals dominate the core – the younger, less experienced and weaker birds appear to form the edges. That is who steers the overall flock, and that is who gets picked off.

Feder, T. 2007. *Statistical physics is for the birds*. *Physics Today* **60**, No.10: 28-30.

Berdahl, A., Torney, C.J., Ioannou, C.C., Faria, J.J. and Couzin, I.D. 2013. *Emergent sensing of complex environments by mobile animal groups*. *Science* **339**: 574-576

Synthesis by M. Church

Dendroica Aids Bird Identification

Participating in a bird survey? Need to practice your bird ID? The Dendroica module of NatureInstruct has numerous recordings and photos of every breeding bird species in Canada (and many more from elsewhere in the Americas). Browse through the species, or select the "Quiz" to see how well you can separate species. If you register (it is free!), you can create a custom list of species to study and practice on a quiz. This can be particularly useful for participants in Bird Studies Canada's programs, such as breeding bird atlases.

Ever wondered what a bird song 'looks' like? Click "spectrogram" to see a visual representation of each recording as it plays. There is also increased support for mobile devices, making it even easier to use NatureInstruct when you're out and about.

(Click on Dendroica above or Google dendroica to find.)

(From BSC News May 2013)

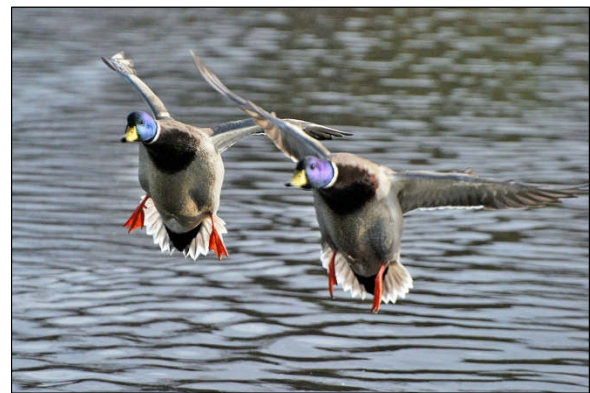
PRECISION TOUCHDOWN

Imagine a group of a dozen or more light aircraft flying in tight formation. They eventually need to land. What's the chance of them all touching down safely whilst maintaining formation? Not great, one expects, unless the pilots all happen to be ex-Snowbirds. Which raises a question: birds do it all the time, sometimes in the hundreds or thousands. How do they avoid collisions?

We now (p.24) we've uncovered something about how birds in large flocks maintain tight formation whilst wheeling about the sky. But are there additional tricks involved in their landing manoeuvres? Apparently there are. A team of Czech ornithologists has studied the landings of 3338 flocks of waterbirds comprising 14 species and nearly 15 000 birds in 8 countries, mostly in central Europe, but including observations from as far afield as Botswana and Nanaimo, BC. They focused attention on larger birds for whom the consequences of an inflight collision might be more serious, and nearly 75% of the observations involved the cosmopolitan Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). Other observed birds included species as diverse as Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), Lapwings (*Vanellus* spp.), Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) and Common merganser (*Mergus merganser*).

Like aircraft, the birds land into the wind but, in the absence of significant wind or, if the wind direction is highly inconvenient, they align themselves with Earth's magnetic field, landing south to north (or north to south). Each bird is apparently cueing on a magnetic beam that maintains it on course and out of the path of its immediate neighbours. Larger flocks exhibited tighter alignment, implying that the effect really is a collision-avoidance mechanism. We know that biologists strongly suspect that some birds sense the magnetic field to guide migration (and magnetodetection has recently been demonstrated in Peking Duck – the domestic conspecific of Mallard). It is conjectured that one means by which they may do this is via a magnetically sensitive chemical reaction in their eyes that allows them, in some sense, to 'see' the magnetic field (imagine a series of spots – older readers will think of 'floaters' – in your visual field that maintains orientation when you move your head, thereby indicating a fixed spatial field, in this case oriented by the magnetic north-south direction). In comparison, the investigators were able to eliminate approach direction (the birds usually circle before landing in any case), time of day and year (hence sun navigation), weather, and location (including latitude and magnetic declination) as cues. It is interesting though that, whilst all the eastern hemisphere birds showed a preference for a small deflection to the east of magnetic north, the lone Canadian sample (a flock of Mallards) deviated slightly to the west. The mechanism remains speculation but the magnetic alignment is now a matter of observed fact.

However, maintaining course is only part of the story. The birds all need to descend at the same rate as well. To study this aspect, the researchers analyzed photographs of 91 Mallards approaching a landing to determine their flight posture. One way to avoid a collision, one would think, would be for the ducks to look around to see where their immediate neighbours are. No (maybe only a human would think of anything so crude). They consistently stared directly forward and, moreover, all the birds held their heads at the same, strictly constant angle throughout the descent. It seems they may be cueing on the complete magnetic field, including declination (angle of the magnetic force lines with respect to Earth's surface). Hence they all descend on the same trajectory, avoiding collisions with birds above and below as well as to left and right. They really do appear to be riding a beam.



Male Mallards about to touch down

MH

Whatever they are doing, the strictly constant speed and rate of descent are all the more remarkable for the fact that they must make other flight adjustments as they descend. They begin their approach with wings held out; then they put wings down to act as air brakes (and to increase lift as they reduce speed); then landing gear is deployed (i.e., feet pop out). Each of these manoeuvres changes the bird's air resistance and will require some compensating adjustment of flight attitude to conform with flock speed and rate of descent. On top of that, they must compensate for the effects of the turbulent wind field around them. Human pilots endeavour to make similar adjustments to ensure a safe landing. At any significant airport there are collimated guide lights to keep them on the appropriate descent path (the equivalent, for humans, of a magnetic field) but, as they almost invariably land just one aircraft at a time (and only after much supervised practice), absolute precision is, fortunately, not so critical as it is with the formation-flying birds, who do it all intuitively. Score another one up for nature.

Hart, V. and 11 other authors. 2013. Directional compass preference for landing in waterbirds. *Frontiers in Zoology* 10: 38 (10pp).

Summary and additional notes by M. Church



Eurasian Collard- Doves recorded in Terrace,
Christmas Bird Count 2012 -- Jenny Hards

Project FeederWatch

The season is now under way! If you haven't registered yet, it's not too late – sign-up is available until the end of January. Bird Studies Canada thanks Home Hardware for helping us get the word out about Project FeederWatch and the importance of counting birds at your feeders this winter. To read a great piece on winter birdwatching and Project FeederWatch, see the

Home Hardware website

From: Bird Studies Canada, 26 Nov., 2013



A feeder-watching chickadee

JMR

Become a Canadian Lakes Loon Surveyor

The 2014 **Canadian Lakes Loon Survey (CLLS)** season will soon be here (May 2014), and surveyors are needed across Canada. Participants survey their lakes at least three times per year (once in June, once in July, and once in August), record the number of Common Loon pairs, and track the number of chicks each pair raises to adult size. Surveyors also record other bird species seen nearby. Each participant receives a package with instructions and forms. After the season is complete, forms are returned to Bird Studies Canada or the information is entered online. The results are analyzed to help assess loon and lake health. Read the most recent research paper in **Avian Conservation and Ecology**.



Common Loon on nest

JMR

select this link

Support conservation – participate in one of our oldest programs! Just count the loons while spending time on your favourite lake(s). **Register online** or contact Kathy Jones at (volunteer@birdscanada.org) or at 1-448-2473 ex 124 for information. The CLLS is a self-supporting program, so you must be a Bird Studies Canada member to participate. To view a map of available Canadian lakes and their most recent survey year,

From: Bird Studies Canada.

OCEAN CANARIES

We have learned that seabirds consume quantities of seaborne detritus, particularly plastic and Styrofoam (see 'Plastic food' *BC Birding*, Dec., 2012). It turns out that they ingest an even wider range of contaminants and are, in fact, rather comprehensive indicators of marine pollution. Seabird egg monitoring has charted the offshore history of persistent organic pollutants, including the infamous DDT. That was a chlorinated pollutant, but it was replaced by chemicals based on other halogens (bromine, fluorine) whose history has been tracked similarly (and which have been banned similarly).

The advantage of seabirds is that they range relatively widely, hence they sample the seas in a reasonably representative manner and far, far more cheaply than any ship-borne, human-conducted program could. But individual species do not range everywhere. Hence species such as cormorants can be studied to assess the condition of inshore coastal waters, alcids sample offshore coastal waters, while species such as petrels and albatrosses sample the surface of the deep sea. Geographical range is a further determinant of what a particular species is sampling. Long-term records can in some cases be reconstructed by sampling museum materials for certain contaminants that are preserved in dried tissue, feathers, bone or shell.



Well-known alcid: Atlantic Puffin (Orkney Is.) L.Killough

Contaminants concentrate most readily in body lipids (that is, in fatty tissue), hence birds' eggs, which are lipid-rich, provide a convenient sample for many contaminants of concern (and are easily recovered, since the birds must come ashore to breed; some even breed in mixed colonies, so a single investigator might, in effect, sample a huge area of ocean in a single day). Further, birds (like all of us) are what they eat. So contaminants accumulate more readily in birds that feed on fish than those feeding on plankton because they are more concentrated higher up the food chain. Nitrogen, carbon and certain metal isotopes, furthermore, can provide additional clues as to where the birds have been feeding, including

discriminating between naturally occurring (mostly mineral) poisonous substances and pollutants. Many chemical pollutants are hydrophobic and are adsorbed onto the surface of particulate debris, such as the plastics of the earlier article. Seabirds ingest these contaminants along with the plastic.



Black-browed Albatross (near South Georgia) JMR

Because they are predominantly associated with the water cycle, most pollutants tend eventually to move into the world ocean. Furthermore, atmospheric pollutants have a 7 in 10 chance of raining out into the world ocean. In this ultimate sink, they may persist for many years or decades after their use has been effectively regulated (as demonstrated by the history of DDT). And with thousands of new industrial and pharmaceutical chemicals being introduced each year, some will inevitably become new persistent contaminants. Human-generated contaminants represent a continuing threat to marine biota and seabirds are the most effective means by which to gauge the nature and severity of the threat.

Based on a perspective in Science: 'Tracking marine pollution' by John E. Elliott and Kyle H. Elliott (vol.340, 2013: pp.556-8). John Elliott works for Environment Canada out of the Delta, B.C. office. Kyle Elliott is in the Department of Biological Sciences, University of Manitoba.

Summary by M.Church

Canada's First Blue-footed Booby

From Bird Studies Canada,, Oct 2, 2013

A Blue-footed Booby photographed on September 24 off the coast of British Columbia is the first accepted record of this species for Canada. (There was one previous sight report for BC that was not accepted.) The bird was found near Stubbs Island on the north side of Vancouver Island during a whale watching tour. Earlier in September, Blue-footed Boobies were observed in unusual numbers along the California coast. Visit the ABA Blog to read more about the [California invasion](#) and the [British Columbia sighting](#).

Rare Bird Report
Winter , 2012-2013
 (1 Dec – 28 Feb
From North American Birds

British Columbia

by Chris Charlesworth



Winter weather followed the typical theme of a mild, wet coast and a colder, snowy interior. Since most of the cold Arctic air was bottled up in northeastern Asia, cold waves were weak with the most notable arriving the 3rd week of December and the 2nd week of January. February was relatively mild with even interior locations experiencing daytime temperatures above the melting point. But with overnight readings still dropping below zero, the snowpack developed a strong surface ice layer which delayed melting and likely negatively impacted hunting raptors such as Snowy Owls. Interior snowfalls north of 53N latitude piled up steadily atop the ice layer with many valley locations reporting highest snow on the ground at the end of the season. Precipitation remained liquid on the coast.

Jack Bowling

WATERFOWL THROUGH ALCIDS

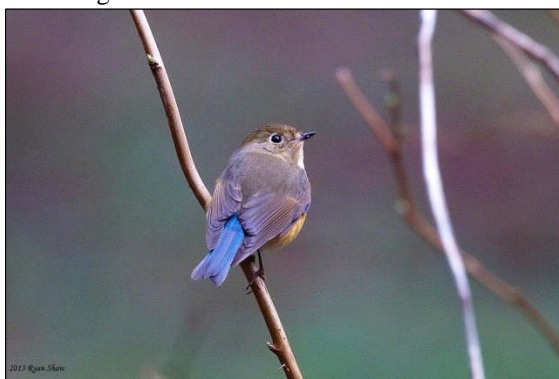
A female Tufted Duck, found on Osoyoos Lk on 24 Dec was a great find, and constituted the first record for the South Okanagan Valley (DB). Also in Osoyoos, a pair of Long-tailed Ducks remained at the local sewage ponds from 29 Jan to 16 Feb (DB, m.ob). On Haida Gwaii, a male **Smew** described on the Massett Christmas Bird Count, 27 Dec, was never seen again (MW). In the interior of the province, Pacific Loons are rare visitors. One was at Vaseau Lk, 7 Dec and another was at Tuc-el-nuit Lk in

Oliver on the same day (DB). In Kelowna, a Pacific Loon was at the west end of the Bennett Bridge 23 Dec (CC, m.ob). Reports of Yellow-billed Loons in the province were rather scarce this winter. One was at Lantzville on Vancouver Island 27 Feb (Scott Gilmore). An immature Double-crested Cormorant sat atop street lights on the Bennett Bridge in Kelowna from early November through 18 Dec (CC, m.ob). In Lake Country, an immature Double-crested Cormorant was seen 11 Dec (MF). Brown Pelicans had a spectacular showing around southern Vancouver Island this fall, and up to 22 of them remained around Victoria 1 Dec (Al, AC, m.ob). An adult gray morph Gyrfalcon was noted at the Tsawwassen Ferry Jetty south of Vancouver 30 Dec (RJ). Another, or perhaps the same bird, frequented the Hastings Park area of Vancouver from 21 Jan through the end of the period (Doug Cooper, m.ob). Wintering Soras are always of interest anywhere in Canada, thus one at Colony Farm in Coquitlam, 2 Feb, was of note (Monica Nugent). In West Vancouver, an adult basic Little Gull was seen at Ambleside Park 21 to 23 Dec (JK, JF, IT). In Kamloops, 3 Dunlin were along the Thompson River at McArthur Island Park from an undisclosed date in early December through to at least 18 Jan (AR). At Kelowna's City Park, an adult 'Kumlein's' Iceland Gull was seen and well described 24 Jan (RT). An adult Slaty-backed Gull was in agricultural fields in Chilliwack, 17 Dec (GG). An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull made a brief appearance in Kelowna 23 Dec at Robert Lk (SW). Presumably the same bird was seen again at the Kelowna Landfill 26 Jan (CC, RT). Outside of the Lower Mainland and southern Okanagan Valley Barn Owls are a rarity in BC, especially in the winter, thus one found roosting at Salmon Arm 12 Dec was noteworthy (Steven Hornstein). The winter brought many reports of Snowy Owls to the province. Up to 27 Snowy Owls were seen 24 Dec at Boundary Bay near Vancouver (MT). On Vancouver Island's scenic West Coast, a Snowy Owl was seen at Tofino 5 Jan (AD). Perhaps the same bird was seen 8 Feb at nearby Stubbs Island (AD). In Penticton, a Snowy Owl frequented the downtown region, being seen on 1 Dec, and again on 6 Jan (RC). Other towns in the interior of the province that enjoyed their own private wintering Snowy Owls included Quesnel, Prince George, Smithers and Salmon Arm. At Victoria, a suspected first year male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was a nice find 9 Jan (IC).

DOVES TO BUNTINGS

Sightings of Western Scrub-Jays continue to increase in BC's Lower Mainland area. One was seen repeatedly along Hamilton St. in New Westminster,

27 Jan to 7 Feb. The bird had apparently been present since Sept 2012 (fide Wayne Weber). Rare but annual in winter throughout the Southern Interior, a couple of Blue Jays were reported in the Okanagan during the period. One was at Summerland for the entire period and was reported 1 Dec (Gwynneth Wilson, et al). In Kelowna, a Blue Jay was briefly encountered along the Mission Ck Greenway, 26 Jan (Tanya Seebacher, Rease Larson). A long staying Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was seen until at least 5 Dec at Swan Lake in Victoria (IC, m.ob). Most likely the bird of the period for many, a first year female type **Red-flanked Bluetail** was found at Queen's Park in New Westminster 13 Jan (Colin McKenzie). This bird was a first for Canada and was seen by many, remaining into March.



Canada's first Red-flanked Bluetail, found by Colin McKenzie in Queen's Park, New Westminster. Photographed here 10 Mar by Ryan Shaw.

A Mountain Bluebird at the Tsawwassen First Nation Reserve was discovered 19 Feb and remained throughout the period (JF). Rare in winter in the interior, a Hermit Thrush successfully wintered along Hall Rd in Kelowna, 14 Dec to the end of the period (RT, m.ob). Another wintering Hermit Thrush in Kelowna was at Brandt's Ck 24 to 26 Jan (RT, et al). In Penticton, a Hermit Thrush was seen at the Esplanade Trails, 24 Dec (CS). In Kamloops, a Hermit Thrush wintered at McArthur Island Park and was reported 18 Jan, although the bird had apparently been present for a week or so prior (AR). Another rare winter bird, a Gray Catbird was at New Denver in the West Kootenay from 3 to 16 Dec (Linda Norman, et al).

Even more exciting was a Brown Thrasher that spent the winter at a private feeder in Cranbrook in the East Kootenay. It was first reported 27 Jan and remained through the end of the period (Jack Loeppky, m.ob). A Sage Thrasher magically appeared along the Boundary Bay dike near Vancouver and was seen by many, 9 to 22 Dec (Doug Bamford, m.ob). Canada's first **Citrine Wagtail**, first discovered in Nov 2012,



This Brown Thrasher successfully wintered in the Kootenay town of Cranbrook, photographed here 9 Feb by Chris Charlesworth.

remained through the end of the period in farm fields near Comox on Vancouver Island. Massett on Haida Gwaii hosted 5 Red-throated Pipits, 28 Dec (PH, MH, MW). In Vancouver, a Northern Waterthrush was a surprise find at Hastings Park 21 to 26 Jan (Doug Cooper). A Common Yellowthroat was at Swan Lake in Victoria 23 Dec to 4 Jan (IC). Continuing the late warbler trend, a Wilson's Warbler was at Cecil Green Park at the University of BC in Vancouver, 8 Dec (BD). One of the best sightings of the period came from the Cariboo town of Williams Lake, where a female **Scarlet Tanager** was discovered on the Christmas Bird Count, 16 Dec (PR, et al).



Perhaps one of the first photo-documented records of Scarlet Tanager for BC, this bird appeared in Williams Lake 16 Dec. Photo by Phil Ranson.

Much less exciting, but still noteworthy was a Western Tanager at Swan Lk in Victoria 3 Jan to 3 Feb (IC, m.ob). An adult Chipping Sparrow found on the Osoyoos Christmas Bird Count along the east side of Osoyoos Lake 29 Dec was a first for the count

(Kyle Fitzpatrick, RT). In West Vancouver, a Clay-colored Sparrow wintered with the aid of a feeder along Fulton Avenue and was last seen 6 Feb (Alexis Harrington, m.ob). The Okanagan's first winter record of a Vesper Sparrow came from Kelowna's Thompson Brook Ponds. The bird was discovered 10 Dec and was last seen on the local Christmas Bird Count, 15 Dec, when a heavy snow storm gripped the area (RT, CC). It was never seen again. On Vancouver Island, a Vesper Sparrow was found with a mixed flock of other sparrows in residential Victoria 16 Dec and remained to 21 Dec (IC, m.ob). It was a bumper season for Harris's Sparrows in BC with at least four wintering birds reported. A first year Harris's Sparrow was at a feeder along No. 6 Rd in Richmond, 1 to 13 Feb (John Tabak, et al). In Kelowna, an adult Harris's Sparrow spent the winter at a feeder near the Michaelbrook Golf Course, 14 Dec through end of the period (RT, m.ob). Victoria's Hyacinth Park hosted a Harris's Sparrow 5 & 6 Jan (Jeff Gaskin, m.ob), while also in Victoria another was at a feeder 3 Feb (Nathan Hentze). In Merritt, a male Common Grackle made a surprise visit, reported 1 Dec, though apparently present for a 'few weeks' prior (Alan Burger). A Bullock's Oriole was seen at a suet feeder in the Champlain Heights area of Vancouver on the 18 Dec Christmas Bird Count. The bird was again seen 27 Dec (Ilya Povalyaev, JK). Numbers of Common Redpolls throughout the southern interior were quite boisterous this winter, however reports of Hoary Redpolls were few and far between, with one seen at the Red Roost Gift Shop near Kaleden in the Okanagan, 27 Feb (CC, RT).



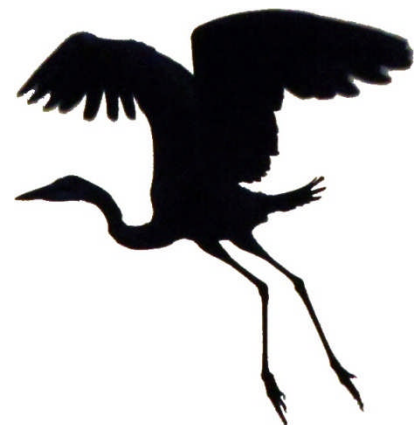
A male Brambling entertained many birders in Vancouver during its extended stay, photographed here 21 Jan by Ryan Shaw.

The winter of 2012/13 turned out to be the best winter ever in BC for Bramblings with 6 in total. It all began in the Trout Ck area of Summerland in the

Okanagan where on the Christmas Bird Count, a male Brambling was found 16 Dec, remaining until at least 10 Jan (Tom Lowery, Robyn de Young, m.ob). Next, another male Brambling appeared in Revelstoke at a feeder on 17 Dec, and remained through the end of the period (Darlene Cancelliere). Brambling 'mania' spilled over to the Lower Mainland when a male was reported 6 Jan, and remained until at least 10 Feb (Steve Ansell, m.ob). Apparently the bird had been present for at least two weeks prior as well. The Okanagan's 4th record of Brambling came from Vernon 2 & 3 of Jan (John Baumbrough). On Vancouver Island, a Brambling appeared 10 Jan and remained to at least 1 Feb (MM, m.ob). Not to be outdone, the Sunshine Coast also produced a Brambling with one seen at a feeder from 3 Jan to 3 Feb (Peter Feichtner, et al).

OBSERVERS: DB – Doug Brown; RC – Richard Cannings; CC – Chris Charlesworth; AC – Aziza Cooper; IC – Ian Cruickshank; BD – Brent Daikow; AD – Adrian Dorst; JF – Jess Findlay; MF – Mike Force; GG – Gord Gadsden; PH – Peter Hamel; MH – Margo Hearne; RJ – Ryan Johnston; JK – Jeremiah Kennedy; AL – Agnes Lynn; MM – Mike McGrenere; AR – Andrew Raniseth; PR – Phil Ranson; CS – Chris Siddle; MT – Mike Tabak; IT – Ian Thomas; RT – Ryan Tomlinson; SW – Stu Weir; MW – Martin Williams.

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





“Snowy Backyard”
(winter 2012-13)

Clive Keen
Prince George

COVER STORY: NORTHERN HARRIER

Photographer: John Lowman

This male Northern Harrier was photographed from the dike at Boundary Bay. We observed both parents flying food to a nest out in the marsh. We set up on the dike about a hundred yards away from where the birds were landing, and waited hoping that one would fly overhead as it returned from hunting. A couple of hours later the male flew close by carrying a Townsend's vole, hence this image

If you have enjoyed this issue, PLEASE support BC Birding by contributing. To keep our newsletter interesting, we need to 'hear' from birders all over the province.



Short-eared Owl

MH

