BC BIRDING

NewsMagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

ISSN 1206-1611 Volume 25 Number 2 / June 2015

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BC Birding: ISSN 1206-1611, is published four times a year by the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

PO Box 45111, Dunbar
Vancouver B.C., V6S 2M8

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 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.

NewsMagazine 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 about bird behaviour, site guides, photos, and other topics of interest to birders, preferably, but not necessarily, in British Columbia.

The deadline for receipt of material 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: $40per issue of $36 each for 4 or more issues

BCFO Website: http://bcfo.ca/

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COVER STORY

Merlin

Photographer: Alan Burger

One doesn't expect to find a Merlin on a fencepost in the BC interior grasslands, so I was a bit surprised to see this bird near the road in the Douglas Lake Plateau IBA. The Nicola Naturalist Society helps to monitor this high plateau IBA and a small group of us were returning from a routine visit in late April. The Merlin was clutching a freshly-caught Vesper Sparrow, and as we watched it plucked and ate it.

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, and avian ecology and behavior. 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:

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.

http://bcfo.ca/bcfo-research-grants/

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Here's to all volunteers, those dedicated people who believe in all work and no pay.
– Robert Orban

We've just wrapped up a very successful and well-attended AGM in Oliver – good friends, good times, good food, good birding. And while the full details of the conference will appear in the next issue of *BC Birding,* I'm taking this opportunity to reiterate my message to delegates in Oliver. BCFO has had a great year, but we wouldn't have managed it without our dedicated volunteers, both on and off the Board. We should recognise and thank them all.

Increasingly giving us provincial and international recognition, our **Bird Records Committee** continues to work diligently and quickly, and decisions are published promptly. Since the committee started in October 2013, it has reviewed over 80 rare bird reports. Chair: **Nathan Hentze**. Members: **Peter Candido** (Vancouver), **Chris Charlesworth** (Kelowna), **Mike Force (**Lake Country), **Jeremy Gatten** (Saanich), **Guy Monty** (Vancouver Island), **Mike Toochin** (Richmond).

Our **Young Birder Award** is also garnering a lot of attention and expressions of thanks from birders around the province who are delighted that we are encouraging and recognising the next generation of birders and young ornithologists. We have a number of ideas to broaden and deepen the program, but without the committed work of **Carlo Giovanella**, who does all the legwork on this one, we wouldn't have made such a great start.

Another innovation that we can thank **Carlo Giovanella** for is our very popular **Featured Photographer** series. Our website traffic jumps dramatically after each new set of photographs is published. Our members take fabulous photos, and birders around the world view their work via our website.

Two-day Field Trips continue to be a draw for members, and based on the two most recent, are growing in popularity. There was so much interest this year that volunteer leaders **Adrian Leather** and **Brian Murland** doubled the usual number of participants because demand was so high: instead of closing off participation, they simply added another section. Similarly, the pre-conference Kelowna event, organised by **Les Gyug,** was also in high demand. Eventually, four sections were offered in cooperation with the Central Okanagan Naturalists. Thanks too to all members who have previously offered trips.

Our **Extension Trip** continues to attract members to our guided expeditions, and this year we faced unprecedented demand. The trip was full just four days after it was announced. Such rapid enrolment means that we will need to develop new procedures to ensure access to booking for all members. Luckily, we weren't faced with over-booking this year. **Art Martell** does most of the grunt work in arranging these post-conference tours. This year he did the work, but left it to others to enjoy.

The **Annual General Meeting** take more than a little organizing. This year, **Jude Grass** has been my right hand person. There's a lot to do from inviting speakers, organising field trips, to printing agendas and name tags.

BC Birding, our NewsMagazine, continues under the steady stewardship of **June Ryder**. It's no mean feat to publish four issues per year, on time, that are absolutely stuffed with good bird articles, reports, and photographs.

British Columbia Birds is our annual, peer-reviewed journal, and our contribution to the ornithological literature of British Columbia. The journal is another reason for our increasing credibility. Under **Art Martell's** editorship the journal is attracting more high-level papers ranging from recent sightings to historical information not previously published. **Neil Dawe** ably assists Art in his editorial role.

In the category of **Behind the Scenes** we could not survive without the taker of our minutes, **Mary Tait,** BCFO Secretary. **Adrian Leather** has been helping out with **nominations** and **field trips.** Our **Treasurer**, money man **Mike Fung,** keeps our books in good order, and ready for any enquiry about our finances whether internal or external. Our **Membership** has grown significantly this year, with not only new members, but renewals happening at a record pace. **Larry Cowan** keeps track of how we're doing in great detail and with superb accuracy.

A final note to illustrate how committed our volunteers are. As we welcome two new (volunteer) members to your Board of Directors, **Clive Keen** and **Mike McGrenere,** our two retiring directors **Art Martell**, and **June Ryder** have agreed to continue, for the time being, with their editorial duties for our journal and newsmagazine. Now that's commitment. And clearly they're not just in it for the pay!

George Clulow, President

EDITOR'S NOTES

Well, this is becoming a repeating pattern! – the June issue of *BC Birding not* appearing as promptly as the other three. Again, it's the diversions of late spring and early summer that interfere with long sojourns at the computer – this time, the Kelowna two-day trip and Oliver AGM (all field trips well organized and enjoyable), as well other bird activities -- ranging from loon surveys to hummingbirds on the back deck. As George has mentioned, materials related to the Oliver weekend – director's reports and field trip accounts – will appear all together in the September issue. (I have no accounts yet for the Anarchist Mtn. and Nighthawk field trips, so if anyone can fill this gap I would be most grateful.)

Below you will see a note from WildResearch seeking help for their ongoing nightjar surveys. I did a couple of these last summer (and will do them again very soon), and found it a very interesting experience – standing on a quiet back-road and listening to the evening soundscape as darkness descends – Vesper Sparrows living up to their name, snipe winnowing, frogs, coyotes, nighthawks, poorwills and more.

Special thanks to Alan Burger for his splendid images on the first and last pages of this issue, and thanks to everyone else who has contributed.

Enjoy the summer

June Ryder, Editor

WILDRESEARCH SEEKING HELP FOR B.C. NIGHTJAR SURVEYS

WildResearch is seeking volunteers to take part in the Nightjar Survey, a citizen science program to survey Common Nighthawk and Common Poorwill populations in B.C. There is concern that these species may be declining. Help researchers learn more! Volunteers across BC are needed to survey for nightjars between mid-June and mid-July. Routes require only two to three hours to survey, and one hour of data entry. Each route involves a series of roadside stops, and is surveyed only once per year. Everyone with a vehicle and good hearing is invited to conduct a BC Nightjar Survey!

To sign up or to learn more, visit the BC Nightjar Survey webpage at <http://wildresearch.ca/programs/bc-nightjar-surveys/> or email nightjars@wildresearch.ca.To learn about the success of the program and preliminary results, check out the 2014 BC Nightjar Survey Annual Report <http://wildresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/BC-Nightjar-Survey-2014-Annual-Report.pdf>

The British Columbia Young Birder Award 2015
Call for Nominations

In 2014, BCFO inaugurated the BC Young Birder Award to welcome talented young birders into the birding community and recognise their accomplishments, contributions, and engagement with birds and birding in the province. To be selected for a Young Birder Award, recipients must be 16 or under and meet all of the following criteria:

- Exceptional observational and birding skills well beyond the 'novice' level
- Significant contribution to activities in the birding community such as: posting to list-serves; entering data to eBird; participating in local surveys, counts, and field trips
- Sponsored, nominated and seconded by a BCFO member who has direct knowledge of the candidate

The BCFO is seeking nominations for our next round of 'Young Birder' awards. Our previous awardees (see Newsletters for March 2014 and 2015) are carrying on in impressive fashion, and we expect there are more like them out there

Send nominations to:
BC Young Birder Award, BC Field Ornithologists
PO Box45111, Dunbar, Vancouver, B.C., V6S 2M8

House Wren image: MH

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

Compiled by 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* at www.birdmeetings.org and on the BIRDNET website at http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/ornith/birdmeet.html.

For most meetings, festivals and other events, the website is the main source of information, and registration can often be accomplished online as well. Wherever information can be obtained through a phone number or e-mail address, we have included these as well. If no contact information is listed, it can be assumed that none was provided by the organization, at least not on the date when this listing was compiled. It is usually not necessary to contact a particular individual, except for scientific meetings when one is interested in making a presentation. Names and contact information for individuals are listed whenever they are available.

June 5-7-- 27TH ANNUAL MOUNT ROBSON PROVINCIAL PARK BIRD BLITZ. For information, email Gail Ross at gailross1@telus.net, or phone Nancy Krueger at 250-563-7896.

June 5-7-- 36TH ANNUAL OREGON BIRDING ASSOCIATION conference, Sutherlin, OR.
For information and to register, check the Oregon Birding Association website at http://www.orbirds.org .

June 10-14-- WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL MEETING, Billings, Montana. For details, check the WFO webpage at http://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php .

June 10-14-- ANIMAL BEHAVIOR SOCIETY, 52ND ANNUAL MEETING, Anchorage, Alaska.
For further information and to register, visit the conference website at http://abs2015.org .

June 17-21-- AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION BIRDING RALLY, Spearfish, South Dakota (in the Black Hills). For further information and to register for the event, visit the ABA website at http://events.aba.org/aba-birding-rally-spearfish-south-dakota/#more-1576 .

June 27-- WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip from Westport, WA. This is the first of 16 trips scheduled from June through October 2015. For information and to sign up for a trip, please visit the Westport Seabirds webpage at http://www.westportseabirds.com . You can make reservations through Phil Anderson, the boat operator, by phone at (360) 268-9141; by email at pmand001@comcast.net ; or by mail at Westport Seabirds, PO Box 665, Westport, WA 98595.

July 15-18-- Joint meeting of the WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, ASSOCIATION OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS, and SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS at Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. For further information, check the conference website at http://personalpress.acadiau.ca/ornithmeet2015 .

June 19-21-- MANNING PARK BIRD BLITZ, Manning Provincial Park, B.C. (based at Loneduck Campground on Lightning Lake). For information and to register, check the website at http://hopemountain.org/programs/manning-park-bird-blitz-june-19-21-2015. Inquiries may be made by e-mail at info@hopemountain.org or by phone at 604-869-1274.

July 28-31-- 133RD STATED MEETING, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, and 85TH ANNUAL MEETING, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK. For information and to register, visit the AOU/COS conference website at http://aoucos2015.ou.edu .

Aug. 11-15-- 39TH ANNUAL MEETING, THE WATERBIRD SOCIETY, Bar Harbor, Maine. For information and to register, visit the website at http://www.waterbirds.org/annual_meeting-2015 .

Aug. 21-24-- WASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Ocean Shores, WA. For information and to register for the conference, visit the Society website at http://www.wos.org/2015conference.html .

Sept. 4-7-- WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION annual meeting, Burnaby, BC. For information and to register for the meeting, visit the WBBA website at http://www.westernbirdbanding.org/meeting_2015.html .

Sept. 4-6-- 29th ANNUAL OREGON SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL, Charleston, OR (near Coos Bay). Includes a pelagic birding trip as well as shorebird field trips. For information or to register, visit the festival website at http://www.fws.gov/oregoncoast/shorebirdfestival.htm , phone Dawn Harris at (541) 867-4550 (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service office in Newport, OR), or email Dawn at dawn_harris@fws.gov .

Sept. 11-13-- PUGET SOUND BIRD FESTIVAL, Edmonds, WA. For information and to register (starting Aug. 1). check the festival website at http://www.pugetsoundbirdfest.com , or contact Sally Lider at the City of Edmonds Parks Dept. (phone 425-771-0227, or email her at sallylider@edmondswa.gov).

Sept. 20-- PELAGIC BIRDING TRIP from Ucluelet, BC, on the MV Frances Barkley, organized by WildResearch. For information or to sign up, visit the WildResearch website at http://wildresearch.ca/news/pelagic-trip. NOTE: trip is currently full, but there is a wait list.

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Oct. 17-21-- 22ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY, Winnipeg, Manitoba. For further information and to register, visit the conference website at http://wildlife.org/22nd-annual-conference-of-the-wildlife-society .

Nov. 4-8-- RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Sacramento, California, hosted by the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory. For further details, visit the society website at http://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org .

The Steve Cannings Award for BC 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. Recent recipients are Glenn Ryder (2012), Fred C.Zwickel (2013), and Martin K. McNicholl (2014).

The award recognizes contributions over a long period of time to ornithology in B.C. 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 annually and, if possible, presented to the recipient during the banquet at the B.C.F.O. annual meeting.

We request nominations from any BCFO 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.

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

BCFO TWO-DAY FIELD TRIP
CACHE CREEK – SPENCES BRIDGE, MAY 16-17, 2015

Adrian Leather

Following discussion of those parts of B.C. that remain relatively unexplored and seriously underbirded, the Cache Creek and Spences Bridge areas were proposed for an exploratory trip. With trip leader Brian Murland struggling to cope due to a long vacation in Australia, I started the planning process.

Doubt was expressed as to the likely popularity of the trip. Was it too close to the BCFO Conference? Were the dry southern interior habitats too similar to those in the Okanagan? Would anyone be interested? But we were swamped with birders keen to explore the area, and I was transformed into a trip leader so we could accommodate two large groups. We made the trip during mid-migration, realizing quite a number of species would not have arrived yet.

I located five birders with some experience of the area, but three helped specifically: I really appreciate the very useful information provided by Heather Baines, Ken Wright, and Wendy Coomber, Editor of the Ashcroft - Cache Creek Journal. The more on-line research I did, the more potential sites I uncovered, and some negative information, such as limited access and poor road conditions, helped with planning the final itinerary.

Birders – 23 of them -- converged on Cache Creek, from as far away as Nakusp, Prince George, Victoria, and Nova Scotia!

Brian and myself stayed at Blue Sage (bed and breakfast) in Ashcroft. Our hosts, Jim & Martina, informed us that they had spent years hoping their noisy crows would leave, and they finally did, only to be replaced by a pair of screeching Merlins, who jumped into the crows' nest, and welcomed us with a 04:30 alarm call. The patio doors opening to the front deck allowed the intoxicating aromas of sage, lilac, and hyacinth to permeate the air.

We met the birders for breakfast at the Husky Restaurant in Cache Creek. Mary Lou and her crew were friendly and competent. Then, with waivers signed and plans discussed, Brian's group drove to Juniper Beach Provincial Park, 25 km east of Cache Creek, and my group headed 17 km south, to Oregon Jack Provincial Park. We later switched locations, and with time left to spare, some birders ventured to Separation Lake near Kamloops to view a flock of White-faced Ibis, and my group drove to the McLean Lake area.

Juniper Beach PP is a delightful camping spot by the Thompson River, a desert oasis where a small riparian strip attracts birds. As we were birding, the park host, an amusing Scottish gent appeared and began talking birds with us. He said, "Aye, we have Cassin's Finches, and Eurasian Doves, and hummingbirds in the acacia." I put it to him, "Come on, you're a birder -- go on, admit it!" He replied, "No, I can't. I've got you guys down as the number two crazies, but you're not as bad as the number ones, the train-spotters …"

The road to Oregon Jack PP is a beautiful drive, with a burn, mixed woodland in the mountains, small reed-fringed ponds and scrub, and ranchlands at Upper Hat Creek. En-route, a small pond by the highway provided some great looks at a pair of Cinnamon Teal, and Nancy Krueger spotted a Long-billed Dowitcher. Brian's group enjoyed good views of Lewis's Woodpeckers in the burn. My group relished great looks at a Golden Eagle feasting on a Canada

Goose by the roadside, perhaps 12 m (40 ft) ahead of Robb Paterson's van. We stared in excited silence as the eagle glared back at us, one of those unforgettable birding moments. The eagle hopped-up on to a branch overhanging the road, then shot away through the trees. We looked up and there it was circling across the nearby cliff. The elating songs of Western Meadowlarks and Vesper Sparrows greeted us in the ranchlands. The steep climb to the McLean Lake area provided stunning mountain and valley vistas, and we were greeted by a Common Loon, three American Pipits, and two stunning Eared Grebes close to shore.

After a few hours break, we convened on the outside patio at the Heartland Restaurant. The head waitress was supremely efficient and soon we all had drinks, and were enjoying good Greek food, the Lamb Dinner deserving of a special mention. Wendy Coomber from the local newspaper joined us, asking questions about the tour and taking a few photos. It was a lively and congenial atmosphere with lots of joyous chatter of The days birding. Brian conducted the tally-up.

On Sunday, we beat the Merlin alarm clock which 'rang' at 05:20. Meeting at the Husky, we wondered why we hadn't yet seen or heard an American Goldfinch, but then, as we assembled in the parking lot, an American Goldfinch flew over calling.

We headed to Horsting's Farm, 3 km north of Cache Creek. Chelsey came out to greet us, took a group photo, and thanked us for our visit. We located a Lewis's Woodpecker nest where a bird kept teasing us by sticking its head out of the hole then popping back in. We stopped to admire three Say's Phoebes, a fledgling phoebe being fed by an adult, and were struck by the stunning black and yellow combo of a Western Meadowlark beaming in the morning sun. Two male Lazuli Buntings provided plenty of oohs and aahs at a feeder. Some Cedar Waxwings had just arrived. We overstayed somewhat, happily watching Lewis's Woodpeckers foraging.

Next up was Ashcroft, where Brian's group headed for 'The Slough' on Evans Rd, and my group drove up to Willard and Barnes lakes. As we ascended, a Chukar was on the road. I wasn't sure whether to grab my bins or the walkie-talkie, but decided I had a moral obligation to go for the walkie-talkie. The Chukar scurried across the road, and bobbed and weaved through the sage, then fortunately reappeared further down the hill providing decent looks for the rest of the group. A Bank Swallow was spotted at the lakes. The Slough provided some great birding, with all three swifts, Peregrine Falcon, Chukar, Mourning Dove, and Lewis's Woodpecker.

We then went to Spences Bridge, 50 km south of Cache Creek, and met for lunch at The Packing House, where the food was really good but service was slow -- a very fortunate consequence was that Gary Davidson looked-up to catch a glimpse of a Long-billed Curlew heading north. Spences Bridge was birdy, with the sounds of hummingbirds, House Finches, American Goldfinches, Bullock's Orioles, et al. filling the fresh mountain air.

Brian's group headed out along the Lower Nicola Valley Rd, while we took a short walk along the river. We were pleasantly surprised to watch three River Otters scampering around on a sandbank, and spotted a Cassin's Finch. Then it was my group's turn to head out along the Lower Nicola. A few colonies of Cliff Swallow were noted. Alex Coffey spotted a Peregrine Falcon. A dead tree was decorated by

three Western Tanagers. A Belted Kingfisher rattled then vanished. Three Golden Eagles and a Cooper's Hawk were atop the mountains. Brian scanned for an American Dipper, but what was this distant bird that was rapidly filling his bins?, "A Harlequin!", and birders were enthralled by two male Harlequins. We bumped into Luke Halpen, an English birder living in B.C., who'd seen a Common Nighthawk here the previous evening, and relished awesome views of those iconic Lewis's Woodpeckers, a fitting finale to a memorable weekend.

Birders exchanged farewells and dispersed, with some returning to the Heartland Restaurant, where a rainbow appeared over a nearby mountain, and a lone Evening Grosbeak flew over for species #115. It was such an enjoyable weekend that it felt quite difficult to leave.

I should give honourable mentions to some species found either side of the weekend. Brian and myself heard a Hairy Woodpecker at Oregon Jack on Friday. On Monday, Alex Coffey spotted a Western Bluebird at Cache Creek, and Alex Dobrzanski saw two Clark's Nutcrackers near Juniper Beach.

Birders: Brian Murland, Brian Scott, Larry Cowan, Agnes Lynn, Alex Coffey, Luanne Coffey, Andrew Dobrzanski, Alex Dobrzanski, David Boyd, Rosemary Boyd, Adrian Leather, Robb Paterson, Fern Paterson, Clive Keen, Nancy Krueger, Nora McMuldroch, Alex Day, Heather Felushko, Michael Day, Shyana Felushko, Aryela Felushko, Paul Whalen, Gary Davidson.

Photo Credits: Lazuli Bunting, Eared Grebe and Mountain Bluebird: Paul Whalen; Killdeer: Nora McMuldroch.
(The Eared Grebe was photographed at Separation Lake near Kamloops.)

SPECIES LIST: BCFO TWO-DAY FIELD TRIP
CACHE CREEK – SPENCES BRIDGE, MAY 16-17, 2015
Compiled by Brian Murland

Canada Goose
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
Blue-winged Teal
Cinnamon Teal
Northern Shoveler
Green-winged Teal
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Barrow's Goldeneye
Common Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Harlequin
Chukar
Ruffed Grouse
Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
Eared Grebe
Great Blue Heron
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Golden Eagle
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
American Coot
Killdeer
Spotted Sandpiper
Lesser Yellowlegs
Long-billed Curlew
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Snipe
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Mourning Dove
Black Swift
Vaux's Swift
White-throated Swift
Calliope Hummingbird
Rufous Hummingbird
Belted Kingfisher
Red-naped Sapsucker
Lewis's Woodpecker Downy
Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Olive-sided Flycatcher
Western Wood-Pewee
Least Flycatcher
Hammond's Flycatcher
Dusky Flycatcher
Say's Phoebe
Western Kingbird
Cassin's Vireo
Warbling Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Grey Jay
Steller's Jay
Black-billed Magpie
American Crow
Common Raven
Tree Swallow
Violet-green Swallow
N Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Barn Swallow
Black-capped Chickadee
Mountain Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Marsh Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Mountain Bluebird
Townsend's Solitaire
American Robin
European Starling
American Pipit
Cedar Waxwing
Orange-crowned Warbler
Nashville Warbler
MacGillivray's Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Yellow Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Townsend's Warbler
Wilson's Warbler
Spotted Towhee
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Western Tanager
Lazuli Bunting
Red-winged Blackbird
Western Meadowlark
Brewer's Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Bullock's Oriole
Cassin's Finch
House Finch
Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch
Evening Grosbeak
House Sparrow

115 species

WHAT DRIVES AVIAN DIVERSITY?

It has long been thought that diversification of species is driven chiefly by the appearance of barriers in the landscape that isolate one group from another, followed by independent evolution in the isolated groups. This mechanism is known as 'allopatric speciation' (or, sometimes, 'geographic speciation'). In contrast, 'sympatric speciation' occurs when species diverge in a common territory.

Allopatric speciation has been regarded as a primary driver of speciation. An oft-quoted example is the uplift of the Andes Mountains within the past 20 million years. This event isolated lowland tropical forests to the east and west (the western side in a narrow coastal strip), created a network of major rivers to the east, of which the Amazon and its principal tributaries, Negro and Madeira, have been thought to demarcate semi-isolated lowland environments; it also aridified the Caribbean shore of South America and provoked the closure of the Isthmus of Panama. Did this major reorganization of the tropical South American landscape provoke extensive allopatric speciation within the landscape units it created?

A study of 27 lineages of Neotropical, mostly passerine birds (which is why you are reading this) shows that, contrary to the concept sketched above, divergence and speciation events were spread through time and suggested multiple avian crossings of the supposed physiographic barriers. The investigators detected between 9 and 27 divergence events, each occurring at a different time, across the formidable barrier posed by the Andes. Most of the events occurred during the Quaternary Era (most recent 2.6 million years), implicating the climate swings of the Ice Ages (which influenced rainfall and the extent and type of vegetation cover in the tropics) as a more likely physical driver of divergence and promoter of speciation. Lesser numbers of divergences across the major Amazonian rivers and the Isthmus of Panama were similarly found to be scattered through Quaternary time.

In further analysis, the researchers found that the time-depth of the lineage (time since the root bird in the line appears in the fossil record) is highly correlated with the number of species in the line. A further factor promoting speciation is foraging stratum, with understorey dwellers giving rise to more species than canopy dwellers. It appears that canopy dwellers, though they have greater opportunity to travel in the more open canopy environment, and incentive to do so in search of patchy food resources, ultimately differentiate themselves less than understorey dwellers -- who are perhaps more narrowly confined by the varied nature of the ground environment.

So the concept of physiographically driven allopatric speciation is not supported in this major study. But the rise of the mountains did create a range of environmental niches in which bird specialization and speciation has gone on (see 'Hummer history', BC Birding, June, 2014). Instead, it appears that avian speciation is more strongly driven by shorter term and more subtle environmental changes, like the climatic fluctuations of the past few million years. That, however, may merely be masking an effect of the tens of million year physiographic changes.

B.T.Smith + 15 others (a sizeable flock). 2014. The drivers of tropical speciation. Nature 515: 406 409.

Summary by M. Church

Western Kingbird
by Clive Keen

Cache Creek
Field Trip

The Reflective Birder #11

How Not to be a Listers' Pain in the Butt

Clive Keen

Scenario 1
You're wandering with a birder colleague in distant parts. "What the heck was that?" say you and your colleague as something darts away. The local expert tells you what it was, and it's a bird you've never seen before. Your colleague dances with joy and proclaims that he's got a lifer.

So, what do you do? You and your colleague have seen, out of the corners of your eyes, a blur with wings. Do *you* claim that you've got a lifer? Probably not. All you've actually "seen," and could swear to, hand on heart in a court of law, was something that looked like a bird. So you think it's not at all kosher to claim a lifer, and don't. But what do you say to your colleague?

Recommendation 1: Keep your thoughts entirely to yourself. Your colleague is happy. "You can't possibly claim that!" would stop him being happy. If he still went ahead and ticked it as a lifer, he'd be less happy about it. If he decided he shouldn't tick it after all, he'd resent the fact and you. And you can't, honestly, say that he *didn't see* the bird. Photons from the bird had impinged on his retina. The expert, completely trustworthy, has verified their source beyond reasonable doubt. So your colleague has seen the bird, hasn't he? What does "seen" actually mean? Read on.

Scenario 2
Say you've never seen a Forster's Tern before. You get good long looks at a tern, and your colleague declares that it's a Forster's. You're pretty happy about the fact and on the way home dig out your Sibley to administer a tick and add the bird to your life list. But, looking at Sibley, you wonder if you've seen a Common, not a Forster's. Your colleague, who knows terns well, declares that it was definitely a Forster's. You didn't, though, know what to look for to distinguish between the two species, and so don't feel that you've "seen" a Forster's. In that court of law, you could only put hand on heart and say that you've seen something that was either a Forster's or a Common.
Do you tick?

Recommendation 2: Feel entirely free to make your own decision, but again, keep it to yourself. It really is up to you whether you count it – nobody will ever object. If you feel unsure about it, though, don't tell your colleague. He'll feel that you're questioning his ability to distinguish the species.

Scenario 3
You've had longstanding trouble distinguishing two species – say Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers. You and a group of experts are staring at Dowitchers. You get good, long, looks. You've read up extensively on the distinction between the two species, and know what you are supposed to look for. But you're still not at all sure which you're seeing. The experts tell you that you're seeing Short-billed. Do you tick?

It might seem to be stretching things now not to tick, but perhaps you've decided that you can only claim a lifer if you could have been sure, had you seen the bird unassisted, what it was. Simply being told what it was, you've decided, doesn't cut the mustard. Well, very good for you, but, once again, keep quiet about it.

If you don't, you might have this situation: you're staring at the bird; so is an expert. You discuss it. He continues to point out various things. You concur, but each time you say that, to you, it just doesn't confirm the identity. He starts to get exasperated, but continues with his commentary. After a while, after you've followed all his comments but still say you can't count it, he declares in some pique that if you won't tick it now, you'll never be able to, because you'll never get better looks. He is not just annoyed that you can't take his word for it, but is seeing you as a holier-than-thou pain the neck; an obnoxious puritan of bird listing. It's so much better to keep quiet.

Your principle, though – that you should only claim a lifer if you'd be confident of ticking it unassisted – remains a good one. What is the way forward?

Recommendation 3: adopt the Assisted Lifer / Self-identified Lifer distinction. If you get reasonably good looks at a new bird, aren't sure, but are told what it is, count it as an Assisted Lifer. Put an asterisk against it in your life list, and hope to convert it later.

Everybody will be happy if you do this. And for the more difficult birds, it is really the only way forward. The reason lies in the fact that there can be no solid definition of what it is to really "see," tickably, a bird species.

It might seem easy to say what "I've definitely seen this species of bird" means. Doesn't it mean that you've had a clear view, and were able to note and

articulate the objective features that differentiate the bird from other species? Well, sometimes it means that, but quite often, and particularly with the more difficult birds, it doesn't mean that at all. Compare the situation with telling the difference between two brothers. Someone vaguely acquainted with them might confuse the two, but if they are your friends or family, you'll not have the slightest difficulty. You might, though – and this is the key point – be completely unable to list any objective identifying features. If pressed to explain the difference, you might say something like "Bill is a bit better looking" or "Bob has this glint in his eye," though others knowing them might refer to entirely different "impression" features.

With enough experience, the same thing happens with recognition of, say, Cooper's Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks. Telling them apart, for learners, is a process of learning a series of semi-defining objective features. But an expert will just *know* the difference, even if none of those objective features are evident. Pressed, our expert might say that the Cooper's has a more hostile look, or the Sharp-shinned has a more innocent air, or he might say something entirely different, meaningful to him but not particularly meaningful to anyone else. It is this type of "knowing" that just can't be achieved on a first sighting.

The notion of an Assisted Lifer for the more difficult birds is, as a result, virtually essential, and it can save a terrific amount of indecision. Adopting it allows learners to rejoice, guiltless, in the fact that they've got a lifer. Even better, they'll avoid being a lister's pain in the butt.

NOTE: This is one of 55 articles in the second edition of the eBook *Birding: a Flock of Irreverent Essays,* available from Amazon, at http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00K09F1JQ, and can be read on a Kindle or on any computer by downloading a free app from Amazon
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STRESS AND REPRODUCTION:

FAST LANE – SLOW LANE

Biologists reckon that animals respond in different ways to changes in their environment that enhance or threaten species survival. According, each has their own own life strategy. A 'slow-living' strategy, favoured by long-lived species, ranks behaviour that preserves the individual above the needs for immediate reproductive success, whereas 'fast-living' species – ones that may not survive so long – take chances to ensure reproductive success over self-preservation. An interesting test of these concepts has been conducted within the two global populations of the Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*). The North Atlantic population (known in Europe simply as 'Kittiwake') (*Rissa tridactyla tridactyla*) is considered a 'fast-living' species, whereas the North Pacific population (*Rissa tridactyla pollicaris*) is a 'slow-living' species (The Pacific bird is slightly larger and has a distinct hind toe, near absence of which in the Atlantic population gives rise to the specific name.) Vital statistics bear out the distinction: Atlantic kittiwakes have, on average, 81% survivorship from year to year and live 4.8 years, whereas Pacific kittiwakes have over 92% annual survivorship and live, on average, for 13 years. Correspondingly, the productivity (number of chicks raised each year) of Atlantic Kittiwake pairs averages 1.2, while for Pacific Kittiwakes the figure is 0.3[1].

Researchers set out to probe the underlying reason for these statistical contrasts by testing the response of birds in the two populations to an artificially imposed *sense of stress*. Specifically, they hypothesized that the contrasting life strategies would dictate different responses to the imposed stress during chick rearing. Stress was induced by subcutaneous implant in the birds of a small tube containing corticosterone crystals which dissolved into the bird's system. "Cort" is a hormone that enhances stress level in a bird, especially in relation to food supply and feeding anxiety. (So the stress was not real, hence 'sense of stress', although physiologically, it had the same effect as a real stress.) In the Pacific colony (Middleton Island, Gulf of Alaska), 30 birds were treated in 2010 and 31 'controls' were implanted with an empty tube (to discount the real stress-promoting effect of the implant procedure). Of these birds, 15 treated and 16 controls were actually offered supplementary food during the test, which lasted three days, after which the birds were recaptured and the implants removed. In the Atlantic colony (Kongsfjorden, Svalbard), 19 birds were treated in 2011 and there were 18 controls; no supplementary feeding was undertaken. The effect on chick rearing was assessed by measuring the weight gain of the chicks between the time of the stress test and late in the rearing cycle (about three weeks later) and by measuring the response of the chicks themselves to an imposed stress (being held in a bag for an hour; the stress response, measured by increase of the natural cort level in the chick, reflects the adequacy of prior feeding of the chick and is interpreted as a measure of adult rearing care). Finally, rearing success (number of fledged chicks) was noted for each nest.

The researchers found that baseline (i.e., natural) cort levels were 50% higher in Atlantic than in Pacific birds and that food supplementation (in the Pacific control group) further decreased their cort levels to less than half that of Atlantic birds. Treated but unfed Pacific birds experienced a doubling of cort levels after 3 days whilst levels in Atlantic birds were unaffected. Controls experienced no effect of the transplant. The results suggest that the Atlantic birds are operating under a greater level of food stress, but have adapted to deal with it by maintaining a higher but controlled level of anxiety in comparison with Pacific birds.

The response of Pacific birds to increased stress was to decrease their attendance at the nest, and some nests were abandoned, while in Atlantic birds the reverse happened – nest attendance increased and no nest was abandoned. The provision of supplemental food had no effect on this outcome. The result of these actions was to increase chick survival in the Atlantic colony (from 33% to 42%), while it declined in the Pacific colony (from 92% to 73%). In the Atlantic colony, chicks with artificially stressed parents gained more weight over the extended test period than did chicks of control birds (+2.3 grams/day), while in the Pacific colony chicks in stressed families lost (-1.8 g/d) in comparison with unfed controls. Chicks in the Atlantic colony with stressed parents had a smaller response to their own cort test than did controls while in the Pacific colony the reverse occurred. Supplementary feeding magnified that effect.

The researchers concluded that their hypothesis was sustained. Faced with an increase in stress 'fast-living' Atlantic birds increased their efforts to ensure reproductive success; 'slow-living' Pacific birds reduced their efforts. There was additional evidence in the cort test of the chicks that Atlantic chicks are, overall, better attended than Pacific chicks. The researchers contrasted these responses as 'flexible' (Atlantic) versus 'fixed' (Pacific) investment strategies for parenting.

The outcome is consistent with the overall lower level of rearing success in the Atlantic – conditions that limit nest success are ones that have led the birds to adapt to a higher ambient stress level. Aside from relative abundance of food in the sea – aggravated by the intensity of the North Atlantic commercial fishery – Atlantic birds face heavier predation than Pacific ones. Atlantic kittiwakes suffer deliberate predation from large Glaucous Gulls (*Larus hyperboreus*), Greater Black-backed Gulls (*Larus marinus*) and Northern Fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) (in the case of the studied colony, the first and last of these predators), while the Pacific birds face only opportunistic predation, mainly from Glaucous-winged Gulls (*Larus glaucescens*). Additional factors that may bear on the present study are contrasting weather between the two years (which the authors do not discuss), and the fact that the Pacific colony is located on the artificial ledges of an old structure and designed to be safe from predation: it is possible that ambient stress in this colony was even lower than in most Alaskan colonies. On the other hand, the offer of food to some of the Pacific birds, which made no difference to the outcome, discounts foraging conditions as a cause of that outcome. The results match the hypothesized pattern of life history strategies in an unusually well-controlled (because monospecific) case.

Schultner, J., Kitaysky, A.S., Gabrielsen, G.W., Hatch, S.A. and Bech, C. 2013. Differential reproductive responses to stress level reveal the role of life-history strategies within a species. Proceedings of the Royal Society B280. doi. 10.1098/rspb.2013.2090.

[1]Vital statistics from Hatch, S.A., Robertson, G.J. and Baird, P.H. 2009. Black-legged kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla). Poole, A., editor, The Birds of North America. Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Retrieved from BNA Online (http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/092. doi: 10.2173/bna.92.

Summary by M.Church

Image: Black-legged Kittiwake, Alaska (JMR)

A REMARKABLE ENCOUNTER

I just had the most marvelous experience. Harv and I were watching a Great Horned Owl fledgling close by our place. In the evening, Harv called, "you better get out here (on the deck) and see this owl" I ran out and there he was, awkwardly walking along the path, and hopping onto the water barrel. He sat on a piece of driftwood as if he owned the place. He wasn't disturbed by us, and it was dark by this time. When the motion light came on it didn't phase him. He decided to sit on the old wooden fence between us and the neighbour, but then thought Harv's grill on his truck might be better. We chatted quietly as his head turned figure-eights, and wondered where his mom was? He flew to our neighbour's roof and saw me looking at him. I suggested we go in so his mother could fetch him. The owl had a different idea. He flew to the wood railing I was leaning on and sat beside me. I could have touched his feathers without stretching my arm out! His big eyes looked directly into mine and I was gobsmacked! His head wove from side to side and around as he stared into my face. I could see the lines on his downy grey feathers, and that they were coming loose. Harv kept saying "I don't believe this". I held my breath as the owl sat looking at me. He made soft noises. He made himself comfortable, large feet tucked under his feathers. Then we heard mom calling. He looked into the trees. She called, and he answered, still sitting beside me. He gave me one last look then took off, his wings almost hitting me in the face. If only there had been someone there to film all this! It was about 25 minutes.

Angela Ostash, Penticton

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AGE AND SKILL TRUMPS YOUTH AND STRENGTH

The old adage is proved once more in a population of Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*), a medium-sized old world raptor that is thought to be the most abundant of all Accipitridae because of very large south Asian populations. While tropical birds of this species are resident, those that breed farther north are migrants, in particular, the nominate European race (*M.m. migrans*). So the question is 'which are the most efficient migrators?' Spanish ornithologists observed a long-studied population of the kites that breed in Doñana National Park (southwestern Spain). These kites migrate via northwest Africa to winter in Mali. The researchers determined their migration routes and timing by attaching GPS locators to 92 birds. They recorded a total of 162 spring flights and 202 autumnal ones. The advantage of studying this population is that the ages of individual birds are known so, for the first time, age-related migration behaviour can be investigated. The sample included birds of nearly all ages between 1 and 27 years. Another advantage of studying this species is that, although they move in loose groups with other thermal current-seeking raptors (and storks!), the birds make individual travel decisions; no group-think here.

Black Kite
Google (Animal-pics.com)

The birds begin regular migrations at age 2. The northward migration in spring occurs over 5 months, chiefly because of the range of departure dates. Birds average 183 km per day (209 km per travelling day) on an 8.5 hour flight during 18 days. The straight-line route is 3130 km (mental mathematicians will calculate that the figures above show that the birds do not travel in a straight line). The post-breeding trip in autumn occurs more quickly because of more favourable winds and more active thermal currents. In what follows 'juveniles' are birds on their first migration, while 'young adults' are 3-6 years old.

The results showed that the youngest birds were last to depart Mali on the northward journey, delaying until mid- to late June. As they become older, birds depart steadily earlier until, by age 7, they leave in late January to early February, a timing that persists for the rest of their lives. Speed and journey duration varies, with young adults (strength!) flying fastest, making fewest stopovers, and completing the journey in the least time. The range of journey times is 5 days, with juveniles being slowest (presumably for lack of navigating experience). But departure time (skill!) trumps the travel factors: older birds arrive on the breeding grounds first (early March, on average) and, presumably, take the best breeding territories. Juveniles arrive last (but may not breed).

The return journey is somewhat different, speed increases and journey duration decreases steadily with age (except the oldest birds are slightly slower) and the young adults are last to leave and arrive back in Africa. It is supposed that they hang around in the north to scope out prospectively better breeding territories for next year.

Black Kite basking
Google (ngm.nationalgeographic.com)

Overall, migratory performance and territorial advantage on the breeding grounds are seen to improve with age. Experience is one obvious reason for this. Older birds' performance was more consistent and efficient from journey to journey. Study of individuals' actual migration track reveals that the younger birds are less skilled at dealing with cross-winds and so their journeys are habitually longer and more varied as they are blown into an eastward arc. But survival is also important: the least competent birds simply do not survive, and so average performance improves with age as the poorest performers disappear from their cohort.

Sergio, F. + 7 others. 2014. Individual improvements and selective mortality shape lifelong migratory performance. Nature 515: 410-413.

Summary by M. Church

RARE BIRD REPORT SPRING 2014

1 Mar to 31 May

British Columbia

Arctic air withdrew from the Region after the first week with milder Pacific air dominating thereafter. The northern half of interior sections lost an average of 30% of the snowpack during the month while southern sections lost it all. Over northern sections, snowmelt was delayed somewhat due to daytime temperatures rising above zero and nighttime temperatures dipping below zero leading to crusting of the snowpack surface. This always negatively impacts plunge divers such as owls. Coastal sections saw plenty of rain with temperatures on the cool side. April is usually when the North Pacific storm season subsides but it remained active throughout the month, soaking the often windy coast. But that mild air took care of the interior snowpacks with all lowland snow gone by the third week. In fact, the outer coast remained unusually windy through May. The Region enjoyed a mild May with the northern half drier than the south.

WATERFOWL THROUGH ALCIDS

Sightings of single Greater White-fronted Geese, or even small flocks of them are not particularly unusual in the southern interior of BC, but a flock of 79 seen at the north end of Otter Lake near Vernon, 10 May, was a very high count (Devin Birkenhead, et al). Two Ross's Geese, found in a hayfield at the north end of Moberly Marsh near Golden 19 April, is of note, since this species is a rarity in BC at any time (Doug Leighton). Another Ross's Goose was at Carter Bay on Montana Lake south of Revelstoke 5 to 9 May (Jeremy Gatten, et al), and two were present on 9 May. A bird believed to be a Baikal Teal X Northern Pintail hybrid got BC birders excited when it first showed up at the Nanaimo River Estuary 7 Mar (Russell Cannings, m.ob). The bird remained in the area until at least 26 Mar. One and maybe even two male Tufted Ducks were at the Iona Sewage Ponds in Richmond, 1 to 8 Mar (David Schutz, m.ob). On Vancouver Island, an immature male King Eider was a nice find at Qualicum Beach 27 Mar (Guy L. Monty). On Little Shuswap Lake in the southern interior, two breeding plumage Pacific Loons were noted 18 & 18 May (Reba & Allan Dupilka). An immature Yellow-billed Loon was an excellent find at Nile Creek on Vancouver Island, north of Qualicum Beach, 21 Mar (Jess Findlay). Another Yellow-billed Loon, this time an adult in alternate plumage, was seen at Tower Point near Victoria 10 May (Ian Cruickshank). A single Laysan Albatross was a highlight on a pelagic off the west coast of Vancouver Island, at Ucluelet 11 May (Russell Cannings, m.ob). Seen from a repositioning cruise, a **Hawaiian Petrel** was well described off the Tofino area, Vancouver Island 25 May (Paul Lehman, et al). A Murphy's Petrel was also noted off Vancouver Island's Tofino on 25 May (Paul Lehman, et al). An estimated 10,000 Short-tailed Shearwaters were amongst 20,000 Sooty Shearwaters in the Hecate Strait, east of Haida Gwaii 14 May (Paul Lehman, et al). Also impressive, 10,000 Ancient Murrelets and 20,000 Cassin's Auklets were noted in the Hecate Strait on the 14 May as well (Paul Lehman et al). A rarity on Vancouver Island, 5 American White Pelicans were seen flying southeast of the French Creek Marina in Qualicum 4 May (Bruce Cousens, Steve Baillie, m.ob). An impressive total of 39 Brown Pelicans was counted off the west coast of Vancouver Island at Tofino 1 May (Ian Cruickshank, David Caudwell). A flock of up to 60 White-faced Ibis seen at Bummer's Flats near Cranbrook 14 May is most certainly a provincial high count for this rare spring and summer visitor. A single White-faced Ibis was at Cartier Point in Revelstoke 21 May (Catherine Craig, Michael Morris). The spring of 2014 brought BC's most impressive invasion of White-tailed Kites in history to the province. It all began with the sighting of a White-tailed Kite in Chase, in the southern interior of BC, where this species has never previously occurred, 27 April (Noreen Sadiwnyk).

White-tailed Kite, Kamloops, May 3. Noreen Sadiwnyk

Another White-tailed Kite, or possibly the same one, was seen at Salmon Arm Bay 3 May (Ted Hillary). In Lister, in the West Kootenay, a White-tailed Kite was seen along Canyon Lister Road 19 to 21 May (Jody McBlain), while the Okanagan's first White-tailed Kite was seen over the Vaseux Lake Boardwalk 27 May (Ted Hillary). Also in the interior, a White-tailed Kite thrilled birders in the Jones Creek area near 150 Mile House 18 May (Phil Ranson, et al). On the coast, where all of BC's White-tailed Kite records historically come from, one was seen on the road to Great Central Lake near Port Alberni 12 Apr (George & Sylvia Bradd). Another was at Brentwood Bay on Vancouver Island, 19 Apr (Mar Yunker, et al). Almost annual in the West Kootenay area, but still mentionable, a Broad-winged Hawk was noted at McDonald's Landing near Nelson 28 Apr (Janice Arndt). Vancouver's overwintering Gyrfalcon remained until at least 9 Mar at

Hastings Park in East Vancouver (Doug Cooper, m.ob). Black-necked Stilts had a bumper year in BC. Three were noted at the Kelowna Lanfill with birds remaining to breed into the summer (Richard Kobayashi, m.ob). In Salmon Arm Bay, a Black-necked Stilt was seen 7 May (Ted Hillary). In Creston, a Black-necked Stilt was along Kootenay River Road 7 to 14 May (Gary Breault, et al), with up to 5 present on 14 May. In the Columbia Wetlands south of Golden, two Black-necked Stilts were noted 5 May (Doug Leighton). A pair of Black-necked Stilts were at the mouth of the Kaslo River in Kaslo 20 Apr (Florence & Barrie Woodhurst). Three Black-necked Stilts seen at the Fort St John Sewage Lagoons 7 May were a first for BC's Peace River Region (Pablo Jost, et al). Rare in the southern interior, a Willet was a great find along Kootenay River Road near Creston 14 May (Gary Breault). On Vancouver Island, a Hudsonian Godwit frequented a golf course in Victoria 6 to 10 May and was seen by many (Aziza Cooper, m.ob). An immature Bar-tailed Godwit was found at the Cluxewe Estuary, northwest of Port McNeill on northern Vancouver Island 11 May (Peter Curtis).

Bar-tailed Godwit (right)
by Peter Curtis, May 11,
Cluxewe estuary near Port McNeill

A first for the West Kootenay, a first year Little Gull was found and photographed at the mouth of Kuskanax Creek in Nakusp 28 Apr (Gary Davidson). Rare in the Columbia River Valley, a Mew Gull was seen at Moberly Marsh near Golden 4 May (Doug Leighton). With annual sightings

Little Gull at Nakusp, April 28,
by Gary Davidson

for about the last decade, the Okanagan Valley in BC continues to be a hotbed for Lesser Black-backed Gull sightings, with an adult seen at Robert Lake in Kelowna 7 Mar (Chris Charlesworth). An adult Iceland Gull at Robert Lake in Kelowna 17 Mar was the only one reported in the interior during the period (Chris Siddle). One and perhaps 2 'Kumlien's' Iceland Gulls were at Airfoce Beach in Comox on Vancouver Island, 21 Mar (Russell Cannings, et al). A highly sought-after bird in BC, a pair of Horned Puffins were seen from a repositioning cruise southwest of the southern tip of Vancouver Island 26 May (Paul Lehman, et al).

DOVES TO BUNTINGS

Although likely an annual event in BC's Peace River area, the appearance of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird along Johnson Road in Taylor Flats 31 May is of interest nonetheless (Pablo Jost et al). On the Sunshine Coast, a male Costa's Hummingbird visited a feeder along Glen Road in Gibsons 1 May (Barry Janyk). A male **Broad-tailed Hummingbird**, constituting what appears to be BC's 6th record of this species, was photographed at a feeder in Johnson's Landing in the West Kootenays, 8 May (Gail Spitler, et al). Since Acorn Woodpecker first showed up in BC in 1996, there have been over half a dozen more records. An Acorn Woodpecker seen in South Burnaby 11 Mar would be the province's 7th record (Janice Fletcher). Rare outside the Southern Interior of the province, a Lewis's Woodpecker was a nice find at the Squamish River Estuary 8 May (Chris Dale). Rare in the Southern Interior, a male Red-breasted Sapsucker was photographed at a Nelson residence in the West Kootenays 1 May (Janice Arndt). Eastern Phoebe is common in BC only in the Peace River Region, so the appearance of one at Esquimalt Lagoon in Victoria 1 to 27 Mar was cause for excitement (Agnes Lynn, m.ob). Sightings of Black Phoebe continue to increase in BC, with most records coming from coastal locations, including a single bird seen at the Millstream subdivision near Ucluelet 10 & 11 Apr (Ewen & Barbara Brittain). Yet another species experiencing a northward population surge into coastal southwestern British Columbia is the Western Scrub-Jay. Two continuing Western Scrub-Jays have inhabited a Maple Ridge neighbourhood for quite some time and were seen 15 Apr to at least 25 May (Roger Craik). Surprisingly rare along the BC Coast, a Black-billed Magpie was seen at Grant Narrows in Pitt Meadows 6 May (Larry Cowan, et al). On the Sunshine Coast, a Northern Mockingbird was found at the Wilson Creek Estuary south of Sechelt 24 Apr (John Hodges, Kaiden Bosch). Another Northern Mockingbird, this one on Vancouver Island, at the Little Qualicum Estuary near Parksville, was present 16 Mar to 10 Apr (John Reynolds, m.ob). Also on Vancouver Island, a Northern Mockingbird was reported near Tofino along Sharp Road 4 May (Ralph Crombie). In the West Kootenay, a Northern Mockingbird was photographed along Kootenay River Road near Creston 10 May (Gary Breault). A Northern Mockingbird was a one day in Richmond near the Vancouver International Airport 31 May (Max Gotz). Rare anywhere in BC outside the South Okanagan Valley, a Sage Thrasher was found in the Cranbrook area 14 May (Dianne

Cooper, Mike Bentley). A female Tennessee Warbler is a much rarer spring migrant than fall migrant in the Southern Interior of BC. Therefore, a female Tennessee Warbler found at the Winfield Creek Preserve in Lake Country 5 May was of particular note (Michael Force). Other spring Tennessee Warbler records included two seen in a backyard in Salmon Arm 7 May (Ted Hillary) and a single bird at the Hope Airport 24 May (Gord Gadsden). Not particularly rare, but still of note, Palm Warblers were found at a couple of locations near Victoria on Vancouver Island, with one in the Metchosin area 29 Mar to 6 Apr (Jeremy Gatten, et al). Another Palm Warbler was seen and photographed at Haliburton Farm in Victoria 9 Apr (Aziza Cooper). Other uncommon or slightly out of range warbler species for the period included a male Blackpoll Warbler seen in Maryville, south of Kimberly in the Kootenays 30 May (Dean Nicholson, Penny Ohanjanian) and an Ovenbird singing in Blaeberry, near Golden 28 May (Douglas Leighton). A good find in the Vancouver area, a Brewer's Sparrow was at the Iona Sewage Ponds in Richmond, 10 & 11 May (Ryan Johnston, et al). Black-throated Sparrow is very rare to casual, but almost annual in arid areas around Osoyoos in the Okanagan Valley

Sagebrush Sparrow at Lardeau, March 17, by Gary Davidson

in recent years. A single Black-throated Sparrow was on the 'West Bench' of Osoyoos 18 May (Doug Brown). A Sagebrush Sparrow, presumably a spring overshoot from populations just to the south of BC, appeared at Lardeau in the West Kootenay and remained 16 to 18 Mar (Marlene Johnston, et al). There were a few records of Lark Sparrow, which is rare in BC anywhere outside of the Southern Interior, including one at the Hope Airport 12 May (Trudi Wierks). Another Lark Sparrow was at Blackie Spit in White Rock, 31 May (Doug Cooper), and yet another was at Glen Valley in Langley 31 May (Doug

Cooper). An adult Harris's Sparrow was noted in a backyard in Kamloops 20 Apr, and had apparently been present for about a month (Tammy Proctor). A singing Harris's Sparrow was a nice bird at Swan Lake in Victoria 6 to 17 Apr (Ian Cruickshank, m.ob). The long-staying **Dickcissel** in Port McNeill, carried over from the winter period and was seen until at least 6 Apr (Jackie Hildering, m.ob). Rose-breasted Grosbeak is common in BC only in the Peace River Region; elsewhere it is rare but annual. A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was photo-graphed in the Blaeberry area near Golden 26 & 27 March (Douglas Leighton). Two male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were seen at Moberly Marsh also near Golden 27 May (Douglas Leighton) and another was seen in the Fraser Valley at Chilliwack 12 May (Gord Gadsden). The long-staying immature male Hooded Oriole at Port McNeill was seen up until at least 29 Mar (Jackie Hildering, m.ob). A female Purple Finch was seen at a feeder near Penticton in the Okanagan where the species is quite rare, 4 Apr (Eva Durance, Laurie Rockwell). On Vancouver Island, a Cassin's Finch was found at Stelly's Crossroad in Brentwood Bay 28 May (Rick Schortinghuis). A male Lesser Goldfinch was found at Shirley near Sooke on Vancouver Island 26 Apr (Ian Cruickshank, Daniel Donnecke).

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DISAPPEARING ACT

So you've kept notes of all your local bird sightings for the last 20 years. From the numbers it is plain that you used to see many more scaup, scoters and alcids than you can find today, and Western Grebe – well, it's almost become a rarity. You'd swear that these marine birds are declining, at least locally, and you'd be right.

American and Canadian investigators have pooled survey resources to study trends in the occurrence of 39 species of 'common' marine birds that are found seasonally or year-round in the Salish Sea (Strait of Georgia, Puget Sound and Strait of Juan da Fuca). They combined data for the period 1994-2010 derived from Christmas Bird Counts, Bird Studies Canada's Coastal Waterbird Survey, and regular aerial reconnaissance by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. They found that the probability for a real decline in abundance is significantly) high (statistically) for diving birds that feed on forage fish, but that divers (e.g., loons) who target demersal fish appear not to have declined, nor have surface feeders that favour non-fish foods (dabbling ducks, shorebirds). 'Forage fish' are small, pelagic (near-surface dwelling), schooling fish such as herring, Pacific sand lance and surf smelt. Demersal fish are bottom dwelling fish, accessible to the most

accomplished divers. It is thought, then, that a known decline in the abundance of forage fish stocks underlies the decline in the birds. Furthermore, birds that winter in the area but do not breed here were found to be more likely to have declined than resident species. The reasoning underlying that finding is that resident birds are more committed to the area and simply shift to other food resources, whereas wintering birds, who make a migratory journey every autumn from their breeding territory, have the degree of freedom simply to migrate to another place where they can find their favorite fish. This idea is supported by the observed change in the wintering status of the Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*), which has declined by 95% in the Salish Sea since the late 1970s, while it has increased by 300% off the California coast. Faced with the decline of herring in the northern waters, they have decamped in favour of increasingly abundant Pacific sardines off the California coast. So the changes in local abundance do not necessarily tell us anything about the universal status of the bird.

But what's behind the decline in forage fish in the Salish Sea? Overexploitation may be part of the story – by the birds themselves as well as by humans – but also important is loss or modification of shoreline habitats: 93% of the Puget Sound shoreline has been modified by the construction of seawalls, docks and other structures, destroying the inshore sandy and reedy habitats required by these fishes for successful reproduction. While Canadian shores are less comprehensively altered and include a higher proportionof inhospitable rock, some of the viable shoreline has been modified here too. In nature, everything has consequences for everything else.

Vilchis, L.I., Johsnon, C.K., Evenson, J.R., Pearson, S.F., Barry, K.L., Davidson, P., Raphael, M.G. and Gaydos, J.K. 2014. Assessing ecological correlates of marine bird declines to inform marine conservation. Conservation Biology: DOI: 10.1111/cobi.12378 (seen in advance of publication).

Wilson, S., Anderson, E.M., Wilson, A.S.G., Bertram, D.F. and Arcese, P. 2013. Citizen science reveals an extensive shift in the winter distribution of migratory Western Grebes. Plos One 8(6): e65408.

Summary by M. Church
Photo: Western Grebes: MH

SCHEMING MUMS

Some mothers will adopt almost any ploy to ensure the best chances in life for their children. It turns out it's the same with some birds, and the processes involved may be quite complex. Bluebirds (*Sialia* spp.) are secondary cavity nesters but cavities are not so easy to find. So there is aggressive competition, both among bluebirds and with other cavity-nesting species, for the available sites. One environment that offers both a fair number of cavities and the open country that bluebirds prefer is a recently burned area. So Mountain Bluebirds (*S. currucoides*), who are highly dispersive, quickly move into burns and establish themselves. But, later, more slowly dispersing Western Bluebirds (*S. Mexicana*) arrive and, showing superior aggressiveness, eject the Mountain Bluebirds. Over time, however, the established Western Bluebirds become less aggressive and, in turn, must defend their territories against other secondary cavity nesters, such as Tree Swallows (*Iridoprocne bicolor*). That, in turn, leads to the production of more aggressive males, who disperse and restart the process of Western Bluebird colonization elsewhere. What drives this process of successive colonizations?

Western Bluebird at nest-hole
Barbara Magnuson

It starts with the competition for nest cavities between Western Bluebird and other species. This happens early in spring when the birds are seeking to establish nesting territories. If there are few cavities available, or a large number of competing pairs, the individual birds experience high levels of stress as the result of a high incidence of attacks on their nest site. This triggers the production of androgens in the defending female Bluebird (androgens are hormones associated with stress that promote aggressive behaviour and, in developing embryos, male characteristics; the most well-known androgen is testosterone). When the female Bluebirds subsequently lay their eggs, the high androgen levels are bequeathed to the yoke. The birds produce their clutches one egg per day and they hatch in the order of laying. The first hatchlings enjoy earlier growth, nest dominance, and rapid and strong development. The effect of the yolk androgen is to produce a disproportionate number of males among the early hatchlings, who grow into the aggressive males who disperse to find new territories – prospectively displacing Mountain Bluebirds. If there is little competition for nesting space, androgen production is lower and less aggressive offspring are produced -- with a significantly lower proportion of males amongst the earlier, favoured hatchlings.

How did the researchers ever discover such a complex chain of events? First, they established the sex-based bias in the birth order of Western Bluebirds by examining hatchlings from nests in colonies with varying degrees of scarcity of nest sites. Then they artificially manipulated the availability of nest sites by putting out nest boxes and further studying the sex bias of birth order. This step established that nest cavity availability, rather than the competition for nesting sites *per se* is the most direct driver of stress in the birds and consequent birth order. Finally, they assayed androgen levels in pilfered eggs to establish that the consequences of stress in the mother were indeed passed to the young: yolk androgen levels are known to be associated in some birds with social dominance of the grown bird. So mother Western Bluebirds are assuring the best advantage for their male offspring and, thereby, the long-term success of the species when it becomes critical for that success. Advantage is conferred in a particularly subtle way that is a direct consequence of the competitive pressure for nesting success experienced by the birds.

Reference:

Duckworth, R.A., Belloni, V. and Anderson, S.R. 2015. Cycles of species replacement emerge from locally induced maternal effects on offspring behaviour in a passerine bird. Science 347: 875-877.

Commentary by Dantzer, B. Mothers shape ecological communities. Ibid. 822-823.

Summary by M.Church

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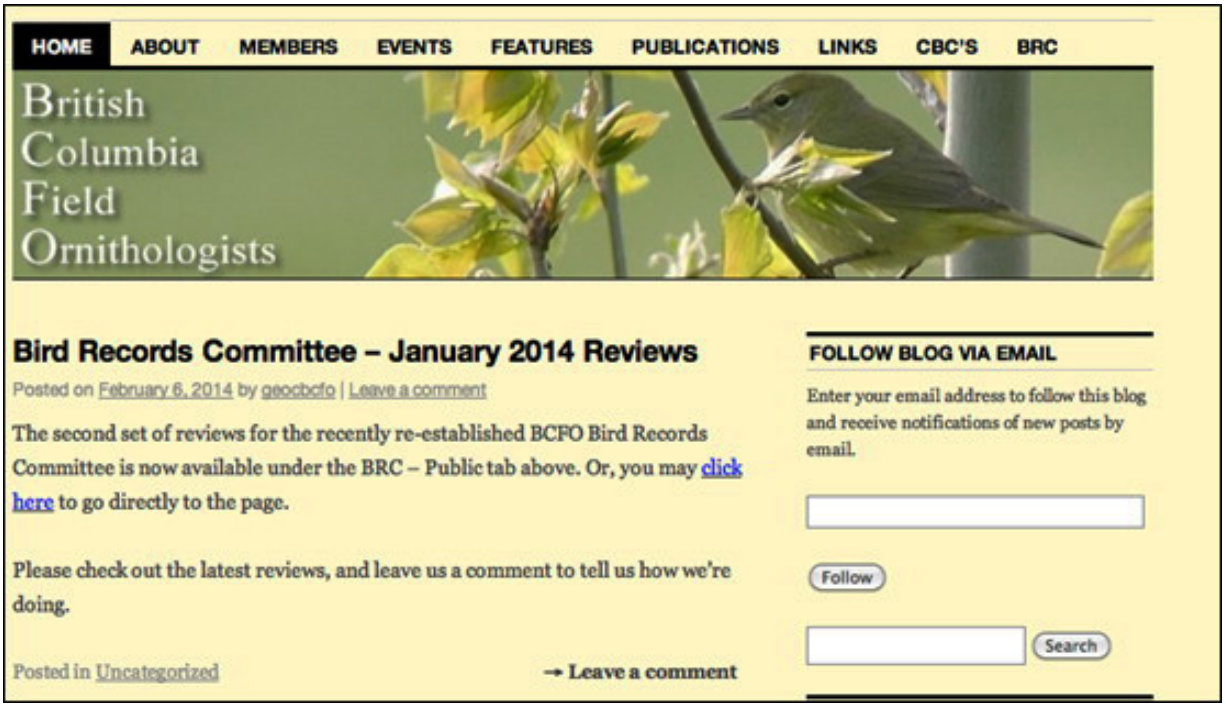

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. Colin Clasen

THE 'BLOB'

This winter, thousands of Cassin's Auklets (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*) have perished along the Pacific coast of North America. So have thousands of sea lions along the California coast. What's going on? Evidently, the animals are starving. No food. Why?

In the autumn of 2013 a mass of water much warmer than normal (up to 4°C warmer, which is a lot for an ocean) formed in the northeast Pacific Ocean south of Alaska. Oceanographers have named it 'the blob'. Climatologists speculate that it formed as a consequence of persistent high pressure over western North America (remember the fine autumn of 2013?). This gave rise to southerly winds over the eastern ocean that pushed warm water northward and inhibited the normal upwelling of cold, nutrient-rich water in the Gulf of Alaska. The warm water, being less dense, sits atop colder water and prevents the cold water from penetrating the near-surface photic zone – the zone of light penetration – where much ocean life subsists. The blob contains on the order of 100 000 cubic kilometres of water! Water has a high heat capacity: once warmed it stays warm for a long time. In the summer of 2014 the warm water spread down the Pacific coast. Most recently, the core has divided into two cells, one off the California coast and one off the coast of Washington and British Columbia.

This unusually warm water has apparently caused a major reduction in the incidence of surface-dwelling phytoplankton – the essential base of the oceanic food chain. On the other hand, creatures that normally dwell in tropical waters, from planktons to whales, are turning up off our coast. But the tropical plankton has considerably lower food value than the affected northern species. A primary disturbance at the base of the food chain, then, has worked its way up through the populations of fishes and other sea creatures to affect the birds, marine mammals and fishes at the top of the food chain. No doubt, the auklets are not the only impacted species (maybe you should feed that squawking seagull). A major concern, for example, is that juvenile salmon heading to sea will not find adequate food so that, in one to three years' time – according to the species – adult salmon returns will be affected.

Climatologists consider that the high pressure episode that apparently kicked off this chain of events falls within the normal range of meteorological variability; they do not finger climate change as the cause. But on the other hand, analysts point out that the ocean conditions it has created may represent a preview of what a changed climate will bring to the northeastern Pacific Ocean in the future.

Cribbed by M. Church from a news story in Science, v.348, 5 April, 2015, pp.17-18.

Cassin's Auklet image: Peter Latourrette

FIFTH COLUMN

We are all by now familiar with the fact that numerous variations of influenza viruses arise to afflict the world. Variations often originate in poultry and seem to have their origin in southeast Asia (southern China and the nations of Indochina) where poultry farming is a major enterprise. Furthermore it is an enterprise carried on there in traditional ways, in close juxtaposition to human society. This situation favours the transfer of viruses into the human population (though that is not an easy step). The viruses are classified according to proteins designated by H (for hemaglutinin) and N (for neuraminidase), hence the familiar HxNy designations, where x and y are numbers designating protein variants. Most HxNy combinations subsist as 'low pathogen' viruses and do not cause great concern in poultry flocks or humans. Certain combinations, however (those subtypes designated H5 and H7), are highly pathogenic and can cause complete mortality in poultry flocks. Outbreaks of such influenzas are controlled by mass culling of flocks suspected to be infected. This is economically disastrous in the large industrial flocks common in Europe and North America. Furthermore viruses of the H5 type can cause serious human illness if they make the leap to humans (as the H5N1 virus, first detected in poultry in 1997, has done, with 400 fatalities out of 700 confirmed cases). But how do the viruses get from Asia to other parts of the world?

It turns out that wild birds of orders Anseriformes (ducks, geese and swans) and Charadriiformes (gulls, terns and wading birds) can pick up the viruses from domestic poultry. Generally their immune systems prevent serious consequences for the wild birds, but they are effective carriers and can re-infect poultry. Many birds breed in central and east Asia, particularly in Russian Siberia, and migrate to wintering grounds in southern Europe, Africa, south Asia and west coast North America. In late 2014 H5 type viruses were detected in Europe and on the North American west coast (including Fraser Valley), apparently spread variously by Anatine (dabbling) ducks, especially Mallard (*Anas platyrhyncos*), Eurasian Wigeon (*Asas Penelope*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) and Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*) (the latter two are East Asian species; the North American variant of Common Teal is *A.c.carolinensis* – the Green-winged Teal). The mix of carriers suggests an origin in Siberia, where the virus presumably arrived with the spring migration of other birds via southeast Asia. It probably is no accident that Anatine ducks are common carriers since they are apt to be found around farm ponds where chickens are also present. Domestic ducks may also be an intermediary agent. Whilst airline travel is blamed for the rapid spread of many communicable diseases today, it seems that disease does not need aircraft to be delivered by air mail.

Verhagen, J.H., Herfst, S. and Fouchier, R.A.M. 2015. How a virus travels the world. Science 347: 616-617.

Summary by M.Church

Common Poorwill by: Alan Burger

Alan wrote: The Nicola Naturalist Society in Merritt runs an amphibian monitoring project which includes night-time point-count surveys for Great Basin Spadefoots in the spring. On one of these night surveys near Douglas Lake, this Common Poorwill fluttered off the road and settled on the ground. I was excited because this was my first sighting of a poorwill, having only heard them previously. The bird was very cooperative and allowed me to get fairly close for this photo. And we also had a good night recording spadefoots calling!