BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

ISSN 1206-1611 BCFO.ca **Volume 25 Number 4 / December 2015**

Mountain Bluebird youngsters spotted by William Murdock at the Swan Lake Bird Sanctuary, Princeton, BC.

Publisher
BC Birding is published four times a year by the British Columbia Field Ornithologists, PO Box 45111, Dunbar, Vancouver BC, 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*.

About the BCFO
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.

Membership
See the website (http://bcfo.ca) for details, or write to BCFO, PO Box 45507, Westside RPO, Vancouver, BC, V6S 2N5

Annual Membership Dues
General Membership (Canada): $30
Junior Membership (Canada): $20
U.S. and International Membership: $35

Newsmagazine Submissions
To submit material to this publication, contact the Editor by email (clive_keen@hotmail.com) or by mail at 10790 Grassland Road, Prince George, V2K 5E8.

Submissions may include articles about birding experiences, casual observations about bird behaviour, site guides, photographs, and other topics of broad interest to birders, preferably, but not necessarily, in British Columbia. Deadlines are:

- March edition: February 15
- June edition: May 15
- September edition: August 15
- December edition: November 15

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

Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Bowen Island, summer 2015.

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Featured Photographer: Carlo Giovanella
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Christmas Bird Counts!

For information on all
the CBCs in BC
go to the BCFO website:
bcfo.ca/

Back Cover

A Western Screech Owl discovered by Melissa Hafting in a cottonwood tree in the South Okanagan.

Melissa used a Canon EOS Rebel T3i with EF500mm f/4L IS II USM

2016 BCFO AGM

Mark those calendars for the Cranbrook AGM: May 27–29, 2016.

Contents

President's Message

What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness? – John Steinbeck

A lot of people like snow. I find it to be an unnecessary freezing of water. – Carl Reiner

Winter is nature's way of saying "Up yours." – Robert Byrne

Clearly evidenced by the thoughts above, the prospect of winter's approach elicits a range of responses in people – from delight to abhorrence, and from grim acceptance to happy welcoming. And no less for us, the birder sub-species of people, who count winter birding and Christmas Bird Counts among the year's highlights, while others of us will avoid the cold and wet of the season at all costs, or simply endure it, dreaming of spring and warmer weather.

Winter finches and sparrows, northern raptors, perhaps a Snowy Owl or two, and huge flocks of waterbirds are all attractions of the season, and will often get the most reluctant, cold-averse birder out in the field, leaving behind the cosy chair, the warm fire, and the frenzied action at our garden bird feeders.

Whether you enjoy the season or eagerly await the return of longer days, BCFO continues its work. As you'll see from our website, we've added a new component to our Christmas Bird Count section – CBC4Kids. As part of our intention to grow the Young Birders Award into a Young Birders Program, we are adding elements as we can, in advance of the formal announcement of the program. Thanks to members Melissa Hafting and Carlo Giovanella, plus director Larry Cowan, who are putting in the groundwork as we finalize the details of the program.

Looking beyond winter, we're pretty much complete with the planning for our AGM in Cranbrook. Later this month we will have the costs and registration materials available. We just have to make sure all members have equal opportunity to register via the website. If you haven't already, mark your calendars – May 27, 28, and 29, 2016. The extension will go to Southern Alberta. Details are being worked on.

2015 has been a good year for BCFO. You'll read on page 8 an article from Membership Secretary, Larry Cowan, which among other things reports that our membership is now higher than we've reached before. Not only are many long term members staying with us, but new birders of all skill and age levels are joining our ranks.

One source of new members has been our continuing series of Two-Day Field Trips for members. Director Adrian Leather has now taken on responsibility for this and you'll find the excellent fruits of his labours on page 9.

Another milestone we can celebrate in 2015 is this first edition of *BC Birding* under Clive Keen's editorship. Clive has a tough act to follow stepping in to June Ryder's shoes, but I'm sure you'll agree that the quality of our newsmagazine continues to be in good hands. Thank you Clive, and thank you June.

As winter arrives, stay warm, and enjoy your Christmas Bird Counts and enjoy the season with friends and family too.

Best wishes from your Board, and for the New Year ahead.

George Clulow, President

Welcome new Members

Kim Klaczek - Prince George
William Murdock - Burnaby
Wallis Reid - Victoria
Neill Vanhinsberg - Vancouver

Ornithocracy

Area Representatives?

The BCFO Directors have been looking at ways to further develop services to members. One idea that came forward was the possibility of developing "area representatives" for parts of the province where there is currently little or no organized local birding. In such areas, the BCFO could provide a useful service through a representative who would be responsible, primarily, for putting together some half-day or one-day field trips in the area. Ideally, those trips would be listed on the BCFO website, and perhaps written up here.

If you are interested in the idea of local representation, let us know by contacting the editor (clive_keen @hotmail.com) or any other BCFO director – see page two for contact information. The notion is at an early stage, but could well prove very helpful in developing birding expertise in underbirded areas, in mentoring beginning birders, in finding ways to cooperate with and support local clubs, and perhaps in increasing membership.

Calls for Nominations

Young Birder Award

BCFO is seeking nominations for our next round of Young Birder awards. In 2014, BCFO inaugurated the award to welcome talented young birders into the birding community and recognize 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 and nominated by a BCFO member who has direct knowledge of the candidate

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 queries and nominations to: cgio@telus.net.

The Steve Cannings Award for BC Ornithology

In 2007, BCFO presented its first award for contributions to BC ornithology, now named *The Steve Cannings Award for BC 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 BC in one or more of the following three categories:

- research on bird biology and/or ecology, or detailed documentation of the avifauna of a portion of BC;
- conservation of birds and/or bird habitats in BC;
- public education about birds in BC.

The award is to be announced annually and, if possible, presented to the recipient during the banquet at the BCFO 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, BC 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.

Cassin's Finches might be ho-hum for some, but not when they appear at a place and time never seen before: October (2015) in Prince George.

Congratulations

Grand Birdathon Prize for BCFO Member

Al Serfas, whose Costa Rica trip report appears on page 12, was the grand prize winner for the 2015 Great Canadian Birdathon. His prize was a choice of a tour of Central Mexico, Trinidad & Tobago, or the High Arctic and Northwest Territories, with Eagle-Eye Tours. We look forward to receiving another trip report!

Dick Cannings, MP

Whatever their political leanings, BCFO members will have been delighted to see a celebrated birder and naturalist elected to Ottawa. Dick Canning will represent the riding of South Okanagan–West Kootenay for the NDP, having defied the Liberal tide by garnering 24,823 votes.

Note From the Editor

This is the first *BC Birding* I've edited, (CNK writing) and the very good news for me is that I find contributors to be a splendidly literate bunch, more than capable of putting together entertaining sentences, paragraphs and whole pages. It's possible, nevertheless, that I need to provide the usual urgings to ensure a sufficient flow of material for the future. So here it comes, plagiarized shamelessly, with a few additions, from one of June Ryder's editions:

BC Birding Needs Submissions

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

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

You might also have an idea for a regular feature: for example a review of birding websites, or software for birders. Contact the Editor (see page 2) if you've such ideas.

Note that purely academic papers are rather out of place in a general-interest magazine, and are better sent to the other BCFO publication, *British Columbia Birds*. This is the journal of record for reporting rarities or range expansions, the general status of species, and avian ecology and behavior. Topics covered include distribution, abundance, extralimital occurrence, reviews of status, banding, identification, plumage variation, moult, behaviour, feeding, breeding, habitat, ecological relationships, reviews, or history and biography of ornithology. See bcfo.ca/journal for details.

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

Rock Wren at the Roberts Creek Pier, Sunshine Coast.
Photograph by Marcia Mason.

Bird Listers' Corner – Report Form

The March 2016 edition of this newsmagazine will once again include listing tables. To take part, please report your life list totals as of *December 31, 2015* for any or all of the areas listed below and for any additional lists you may wish to submit. (You may submit specialized lists such as birds seen above 1500 metres in BC etc.) If the list for a new area is covered by a checklist, please provide the total number of species on the current list.

Most of the areas listed are those for which published checklists have appeared. The number after each area is the *threshold level,* which in most cases represents 50% of the species included on the most recent checklist for that area. You may report levels below the threshold if you wish. Space permitting they will be included.

The size of the geographic areas listed varies considerably.

- The ABA list includes all species seen north of the Mexican/US border.
- *North Pacific Pelagic Waters* include *all* species seen more than 3.2 km (2 miles) from shore off Alaska, BC, Washington, Oregon and California.
- *Non-motorized Transportation* consists of species seen/heard using self powered locomotion (walk, run, bicycle, canoe etc.) from your home location.
- *ATPT* comprises the totalling of all your Canadian Province & Territory lists to create a "total ticks" list.

Areas listed are those having three or more members providing totals for 2014. If more than one family member is submitting a list, individual forms need to be submitted.

Special Note
Due to a recent ruling by the ABA records committee, Crested Mynas are now officially countable for all areas in which you have seen them.

Submitting
Email your list to lawrencecowan@shaw.ca or mail the form below to: Larry Cowan #45, 12268 – 189A St. Pitt Meadows, BC V3Y 2M7.

Deadline
Deadline for submitting listing totals is February 1, 2016.

Acknowledgement
All lists received either by mail or email will be acknowledged if an email address is known. If you do not receive an acknowledgement, your list was not received.

BCFO LISTING REPORT FORM – DECEMBER 2015

Name _____ **Date**_____

Major Areas

____ World (900)
____ Canada (350)
____ Alberta (190)
____ Northwest Territories (40)
_____ ABA listing area (400)
_____ British Columbia (240)
_____ Yukon (40)
_____ Washington (190)

Local Checklist Areas

____ Creston Valley (120)
____ Okanagan Valley (160)
____ Princeton (80)
____ Salt Spring Island (110)
____ Vancouver (190)
____ Victoria (120)
____ Williams Lake (120)
____ Mount Robson PP (80)
____ _____
_____ Kamloops (130)
_____ Peace River Area (130)
_____ Prince George (130)
_____ Sunshine Coast (120)
_____ Vancouver Island (190)
_____ West Kootenay (150)
_____ Manning PP (90)
_____ _____
_____ _____

Other

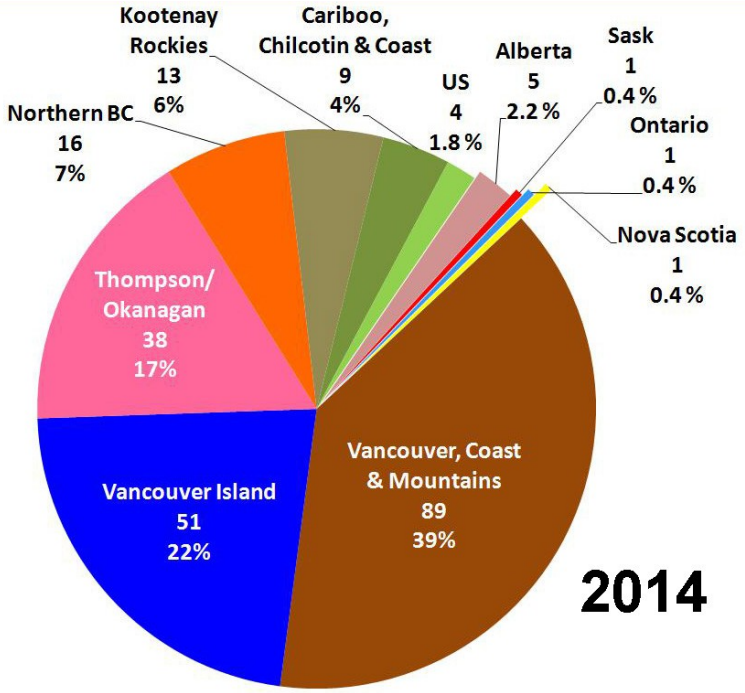
____ Non-motorized (NMT)
____ BC Seasonal lists
____ Blackie Spit
____ Westham & Reifel Islands
_____ _____
_____ All Ticks Provinces & Territories (ATPT)
_____ North Pacific Pelagic Waters
_____ Sea & Iona Islands
_____ _____
_____ _____

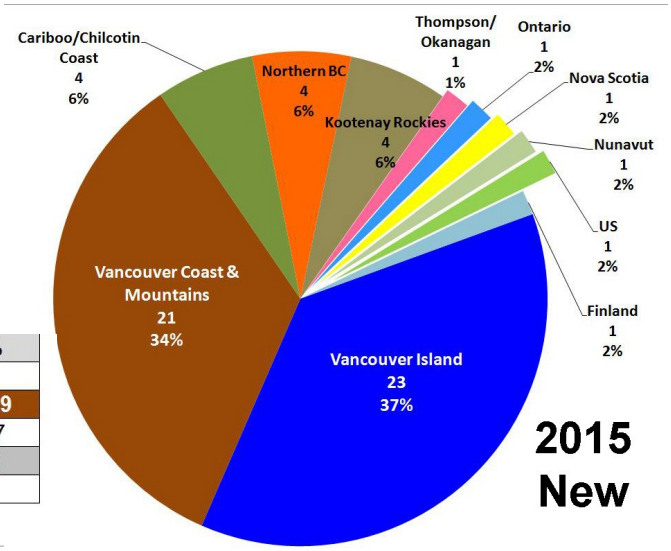
Record Year for BCFO New Memberships

As of November 15, BCFO had attracted 62 new members in 2015. The average membership over the previous five years was 218 so this represents an increase of 23% over the five-year average. Feedback from some of these new members on what motivated them to join BCFO might be revealing – contact lawrencecowan@shaw.ca.

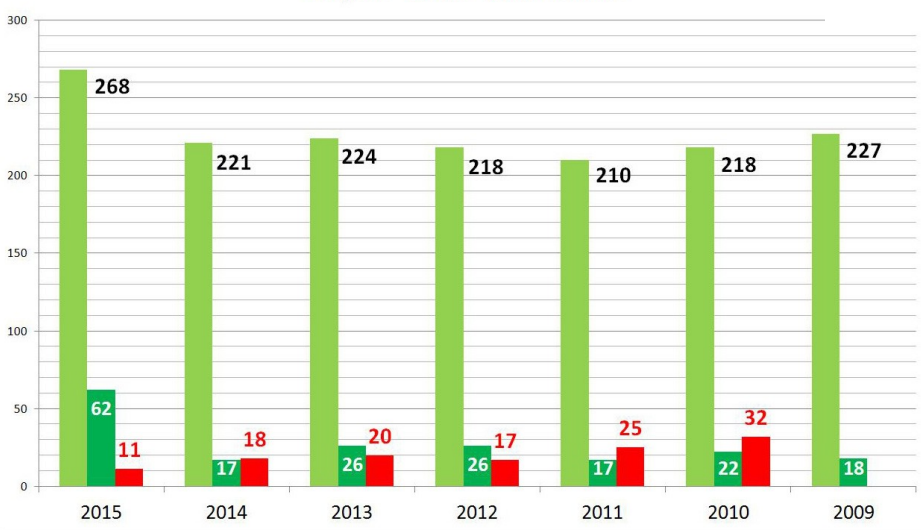
My personal view is it was a combination of a higher profile through initiatives made over the past few years: Young Birder Awards, a functioning Rare Bird Committee, the Featured Photographer series on the website, and the two-day field Trips. The addition of online membership applications and fee payment also made it much more convenient for birders to join and existing members to renew (hint, hint, hint).

To further bolster the membership there were only eleven members from 2014 failing to renew for 2015. This is a retention rate of 95% compared to the five-year average of 90%.





	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
New >	23%	8%	12%	12%	8%	10%	8%
Retention rate >	95.0%	92.0%	91%	91.9%	89%	86%	
Regular	268	221	224	218	210	218	227
New	62	17	26	26	17	22	18
Non-renewals	11	18	20	17	25	32	



The two pie charts above show the geographical distribution of members, using the BC Tourist Regions, comparing the general membership in 2014 to that of the 2015 new memberships.

Larry Cowan

BCFO Two-day Trips

Three trips are planned for 2016.

Clinton & Ashcroft

May 14–15, 2016 with an extension trip on May 16 morning.

Leaders
Brian Murland, Quesnel 250-747-1802
murlands@msn.com
Adrian Leather, Quesnel 250-249-5561
qabis4@gmail.com

Registration/Admin
Adrian Leather – as above.

Accommodation
Nights of May 13–14: Cariboo Lodge, Clinton. 250-459-7992. Special BCFO rate based on two nights: single occupancy $76 per night + tax; double occupancy $85 per night + tax. (Cariboo Lodge has a pub and restaurant.)

Other Accommodation
Nights of May 13–14: Nomad Motel, Clinton 250-459-2214, Round-Up Motel, Clinton 250-459-2226, Clinton Pines Campground, 250-459-0030.

Night of May 15: Sandman Inn, Cache Creek 250-457-6284, Bonaparte Motel, Cache Creek 250-457-9693, Brookside Campsite, Cache Creek 250-457-6633.

Catering
- Bag breakfasts and lunches on Saturday via Cariboo Lodge.
- Bag breakfast on Sunday via Cariboo Lodge.
- Sunday lunch at Horstings Farm, Cache Creek 250-457-6546.
- Sunday dinner at Heartland Restaurant (Sandman Inn) Cache Creek 250-457-9330.
- Oregon Jack extension on Monday breakfast 6:00 AM at Husky House Restaurant, Cache Creek 250-457-9312.

Itinerary
- *Saturday, May 14:* Clinton Sewage Ponds; Big Bar Lake – Jesmond Loop, including Echo Valley and Hidden Valley. Tally-up at Cariboo Lodge, Clinton.
- *Sunday, May 15 morning*: Kelly Lake – Pavilion; Horstings Farm (lunch).
- *Sunday, May 15 afternoon*: Venables Valley; The Slough.
- *Monday, May 16 morning*: extension trip to Oregon Jack Loop.

Target Birds
Clark's Nutcracker, Lewis's Woodpecker, Western Kingbird, Lazuli Bunting, Chukar, Say's Phoebe, White-throated Swift.

How the Trips Work

BCFO two-day field trips are member-led, but participants make their own arrangements for accommodation, food, and travel.

- Day 1: all-day birding and then evening get together at a restaurant to recap the day and tally species.
- Day 2: morning birding, afternoon optional birding.

Carpooling is encouraged, and will be arranged on the morning of Day 1.

Register at least two weeks in advance. The leader will give specific details of when and where to meet.

Cost: Members $10 per person; non-members $40, which includes BCFO membership.

Creston Valley

May 26–27, 2016

Leader
Gary Davidson, Nakusp, 250-265-4456
gsd37@yahoo.ca

Registration/Admin
Adrian Leather – as above

Accommodation
Nights of May 25–26. Downtowner Motor Inn, 1218 Canyon St, Creston, 800-665-9904 or 250-428-2238. BCFO rates based on two nights, single occupancy $70 per night + tax, double occupancy $80 per night + tax, suite which sleeps four (includes kitchen), $120 per night + tax.

Other Accommodation
Creston Valley Motel, 1809 Canyon St, 250-428-9823; Creston Hotel & Suites, 1418 Canyon St, 250-428-2225; Pair-a-Dice RV & Campground, 1322 Northwest Blvd (Hwy3) 250-428-2347.

Catering
Bag breakfasts and lunches via A Break In Time, 1417 Canyon St, Creston, 250-428-5619.

Itinerary
- Thursday, May 26: Meet at Downtowner Motor Inn 6 AM; Leach Lake; Duck Lake; Hwy 21S and Kootenay River Road. Tally-Up at Creston Hotel, 1418 Canyon St, 250-428-2225.
- Friday, May 27: Meet at Downtowner Motor Inn 6 AM; Balancing Rock Trail; Nature Centre boardwalk trails; West Creston Loop and Reclamation Road (to 2 PM, then birders can proceed to Cranbrook AGM).

Target Birds
Bobolink, Wild Turkey, Forster's Tern, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, American Bittern, waterfowl.

Vancouver Shorebirds

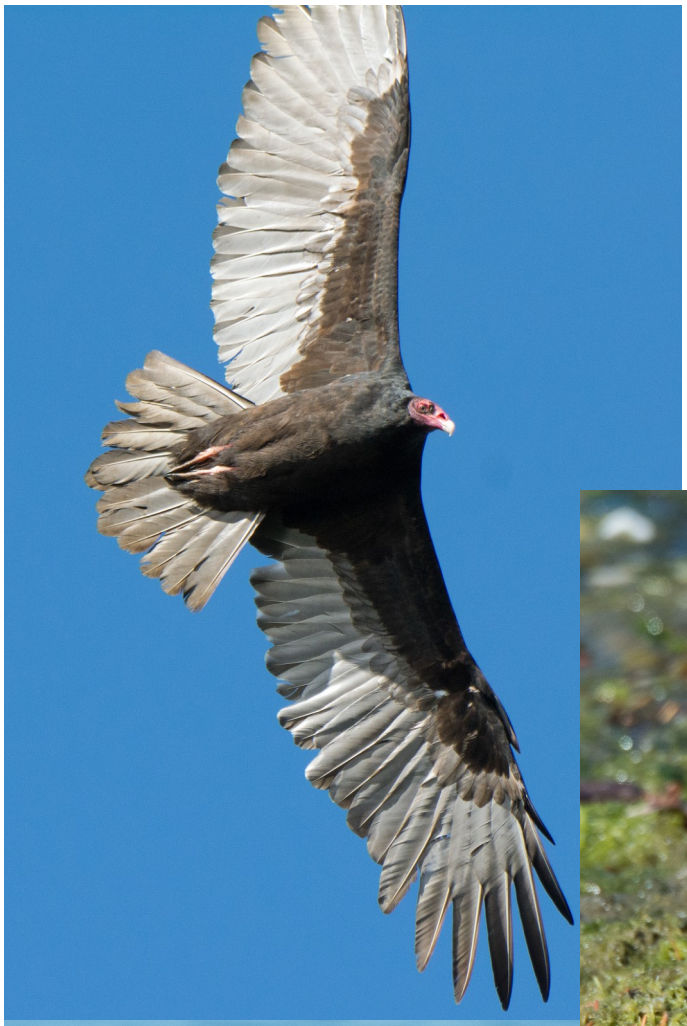
September 2016

Details are still being worked on, and will be given on the website and the next edition of this newsmagazine.

Leader
Brian Self, Delta, 604-943-9378
brianself@eastlink.ca

Registration/Admin
Adrian Leather – as above

BCFO Two-day Hawkwatch



The BCFO two-day hawkwatch trip on 26-27 September 2015 lived up to expectations by providing spectacular views of kettling off Beechy Head near Sooke on Vancouver Island. Up to two hundred Turkey Vultures could be seen at a time, some of which, like the bird to the left, dropped down to give close-up views. There was also hardly a moment when watchers could not sharpen their Cooper's/Sharp-shinned skills, as one hawk or the other, or both, seemed always to be present. One BCFO member, arriving early, managed to see a Broad-winged Hawk, but to the chagrin of the others, it did not return. (It's called *gripping off*.)

Short drives around Victoria-area hotspots generated a substantial trip tally of species seen, including this Long-billed Dowitcher at Albert Head and the Heermann's Gull and Trumpeter Swan at the Esquimault Lagoon.

In Memoriam

Mabel Crocker

Mabel Crocker, a dear long-time friend, birding companion, and BCFO member since 1993 passed away recently after a short illness.

My first association with Mabel was around 30 years ago when I learned there was an astute birdwatcher living on the same road as I, Mill Bay Road, Mill Bay, BC. When making contact I was astonished to hear she kept a daily record of all the birds seen in her garden from early morning onwards. I envied such discipline, and devotion to recording the birds we all see so often in our own gardens. Now those records are being carefully put into journals in her memory by her family.

My most loving memories of Mabel were from the BCFO Annual General Meetings, field trips during those meetings, and the after-AGM birding tours. Mabel remained her pleasant, courteous self at all times and we know field trips can have their worrying moments! She only missed these meetings while travelling overseas (quite extensively) on birding tours. She had just turned 98 when she passed but never lost her devotion to birding and the BCFO. She looked forward to receiving the BCFO journals and newsmagazines, remaining a member till her passing.

One evening a few years ago I met Mabel in our Mill Bay shopping centre late in the evening and asked about her bird list, to which I had an immediate reply "well I have just finished for the day as the light was fading!" And she was still that same pleasant, thoroughly nice person, so devoted to birding I had met living not so far from me so long ago. She will be greatly missed by all those who knew her.

Inez Weston, Cobble Hill, BC

Right: male Mountain Bluebird by William Murdock, one of a series taken at the Swan Lake Bird Sanctuary at Princeton, BC. The sanctuary has a number of nesting boxes, attracting both Bluebirds and Tree Swallows.

William uses a Canon 1DX and Canon 500mm f/4L.

Below: the Wood Thrush first spotted in Summerland on October 25 2015 by Robyn, Tom and Matthew Lowery, and subsequently seen by multiple observers. If accepted, this will be the first sighting in BC. Photo by Ilya Povalyaev.

Trip Reports

A Week in the Chilcotin

Gareth Pugh

June 21–27, 2015.

Day 1

Bob Puls, Josh Inman and myself left Aldergrove at 6:30 AM on our annual "pilgrimage to God's country". Except for a quick break at Cache Creek we travelled at a good pace to 100 Mile House where we ate our packed lunches at the Visitor Information Centre picnic site while watching an interesting array of waterfowl and other birds on the lake. From there it did not take long to reach Williams Lake, the starting point of Highway 20 into the Chilcotin. As we crossed Becher's Prairie we stopped for a few minutes to watch a pair of Sandhill Cranes with three colts before heading on for Hanceville where we turned off the paved road towards Rainbow's End Ranch in Big Creek, which was to be our home for the next five days.

Despite stopping at several 'birdy' spots we still made it to our destination by 4:00 PM and were greeted by Andrea Huber and her very friendly dog. A good omen for the trip was the Northern Pygmy Owl sitting high in an Aspen tree overlooking us – a lifer for me. The cabin we had rented was fully equipped and even had a telephone so we had no excuse for not phoning home. In addition Andrea had feeders hanging by each cabin which were swarming with Rufous, Calliope and Anna's Hummingbirds so we immediately felt very much at home.

Once we had unpacked and had supper we went for a walk in the nearby woods, part of the ranch, where we were fortunate to come across a displaying Ruffed Grouse within twenty feet of the trail which Bob was able to record on video.

Day 2

We made an early start and were on the road by 7:30 heading for Farwell Canyon, which none of us had ever visited. On the way we stopped to check out a likely looking spot where we spent over an hour and found a good variety of birds in the mixed habitat of marsh, aspen groves, dwarf willow and conifers. Travelling on we passed a couple of interesting wetlands and stopped at a small one where a pair of Greater Yellowlegs vociferously complained at our presence as they were obviously breeding there.

As we approached Farwell Canyon we realized how far down we would have to go to cross the Chilcotin River bridge before climbing up the other side. The local logging company were using a water truck to keep the dust down so we did not have the clouds of dust that we had experienced earlier in the day.

We followed a logging truck all the way down and all the way up until we reached the parking lot for the Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park which takes up a sizeable area in the fork of land between the Fraser and Chilcotin Rivers. Although we were able to walk out to a viewpoint from where we could overlook the canyon, the "road" leading into the Park required a higher wheel-base vehicle than our car and also four-wheel drive, so we turned back down the switchback road, parking at the bridge where we found a pair of Western Kingbirds with young in the nest, a pair of Rock Wrens, a pair of Robins fending off a Kestrel and Bank, Northern Rough-winged and Violet-Green Swallows.

We crossed the river and turned down a side road which took us down to the river bank where we ate lunch and found, among others, two more pairs of Western Kingbirds, a White-throated Swift and a pair of Lazuli Buntings.

On the way back we stopped at two wetlands, one of which was a Ducks Unlimited project, where we found a number of different species to add to

Northern Pygmy Owl by William Murdock.

our growing list. We were also finding all sorts of butterflies which Bob patiently stalked and photographed.

Day 3

Following Andrea's recommendation we set out for Mons Lake, part of which is a DU project. Turning off the main road we came to the bridge over Big Creek where we saw Cliff Swallows using the bridge and Bank and Northern Roughwings using the high cliffs along the river. Various songbirds were seen in the bushes and fields nearby including several Clay-coloured Sparrows. This was the only place where we found them although there was plenty of similar habitat in the area.

Further along the road we came to a shallow pond where Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs were feeding, obviously non-breeders as they did not object to our presence unlike the family of Killdeer that were also there.

Our next stop was at a small, almost dry, pond where we found a pair of Greater Yellowlegs, a pair of Spotted Sandpipers and a single Solitary Sandpiper. The latter two did not seem worried by us but the Yellowlegs aggressively tried to drive us away by dive-bombing us so it was obvious that they had young birds nearby. Leaving them in peace we travelled on towards Mons Lake, stopping at a small lake with extensive reed beds where we ate our lunch sitting in the hot sun. Highlights at this stop were the Savannah Sparrow which gave away its nest with four newly hatched chicks by doing the broken-wing trick, something we thought only Killdeer do, and a Wilson's Snipe with two half-grown fledglings.

Eventually we moved on to Mons Lake which was rather disappointing as it is a large lake with only a small area where there is water access and we only saw a pair of Loons there so we turned back and drove further up the main road where we found a Townsend's Solitaire singing its beautiful song.

After supper we drove to Taseko Road to carry out a Nightjar Survey for Wild Research. At some of the stations the habitat was not suitable for Nighthawks but we still counted a total of seventeen.

Day 4

After a late breakfast we set out for Nazko Lake Provincial Park. Our first stop was to scour the hayfields above the Chilcotin River hoping to find Long-billed Curlew. There were lots of birds to be seen and heard including an Alder Flycatcher which was competing with a Willow Flycatcher. We had almost given up hope when a Curlew flew out of the grass not far from us calling as it went; then it was joined by a second one, both making that wonderful bubbling sound.

A little further down the road we stopped at the sound of a Meadowlark singing from a tree at the roadside and being answered by others nearby. In addition we saw a Western Kingbird which was further west than generally expected.

We had difficulty locating the road to Nazko due to inaccurate information on our map and ended up in someone's yard where the old buildings housed the nests of Say's Phoebes, Cliff Swallows and Violet-green Swallows. We talked to the owner who said that Curlews had nested in his fields in past years but that he had not seen them for a couple of years. We returned to the main highway and stopped at Bull Canyon Provincial Park to have lunch and walk the trail along the Chilcotin River which was a beautiful glacial blue-green colour. After receiving directions we took the Alexis Lakes Road, stopping at Alexis Lake where there was plenty of bird life but nothing new to add to our growing list.

Eventually we arrived at Nazko Lake and were greeted by a very noisy pair of Greater Yellowlegs and were rewarded by the sight of a variety of waterfowl including a Canvasback with ducklings, a Wilson's Phalarope and a Belted Kingfisher.

On the return journey we stopped at the café in Hanceville for a cup of coffee which we drank on the deck outside so that we could watch the hummingbird feeders and were rewarded by the sight of four species, Calliope, Rufous, Anna's and Black-chinned, the latter a surprise as we did not think its range extended so far north.

Day 5

In the hope of finding some different species we set out for the Nemaiah Valley. Our first stop was at a wetland with lots of willow bushes which were buzzing with song. Northern Waterthrush, Yellow Warbler, MacGillivray's Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Cedar Waxwing and Willow Flycatcher plus the usual species in the adjacent grassland and forest edge.

Our next stop was at Big Lake Recreation Site where we ate lunch overlooking the lake. We had come to look for White-winged Scoter and counted a number of them on the lake together with Lesser Scaup, Common Loon, Spotted Sandpiper and Killdeer. There were many varieties of wild flowers at this location and several species of butterflies which made this one of the best places we had visited to date.

Hoping to find Cassin's Vireo and Clark's Nutcracker which we had previously seen there we drove down the Elkin Taseko Road as far as the airstrip but were unable to find them. We did, however, see a mother bear feeding at the roadside while her two small cubs wrestled in the roadway giving Bob a great photo opportunity.

We drove on down to the bottom end of Konni Lake before turning back, stopping at an interesting wetland but not finding anything new except a Lincoln's Sparrow.

Day 6

The day started very well. We had not seen the Pygmy Owl for a couple of days and thought it had moved away but Josh spotted it feeding a fledgling in the aspens across from the cabin. It was tearing apart what appeared to be a Savannah Sparrow and feeding it bit by bit to the fledgling. Then two other fledglings and the other adult appeared so we were able to observe them quite easily as they seemed to have no fear of us.

We had been recommended to try Lockhart Road, a couple of miles down the road, so we left the owls in peace and set off. The first few kilometres were slow as the surface was rough gravel but further on it improved. We stopped at a clearcut which was

regenerating with pines and aspens and found the ubiquitous Northern Flicker and Red-naped Sapsucker plus Cassin's Finches, Swainson's Thrush, Song Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow and Vesper Sparrow.

Moving further on we came to a mixed fairly open mature forest with Douglas Fir, Aspen and Lodgepole Pine with a grassy understory. All along the road and in open areas there were lots of different flowers and a variety of butterflies dancing around Bob as he tried to photograph them. We walked along the road for a couple of hours finding lots of birds, the best being a Spruce Grouse with several small chicks which were already able to fly even though they seemed to be only a few days old.

On the way back we turned off Lockhart on the old Hanceville Road which is only a dirt road, so after a while we parked the car and had our lunch sitting in the shade as it was turning into the hottest day of the week. While eating we noticed a Red-naped Sapsucker feeding its noisy nestlings in a nearby Aspen and had a deer watching us for a while before we set off to walk down the track towards the old farmstead on the banks of Big Creek. We found cougar and deer prints in the dried mud after the recent rain and some old bear scat, but did not see any bears.

The grasslands at the old farmstead were dry and the grass was short and there were no grassland birds around but we did see Cassin's Finch and another Red-naped Sapsucker nest with noisy inhabitants. By now it was early afternoon and most birds were silent except of course for the Robins which seemed to sing at any time of day, so we walked back to the car and drove back along the old Hanceville Road (which was the original road from Clinton to Hanceville via the Gang Ranch) through dry grasslands where we expected to see plenty of Vesper and Savannah Sparrows which we were finding elsewhere but only found one Savannah on the edge of a grove of Aspen trees.

On our return journey we visited Rushes Lake but found very few active birds there but were very fortunate to have excellent views of a mother otter and three well-grown pups cavorting in the Lake close to shore, a great ending to the trip.

Day 7

We were up early and were on the road by 7:00 AM. We took the Farwell Canyon Road and stopped at a couple of small lakes but saw nothing unusual. We stopped at Scout Island in Williams Lake and spent some time wandering the trails. No pelicans this year, but we saw a pair of Red-necked Grebes at their nest with two newly hatched chicks which one of the parents was feeding with small fish while the other kept them covered up. A number of Gray Catbirds were singing away, one of them sounding very like a Red-eyed Vireo, and we saw several Mew and Ring-billed Gulls in addition to the usual assortment of Warblers and Flycatchers.

As we drove the rest of the way home it got hotter and at Boston Bar the temperature was forty-one degrees, so we were very glad to have air conditioning. By the time we arrived home the temperature was down to a more comfortable twenty-four degrees.

Birding Costa Rica

Al Serfas and Robert Moore

Back in the latter part of December 2014, we had the good fortune to do a 12-day birding tour of Costa Rica.

Online, I contacted a local tour company called *Tropical Feathers.* Together we planned a very interesting and varied tour that visited many different habitats. As a result we saw a total of 360 different bird species and enjoyed seeing a large section of this lovely country. We visited a total of six different lodges, spending two nights at each. We birded along the way as we drove from one lodge to another. Our expert guide/driver, Carlos Urena's knowledge and exceptional ability to locate, identify and coax even the most shy species out for a good view was awesome.

First we visited the Arenal Observatory Lodge nestled at the base of the volcano with a large deck and a fabulous view. Although the top was usually obscured by clouds, we had a clear view of its southern side. As we walked the lovely trails and sprawling gardens, some of the birds observed were the Black-cowled Oriole, White-throated Magpie Jay, Long-tailed Tyrant, Golden-hooded, Hepatic and Passerini's Tanagers and an Olive-crowned Yellowthroat. A pair of Great Curassows walked slowly past, and overhead we had great views of Black-cheeked Woodpeckers and Yellow-bellied Elaenias. In addition we had a very friendly coati visit our room's patio.

After a long day of driving, with many birding stops along the way, we arrived at the Hotel de Campo Cano Negro, our second lodge, located very near the Nicaraguan border. This was a vast wetland area that afforded sightings of Herons, Egrets, Kingfishers, White and Green Ibis, plus White-tailed and Snail Kites. We took a boat tour on a small, shallow lake, down the fast flowing Rio Negro, and then into a very large lake before returning to the lodge. We were surprised when an Osprey dove and caught a fish right beside our boat. Another surprise was a small group of bats that were roosting together on the trunk of a large tree that leaned out over the water. They were so well camouflaged we would never have noticed them if our guide, who knew they were there, hadn't pointed them out.

On our way to the next lodge, we left the lowlands behind and climbed ever higher up into the mountains to the Celest Mountain Lodge. This was a very unique structure as the emphasis was on the use of recycled materials throughout, right down to the one-of-a-kind lamps, light fixtures, tables and cushions. However, the main highlights were the three-course gourmet meals that were served on small wooden cutting boards covered with a fresh banana leaf.

We birded the road above and below the lodge. Despite the fog and rather windy conditions, we spotted a large Ornate Hawk Eagle that was perched

high up in a large tree right beside the lodge. Other bird highlights were a Black-throated Trogon, Keel-billed Motmot, a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars, a very unique and rare White-tipped Sicklebill Hummingbird, and a Black-mandibled Toucan**.**

On our second day, as we left the fog, wind and rain behind, we crossed the mountains and descended to the much drier region of Guanacaste. We took a side road that bordered a vast grassy pasture. The fence line afforded great sightings of a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, a singing Eastern Meadowlark, and a pair of Double-striped Thick-Knees. Further down the road we encountered a wooded area where we were very fortunate to see the lovely male Long-tailed Manakin.

Later in the hot afternoon we took another side road to an area of some salt flats. Here we saw many species of shorebirds feeding in the shallow ponds and on the mud flats. In the trees along the road we saw a Streaked-backed Oriole, Cinnamon Hummingbird, and a Turquoise-browed Motmot. As it grew dark, we drove along the Pacific Ocean, enjoying a lovely sunset as we headed to our next destination, the Cerro Lodge.

We awoke to the sharp calls of a pair of Scarlet Macaws that were feeding in a nearby tree. The open-air dining hall with its fruit feeders provided us with great views of various birds.

Early in the morning we walked down along the road where we spotted a Squirrel Cuckoo and enjoyed lovely views of the Tarcoles River valley. Later we walked along a lovely forested trail in the Carara National Park. We saw a Gartered Trogon and a mother Capuchin Monkey with a small baby that amused us with her agile antics as she fed just above our heads. We also took a very relaxing cruise on the Rio Tarcoles with a very knowledgeable skipper/guide where we saw eight heron species, various egrets, a Crane Hawk, numerous large crocodiles that were lounging along the shore, and a Roseate Spoonbill. Along the road on our return to the lodge, Carlos called out a pair of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls.

Next morning, after fixing our flat tire, we started out on our day's journey to the next lodge. The road followed inland along the Pacific coast as we passed numerous palm oil plantations and crossed a number of rivers before they entered the ocean. We spotted a pair of Fiery-billed Aracari before we turned off the coast highway and began our climb back up into the much cooler mountains.

We stopped at a roadside restaurant to enjoy our lunch where we were joined by a pair of Scarlet Macaws that lunched with us. Refreshed, we now started our descent down to San Isidro that was nestled in another lovely, broad valley. This is where Tropical Feathers has their office. Just outside the city we arrived at our next stop, Talari Lodge.

After an early breakfast, we drove over to the Alexander Skotch reserve. Along the road we spotted a Long-billed Starthroat Hummingbird nest with two ready-to-fledge nestlings atop an insulator that separated the wires. At the reserve, after putting out some bananas on the feeders, we were richly rewarded when numerous birds soon arrived. They included Bay-headed, Cherries's and Speckled Tanagers, Buff-throated Saltator, and the once common, but now very rare, Red-headed Barbet. We also spotted an Orange-collared Manakin, and across a ravine a worker spied a very colorful Turquoise Cotinga.

In the afternoon we drove along a fenced pasture where we saw a Fork-tailed Flycatcher hawking insects aggressively and a lovely Red-breasted Blackbird.

Early next morning we started out, climbing back up into the mountains, heading for our last lodge nestled deep down in the Rio Savegre valley. This is well known as the place to see the awesome Resplendent Quetzal. First we stopped at a roadside hotel where we viewed the Silver-throated Tanager. Later, along the way we were stopped by a small flock of Sulfur-winged Parakeets that flew out across the road, displaying their spectacular under-wing yellow coloring. They turned and landed in a fruiting tree where they amused us as they fed.

We continued our climb until we turned off the highway and drove up to the top of the mountain, above the tree line. It was cold! Here we saw the Volcano Junco and the Volcano Hummingbird among the low-growing scrub.

Back on the highway, we continued onwards, once again turning off to begin descending the very steep, narrow and winding road into this very beautiful valley. We stopped for a late lunch at a roadside café near the top of the valley that had an awesome view from the back yard. Here we saw Acorn Woodpeckers, both a Yellow-thighed and Large-footed Finch, and the Flame-colored Tanager. We continued on down to the Savegre Lodge, nestled beside the fast-flowing Savegre River.

Early next morning we climbed up to a viewing area where it was said we would see the Resplendent Quetzal. There was a female calmly sitting in a wild avocado feeding tree, and off in another tree we did see the spectacular male. However he was partly obscured by the foliage. We also enjoyed seeing a Collared Redstart, some Spangled-cheeked Tanagers, and the very sleek Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher.

All too soon we were back on the highway, heading towards San Jose. We made one final stop at the Quetzal Lodge in the hope that we'd get some better views of the Quetzal, but it was not to be. We settled for some harried action at their hummingbird feeders, as various species tried to feed. Then it was back on the road again as we joined the ever-increasing traffic as we neared the city.

Our tour was soon over, but we had many exciting memories and numerous photos of the country's fabulous birds.

An Assortment of Anna's
Anna's Hummingbirds spotted and photographed by William Murdock in Richmond Nature Park, October 2015, using a Canon 1DX and Canon 500mm f/4L.

Avian Encounters

Loon Marooned

Sometimes there is real practical value in being a birder.

While driving through Mount Robson Park in October, I saw a large bird floundering on the highway about 200 yards away. This was not a welcome sight, as having to dispatch badly injured creatures is an unpleasant business. On getting closer, though, the story changed completely. The bird was a Common Loon, and so much the most likely reason for its floundering on the road was that it had confused the wet road surface with a river during migration.

A non-birder, seeing the floundering loon, would have assumed that it was badly injured – it could not walk, after all, and was clearly unable to fly. The humane thing would surely be to put the bird out of its misery?

But, birders know that Loons have feet so far back on the body (great for underwater swimming) that they can't walk on land, let alone run. And Loons also have very high wing loading – meaning that they have to be moving fast to get enough lift to take flight. Loons can accomplish this on water, but have no chance at all of taking off from dry land. The simple solution would be obvious to a birder, but not to others: the bird just had to be moved to a decent-sized lake.

Common Loons are rather large, though, and are not just feisty but have a long, very pointy, bill. This particular bird also made it clear that it would not be picked up without one heck of a fight. Anyone assuming the bird to be seriously injured would have doubted that it was worth trying. A birder, though, realizing that the bird was in fact uninjured, and just need to be placed on a stretch of water, would have persevered.

Initial attempts to get a coat over the bird, and thus get some protection from that wicked bill, were not a success, but luckily there was a bedsheet in the car. Once the head of the Loon was covered by the sheet, it quietened down, and it could then be tucked inside a coat. A GPS gave the location of a nearby lake, large enough for a Loon to take off, so off we went to find it.

There can be fewer more delightful things than releasing a frightened bird into its natural environment. The Loon immediately dove, then circled the point of its release. I've no idea if it knew that we'd been trying to help, but it stayed around for a while, preening a little and looking relaxed. We felt great.

–CNK

The Common Loon seconds after its release, just prior to its first dive.

Elusive Goose

The Sunshine Coast often sees skeins of Snow Geese overhead but rarely do they land. There is always an exception to the rule!

On 13 October 2015 I went to the Roberts Creek Pier in search of a Rock Wren that had been seen by John Hodges (photo on page 6). While there I noticed a Juvenile Snow Goose sitting on the breakers, close to the water. Its wing appeared broken. I tried to entice

The elusive goose. Photo by Marcia Mason

it to come to me with no luck. Gibsons Wildlife arrived a bit later but unfortunately the bird did not see the need to be rescued by humans.

We tried over four days to capture the goose. Once, we even had assistance from a Birder/Kayaker but the Snow Goose was too wary and too smart, when the kayak was close she dove under water. It was heart breaking not being able to capture her. Especially as there was so little around for her to eat; boulders and logs cover the beach near the pier. She was seen for a few more days, on the rocks and on the spit across from the pier. I fear that the spit, which is frequently patrolled by a Bald Eagle, may have been the wrong place to be though she did have lots of company from the gulls. I do not know her fate but sadly haven't seen her again.

Marcia Mason

Nutty Nuthatch

Unscientific, I know, but we call him "Squeaky" – the male of the Red-breasted Nuthatch pair that frequents our feeders – because of the ferocious squeaking (and hissing) with which he intimidates all the other feeder birds except the jays; no polite "beep beep beep" for him.

This bird is remarkable for the single-mindedness with which he pursues his objective of caching black oil sunflower seeds. He lands on the feeder, chucks a few unacceptably small seeds out of his way, grabs a large one, and flies off – to caching destinations that are usually out of sight. But not always….

Our usual morning schedule includes coffee break out on the back deck to keep company with the birds. A few weeks ago, we were sitting there when Squeaky flew over from the feeder and landed on the small table between us. For what must have been about ten seconds, he scampered hither and thither carrying his sunflower seed, and then, probably exasperated because there were no cracks or crevices in the table top, he tucked it into a bundle of clothes pins that was lying there, and flew off.

A few days later, we noticed him repeatedly stuffing sunflower seeds, one by one, into the millet in a nearby tube-feeder.

In late September I was again sitting out on the deck, this time eating breakfast. It was a cool morning so I was wearing a thick plaid jacket. The birds were breakfasting too – the number of juncos growing each day along with returning Song Sparrows; hummingbirds (Anna's) were appearing more frequently at their feeder. Squeaky was at the small sunflower feeder, when abruptly, he flew toward me and landed on my right shoulder. I held my breath…. Then he proceeded to scrabble along behind my head (in the narrow space between me and the wall of the house). I could sense his sharp toes catching in the fabric of my jacket. Shortly, he emerged on my left shoulder and flew off. Back indoors, when I took off the heavy jacket and looked under the collar – sure enough – there was a fat black oil sunflower seed tucked up tight against the neck seam!

The final episode – a week later, again at coffee break, Squeaky flew over and landed on Mike's knee. He stayed just a few seconds, but long enough to tuck his seed into a crease at the knee of Mike's trousers – not a good caching site because it fell out as soon as Mike stood up.

All this makes me wonder about how many of their cached seeds are retrieved by nuthatches? Do they have an amazing capacity (like jays) to remember their hiding places? A quick review of internet sources turned up no specific answers, only brief comments about food seeds (primarily from conifers); caching sites (usually under flakes of bark but occasionally in the ground or even in rock crevices); and timing – likely short-term storage, possibly diurnal, with the daily store consumed late in the day to provide energy (warmth) overnight.

June Ryder

Squeaky in characteristic pose.
Photo by June Ryder.

Pixilated Woodpecker

"Dennis, there's a Pileated out there with fat stuck to its tongue!"

A male Pileated was thrashing its head back and forth while on the feeder pole. Attached to its tongue, a large lump of fat was flying through the air. "Wow, what a long tongue." How could we help him?

Meanwhile it flew to the second feeder pole at the other end of the deck. Madly grabbing the camera and wondering how to help the bird, I cautiously approached while it was on the pole within reach, still thrashing its head back and forth.

When I was about 2.5 metres away, the Pileated climbed to the top of the pole. Wisely, or fortunately, the bird hooked its tongue over the crotch of an old branch and pulled its tongue away, leaving the fat stuck to the pole. Relief swept over all, humans and bird. The bird stayed motionless at the top of the pole for nearly a minute, then flew off, landing on the trunk of a conifer at the edge of the forest. It seemed to be suffering as it hunkered down, making itself as small as possible and resting for well over an hour.

I soon learned small barbs on its tongue caught the fat. A memorable moment, hopefully never to be repeated.

Text and photo by Dennis Leonard

Briefing 1

And on the topic of bird tongues ….

The Hummer's Tongue

The tongue of a hummingbird is an ingenious device for drawing nectar from flowers. Given their frantic lifestyle, hummingbirds need to be very efficient at capturing the energy-sustaining fluid. The tongue consists of two semi-cylinders that fill with nectar when the tip of the tongue reaches the fluid at the base of the flower corolla. It has long been thought that the cylinders fill by capillary action – the process by which water is drawn up into a narrow tube. Capillary action works because of intramolecular forces within the fluid and between the fluid and the walls of the tube that permit the fluid to flow into the tube without or in opposition to the effect of gravity. But it turns out that capillarity is not the hummers' secret; it is not sufficiently efficient for their needs.

Scientists have cleverly made high-speed video recordings (up to 1260 frames/second) of hummingbirds feeding in the wild by setting out artificial flowers with glass corollas, so the action of the hummer's tongue could be recorded in detail. They recorded 96 feeding events of 32 birds, comprising 18 species that represent seven of the nine major hummer species groups, and they found similar feeding styles in all cases. They recorded hundreds of individual 'licks' (single extensions of the tongue).

The secret to successful nectar withdrawal lies in the semi-cylindrical nature of the tongue: the cylinders are not complete – there is a lengthwise gap -- but can be squeezed into a complete tube by the application of lateral pres-

sure. (To visualize this, think of a mailing tube that you have cut open longitudinally with a knife: you can temporarily reclose the tube by squeezing it with your hand.)

The process begins with the tongue retracted in the hummer's beak. As it is extended through the tip of the beak, pressure from the mandibles squeezes the tongue so the semi-cylinders collapse. If the tongue is already full of nectar, it is expelled into the hummer's throat, completing the feeding cycle. As the tongue extends, it remains collapsed due to the adhesive effect of the remaining fluid film on the tongue, maintaining the two sides of the semi-cylinder in contact. When the tip of the tongue contacts the nectar it spreads apart: nectar begins to flow into the tongue, which returns to its full cylindrical shape to accommodate the fluid. Fluid continues to be driven into the tongue by suction created by the pressure difference between ambient (atmospheric) pressure in the corolla and the pressure deficit induced by the expansion of space within the cylinders of the tongue ahead of the advancing fluid front. In effect, the hummer's tongue is a differential pressure pump!

Ilya Povalyaev photographed this Pacific Loon at Hougen Park, Abbotsford.

The observers found that the bird could drink a tonguefull of fluid in eight to twenty milliseconds (a millisecond is one thousandth of a second), depending on tongue length; in general, then, on bird size. With tongue extensions of 8 to 15 mm, this amounts to fluid advance on the tongue at about 1 mm/millisecond – equivalent to a metre in a second – accounting for the very rapid tongue motions that will have been observed by those readers with transparent plastic hummingbird feeders. In comparison, uptake by capillary action is ten times slower: capillarity could not support the high-speed lifestyle of these birds. For every purpose, nature has an adaptation.

Reference

Rico-Guevara, A., Fan, T-H. and Rubega, M.A. 2015. Hummingbird tongues are elastic micropumps. Proceedings of the Royal Society B282: 20151014. http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2015.1014.

(The article is largely concerned with a mathematical analysis of the pumping mechanism.)

Summary by M. Church

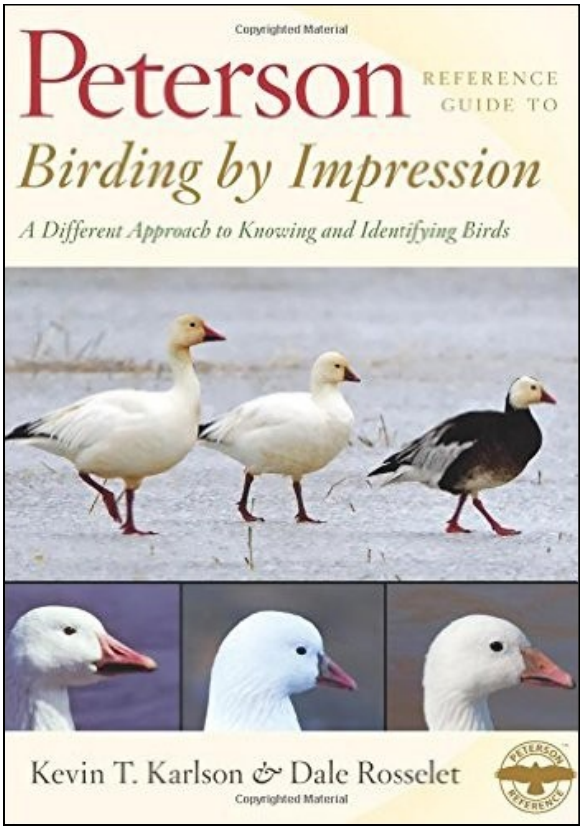
Book Review

Birding by Impression: A Different Approach to Knowing and Identifying Birds, by Dale Rosselet and Kevin Karlson. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, hardcover, $30.

This book contains an intriguing promise: practice a different way of observing birds – Birding by Impression (BBI) – and you'll more speedily reach the point where you can identify birds intuitively, in the same way you recognize a family member. When someone sees their brother, they don't ID him by fieldmarks: *glasses, mole on forehead, grey hair, therefore it's Doug*. They simply know at a glance that it's Doug. And so it is with advanced birders. When they see, say, a Lincoln's Sparrow, they don't think *smallish sparrow, buffy breast, crisp streaks, therefore it's a Lincoln's*. They just smile as they recognize an old friend.

It is the shift to the "at a glance" stage – a direct, non-inferential, way of knowing – that is the central concern of the authors. The BBI technique which is said to facilitate it is a fairly simple one: it involves being conscious and deliberate about the evaluation of size, shape, structural features and behaviour. Instead of just absorbing these features semi-consciously through repeated experience, they become points of focus from the start. Crucially, the deliberate evaluation of these factors engages – according to the authors – the right brain, whereas inferences about plumage, etc, engage the left brain; and it is right-brain activity that leads to intuitive, at-a-glance recognition. This is the central claim of the BBI approach, and if it's correct, the book can deliver on its lofty promises.

I have to admit to approaching the book with skepticism. "Learn to identify birds like the experts!" seemed too much like a marketing ploy. I was certainly uncomfortable with the implication that the book can turn beginners into experts. Beginners need something simple and definite – the yellow on the bill of the Sabine's Gull, the very long tail of the Black-billed Magpie, the brown shoulders of the Chestnut-backed Chickadee, etc etc. The much less definite aspects of GISS (General Impression of Shape and Size) must come later, after the field guides have been well studied and the more common birds nailed. A quick flip through the text of the book confirms that it's really not at all suited to beginners, and the beginner tips offered seem quite out of place. Much of the book is only meaningful to people with a great deal of birding experience. The long and excellent section on dowitchers, for instance, would be utterly impenetrable to anyone that has not spent a great deal of time trying to sort out the Long-bills and Short-bills.



But, let's get back to the main claim: does the BBI approach lead us more readily to at-a-glance bird recognition? Frankly, I don't know, because it could only be verified by systematically practicing the approach over an extended period. I do know, though, that the elements of BBI are far from new to most serious birders. Birding ID for most of us goes through a number of stages. First – not last, as the authors seem to assume – comes observation of size and shape. The rankest beginner will distinguish a duck from a sparrow, or an eagle from a swallow, through observation of size and shape. Noticing the fieldmarks pointed out in the field guides comes next, particularly those connected with plumage. Then, sooner or later, the apprentice birder learns to have a good hard look at the bill. As experience grows, habitat and behaviour start to be taken more seriously, as they are found to contain important clues. At-a-glance recognition, at this point, starts to become quite common, at least for the less difficult birds. Now the authors would no doubt accept all this, but say that for most of us, the BBI elements are consistently given secondary, rather than primary, consideration, and thus, for the more difficult birds, they are slow to work their at-a-glance magic.

Well, perhaps. Since at-a-glance recognition is the holy grail of bird identification, it is certainly worth investing some time and seeing if a deliberate BBI approach pays dividends. My skepticism remains. I suspect that at-a-glance recognition comes through jizz, not GISS. GISS dates from the Second World War, when pilots were trained to recognize aircraft through General Impression of Shape and Size, giving rise to the acronym. But since at least the 1920s, naturalists have been using the term "jizz" to refer to the indefinable quality by which we can recognize a particular species – its "vibe." It might arise because of shape, size and behaviour, but it could be something else: posture, or colouration, or the look in the eye, or something else entirely. Why restrict ourselves just to shape, size and behaviour? Jizz is certainly a subjective notion, and it can draw on a range of factors that would never find their way into a reference guide. If ever I had to describe the jizz of a bird I know at a glance, I'd come out with points that are entirely meaningful to me, but are far too vague for anyone else. For me the Lincoln's Sparrow is immediately recognizable for the simple reason that

it's so pretty, while I can tell perching Cooper's Hawks from perching Sharp-shinned at a glance because the former looks to me angry, while the latter looks to me rather naive. These are definitely right-brained ways of knowing, and I can't see how careful evaluation of BBI elements would ever have led me to them. It's hard to shake the notion that this sort of knowing can come only after a lot of hours in the field, looking rather than analyzing.

But buy the book and see if BBI works for you. Even if it doesn't, the book is beautifully presented and contains a great deal of useful information. A reference guide which focuses on features other than plumage and bare parts is a valuable addition to a serious birder's library, and there's really no need to over-gild the lily. Perhaps it's a pity that the authors, or their publisher, felt the need to package it all with an attention-grabbing promise.

–CNK

Briefings 2 & 3

What Do you Do About a Volcanic Eruption . . .

. . . if you are a Condor? It's a relevant question: Andean Condors (*Vultur gryphus*) occupy a range that extends the length of the Andes Mountains, which includes one of the more active volcanic regions in the world. The 'Southern Volcanic Zone', on the Argentine-Chile border, contains at least 60 'active' volcanoes and about 300 of the big scavengers. The Condors roost and nest in the mountains – some very close to a volcano – and forage on the steppe to the east where they mainly scavenge the carcasses of dead farm animals, mostly sheep.

In 2010, ornithologists radio-tagged a group of ten birds that nest close to Puyehue, a notoriously active volcano, to study their seasonal movements. Fortuitously, Puyehue erupted violently in July, 2011, spewing silica ash 12 km into the atmosphere. The eruption continued for eight months with 860 million tonnes of ash being ejected in the first three-month intense eruption. The ash was blown by the winds east-southeast into the Condors' major foraging area. It blanketed the ground and killed many animals, mostly in the first three months. What does a Condor do in such circumstances?

Faced with a really extensive catastrophe, animals' responses vary according to their perceived advantages or disadvantages. Migrating birds are known to avoid Sahara sandstorms, for example. Extensive floods force birds – other than waterfowl – to move temporarily to higher ground. The dangers posed by breathing in or ingesting volcanic ash, from the Andean volcanoes mainly silica (essentially glass shards), would force most animals to move or else perish and would also pose a severe hazard to eyesight. Whether a bird moves or stays, faced with such an environmental catastrophe, will depend on the balance of survival risk versus food supply, or perhaps the need to continue to defend a territory.

The researchers tagged a further ten birds after the eruption and followed all of the birds through 2012, after the end of the eruption. They found that the Condors essentially did not respond to the eruption! They initially exhibited some plume avoidance, though they were frequently tracked flying in the plume as well. While ash, with varying winds, blanketed their foraging area, the plume on any given day was only a few kilometres wide, so much of their 100-km foraging space remained clear at any given time. Their observed pre-eruption foraging area was initially reduced by about 20 per cent along the principal axis of the plume, but soon entirely recovered. Nor, on the other hand, did the birds exhibit any preference to congregate in the most heavily ash-impacted area where animal carcasses were most abundant. In short, it was business as usual through the event.

The researchers speculate that the birds, who have been present in the Andes for about four million years, may possess physiological adaptations to volcanic ash, including nasal membranes and feather composition. They also consider that these long-lived birds, who possess a complex structure of social relations, may have felt compelled to maintain their customary foraging territories in order to maintain their social position. It remains possible that a greater eruption would indeed displace them. And what we don't know is what happened at the nests closest to the volcano. But the outcome was clearly a major surprise.

Reference

Alarcón, P.A.E., Lambertucci, S.A., Donázar, J.A., Hiraldo, F., Sánchez-Zapata, J.A., Blanco, G. and Moralesa, J.M. 2015. Movement decisions in natural catastrophes: how a flying scavenger deals with a volcanic eruption. *Behavioral Ecology* 26. doi:10.1093/beheco/arv124. (Seen online before publication.)

Changing the Scenery

Landscapes are being altered by human activity in many parts of the world. In particular, changes in land cover are very common: oil palm plantations and pastures replace tropical forest; forest monocultures replace natural woodland and old agricultural landscapes are returned to forest plantations; urbanization continues. What do the birds think of this wholesale reorganization of their furniture?

A number of studies have been completed, including studies of clearcut effects here in British Columbia. But they are almost all of short duration – essentially snapshots of how birds have redistributed themselves. They do not detect longer-term trends that may accompany maturation of the new landscape. Since tree growth to maturity may take from ten to hundreds of years, depending on where and what is being grown, change may continue through many bird generations.

Now comes a study from Australia that followed bird abundance in a large

(30,000 hectares) pine [*Pinus radiata*: a cultivated version of Monterey pine] plantation established on abandoned pasture fields. The plantation surrounds a significant number of residual Eucalypt copses (various Eucalypt species). The researchers selected 56 Eucalypt sites that were surrounded by growing pine forest – the 'treatment' sites – and 55 Eucalypt sites that remained in open, grazed pastures (to act as controls). In addition they established ten sites each in unbroken pine forest and in open fields. They visited the sites six times within the prime breeding season (November) for 16 years (which covers much of the growth toward maturity of Radiata pine in warm climates) and conducted standard five-minute 'watch and listen' bird counts. Two observers conducted three visits each to discount observer bias.

Overall, numbers of species detected in any year did not change significantly in either the treatment sites or the continued open fields, averaging 22 species in the former and 15 in the latter. Numbers in the control sites (about 20 species) increased slightly and those in the pine forest (from 10 to 15 species) most significantly of all, the main increment occurring in the first few years after planting.

These outcomes superficially make sense: the pine forest was the only one of the habitats to experience radical change in its internal structure, hence presumably in its ability to support varieties and numbers of birds. In comparison, the changing nature of the boundary of the surrounded Eucalypt copses had little net effect, within the study period, on their internal structure.

These summary results, however, mask a significant change. In the treatment sites there was a dramatic turnover in actual species present: only seven of a total 64 species detected in the Eucalypt copses were unaffected by the adjacent establishment of pine forest. Small birds became more prevalent – insectivores that prefer forest edges being particularly reduced – and the incidence of larger birds declined. Large birds also declined in the grazed fields, suggesting that the dramatic reduction in the overall proportion of open country – favoured by larger birds – influenced their local occurrence. Small birds, on the other hand, can take advantage of the variety of structural spaces presented by a forest (consider, for example, the huge numbers of small birds in our boreal forests), and so the overall increase in small bird species throughout the studied landscape.

Finally, over the course of the study, species change in the pine forest yielded a small increase in average species size – the growing forest, with increasing understory room – presumably begins to attract somewhat larger birds.

A possible general interpretation that might be placed on these results is that the loss of open space significantly limits the number of larger predatory birds, leading to a proliferation of smaller birds in all the habitats. Further, change continues in plantations as the forest grows and presents a changing structural mosaic of habitat niches. In plantations intended for wood production – increasingly common in the world – this will become a never-ending process with an attendant chance of local extirpations occurring along the way.

Reference

Alessio Mortelliti, A. and Lindenmayer, D.B. 2015. Effects of landscape transformation on bird colonization and extinction patterns in a large-scale, long-term natural experiment. *Conservation Biology* 29: 1314-1326.

Summaries and comments by M. Church.

A Stilt Sandpiper in breeding plumage, spotted at the Shelley Lagoons near Prince George, summer 2015.

The Reflective Birder # 13

Giving Up Giving Up

Have you given up on some group of birds? Perhaps the dowdier sparrows, or fall warblers, or eclipse ducks, or junior gulls? And are you a bit uncomfortable about it? Well, you've come to the right place. I've regularly given up when faced with hard birds, only to find out later that I needn't have done, and am now a world champion at giving up giving up. It was a long time in the making. In fact, it was only very recently that I finally gave up giving up, having found that it really is possible to tell the dowitchers apart, and that even those mortal enemies of intermediate birders – the Empidonax – can mostly be identified even when they refuse to talk.

There's a cost, though, and if you're not sure if it's worth giving up giving up, here follows a cost-benefit analysis.

Stage one of giving up comes to the owners of the simpler field guides. I've been a fan of plenty of them over the years: the ones that show, very clearly, what all the birds in your area should look like, with one beautiful illustration per page. The bird is of course male, mature, and in resplendent wedding clothes. Birding becomes straightforward. Find a bird that looks just like the picture, and you've cracked the ID. In the field, for some reason, quite a lot of birds don't seem to look like any of the pictures, but tish tish, no matter, you score often enough that you don't worry about having to give up on the peculiar ones. It's their fault, not yours.

Life would no doubt stay simple, with acceptance that some birds break the rules and thus can't be identified, except that one day, humiliation strikes. There you are, confident in your identification skills, when you are asked by a trusting friend to name a particular bird. You look down your nose at it with assurance, having memorized your Walmart field guide, but find that the bird is one of the rule-breakers. You try muttering something vague to get you off the hook, but a stranger pipes in with "It's a Robin." You scramble to get some credibility back by saying that it can't be a Robin because it's got spots on its chest, but the stranger explains that it's a juvenile, pulls out his Sibley, and shows you a bird with a breast as red as your face, but with very definite spots.

Humiliation being one of the world's great teachers, you slink off and buy yourself a Sibley guide, and find that there are such things as immature birds, females, phases, races, molts, and all the rest, and that it would in fact be possible to name those birds you've given up on with a bit of application.

But, Caution Number 1: it's actually quite a lot of application. Memorizing the simpler guides takes an effort, but memorizing the grown-up field guide, replete with all the variations, is a job for a lifetime. If you're smirking and think that you completed that long ago, can you recall what a first-year Painted Bunting looks like? And a dark-morph juvenile Parasitic Jaeger? You can? Then I'm deeply honoured to have you, David Sibley, reading this article. But all others know that it's wise to keep a guide somewhere handy for females, immatures and non-breeders you don't come across often.

So, lesson number one is *give up giving up on everything except standard males* unless you don't mind a dose of humiliation every now and then.

There comes a time, all the same, when the owner of a grown-up field guide realizes that some of the pages are not as well-thumbed as they should be. The most likely pages are the ones containing flycatchers, vireos, and the other small birds that seem excessively fond of camouflage. It's not too surprising that most members of the general public have never even heard of a vireo, let alone are capable of saying what one looks like. Seeing vireos and their brethren, and attempting to tell them apart, is something for the committed. And sometimes you feel that you ought to be committed when you first try making sense of them. So you give up.

Wrong. Well, not wrong if you want to spend your life doing other things, like bringing up children or earning a living. Because mastering that lot involves, just to start with, mastering aural birding.

Learning to identify birds by vocalization has an entirely different learning curve to identifying birds by sight. My wife can immediately spot a Swainson's Hawk now, because on just a single occasion, one flew overhead, and I explained that only the Swainson's has a whitish leading half of the underwing, and a blackish back half. Just once did I say that, and it was enough. But six

"...it really is possible to tell the Dowitchers apart ...."

times so far this year, she has asked me what is making the *Old Sam Peabody Peabody Peabody* sound in the garden. Each time I explain that it's a White-throated Sparrow. She'll ask me all over again next spring, and at the end of the year still won't remember what makes the sound. Since I'm disclosing family secrets, I might as well embarrass my son as well by saying that I've had remarkably little success in getting him to identify a Western Wood-Pewee by sound. "Hear that?" say I when we're out birding. "No, what?" says my son, though he's a very fine birder and I'm hearing what to me is 150 decibels of PeeYurr.

My family are not in any way unusual in having problems identifying bird sounds. The ears are given possession of far less grey matter than the eyes. I used to have fun with my students by saying something while indicating something entirely different through a gesture. I'd then ask them what I'd said, and virtually all the students would have "heard" what I'd indicated visually, not what I'd articulated. The eyes out-muscle the ears just about every time.

Most people – even some avid birders – never learn to make much sense of bird sounds. When I said to my son "Hear that?" referring to the Western Wood-Pewee, he was entirely correct when he said "No". Until you learn to hear it, you don't hear it at all. It gets filtered out; you're not even conscious that there's been a sound. Once you've learned to hear it, though, you can hear the bird clearly at great distances. You might even wish it would shut up, so that you can hear something else.

How long does it take to identify all the songsters in one's area by sound, and then all the females, juvies, morphs, and non-breeders by sight? More than a lifetime in my case, at least. And I've not even started systematically on hybrids, or migration calls, or nests, though I'll not give up on them. Is it worth it? Well, instead of giving up giving up, I could have read the works of Proust three times or removed every dandelion on my acreage by hand. I'm happy with my choice. But I'll really not blame you if you choose otherwise.

–CNK

Briefing 4

Closing the Flyway

There are probably fewer than 200 breeding pairs of Spoon-billed Sandpipers (*Calidris pygmeus*) left in the world; 220 pairs were identified in a 2009 survey on their arctic summering grounds. That contrasts with 1,000 pairs in 2000 and more than 2,000 pairs 40 years ago. The problem is migration. About 50 million birds, comprising nearly 500 species, travel the 'East Asia flyway'; more than 50 species are now endangered or threatened. The birds migrate from summering grounds in East Siberia via Kamchatka or the main Russian coast, Japan or the Koreas, and then the Chinese coast, including Taiwan, to wintering grounds in southeast Asia, or onward via the Philippines and Indonesian islands as far as Australia.

Over the past 50 years most of their critical resting places, wetlands and tidal flats along the coasts of Japan, Korea, and now China, have been reclaimed for agriculture or industrial development by the construction of seawalls. Between 50 and 80 percent of the 4000 km of tidal flats along the coastline of the Koreas and China has been lost to enclosure. In just the last 25 years, coastal defences along the 18,000 km coast of China have expanded from 18% of the coast to 61% -- in effect achieving what King Canute commanded. And what remains of the flats is subject to loss to rising sea levels outside the immovable walls. The most critical areas lie around Bo Hai (the huge bay into which Hwang Ho (Yellow River) flows, and the adjacent Hwang Hai (Yellow Sea) coast, and the coast immediately north of Shanghai on the delta of Changjiang (Yangtze River). In the former areas, a series of arcuate bays focus sediment deposition, much of it delivered by Hwang Ho, on extensive mud flats; in the latter, Yangtze River has built the extensive delta.

The battle to save coastal wetland is largely lost in Japan and the Koreas; China is the current focus of concern. There are no formal regulations there respecting the reservation of wetlands or intertidal lands; they are classified as 'unused land' and open for development. The national government has signed conservation agreements respecting the flyway, but the administrative initiative for land use lies with provincial and local governments that are under strong pressure to promote economic development and see the reclamation and sale of wetlands as an important revenue stream. Developments on China's rivers have further aggravated the situation. The 80 million tonnes of silt formerly added annually to the Yangtze delta are now sequestered behind dams upriver and the coastal mudflats now lose about 55 million tonnes annually to net erosion. In some years, water from Hwang Ho barely reaches the sea and many of the lesser rivers that drain the North China Plain are indeed dry today.

Important wetlands remain around Bo Hai and at Rudong, on the north side of the Yangtze delta, but development continues in the former area. The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a sensitive harbinger of the disaster that is developing on the East Asia flyway because its flattened bill is specialized for foraging for small shrimp in the thin layer of fluid mud found on the surface of tide flats. It has no capacity to adapt to alternative food sources on sea or land. At present, the major international management effort is focused on raising awareness of the problem in China in hopes of seeing the establishment of effective, nationally directed conservation efforts on the remaining coastal wetlands and tide flats.

Reference

Larson, C. 2015. Hostile shores. *Science* 350: 150-152. (This is an accessible 'news' article: it includes references to the research literature).

Summary by M. Church