

# BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

ISSN 1206-1611

BCFO.ca

Volume 26 Number 4 / December 2016



*Rough-legged Hawk at Shelley, Prince George, October 2016. Photo by Bill Bailey.*

**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 the BCFO address given above under "Publisher."

**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](mailto:clive_keen@hotmail.com)) or by mail at 10790 Grassland Road, Prince George, BC 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

BCFO members are welcome to include classified ads, of up to 25 words, at no cost.

**Mountain Bluebird**

To the right is one of the shots of the current BCFO Featured Photographer, Alan Burger – you can see a dozen of his photos and accompanying commentary by clicking on the links at <http://bcfo.ca>. If you know of another BCFO member who deserves to be featured, don't hesitate to pass on the name to a BCFO officer.

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*Featured Photographer:* Carlo Giovanella

*Canadian International Joint Venture:* Wayne Weber

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### Christmas Bird Counts 2016 – 2017

The 117th CBC takes place this year between December 14, 2016 and January 5, 2017. Information on dates and contacts for the ~110 BC counts are available at <http://bcfo.ca>.

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Pictured right is a potential BCFO Young Birder Award recipient – Willa Crowley from Fort St James. She participates in FeederWatch, NestWatch, the BC-Yukon Nocturnal Owl Survey and the Christmas Bird Count. Willa began observing birds in earnest at the age of eight, but her favourites have always been hummingbirds. The 2016 season was her third volunteering with Rocky Point Bird Observatory's Hummingbird Project. She also collected data on hummingbird feeder hygiene in the Fort St. James area, which will be presented at School District 91's 2017 Science Fair.



## President's Message

The BCFO was established in 1991 and we are celebrating our 25th anniversary this year. Many of our members may not be aware that this is my second time as BCFO president, having served as president in the formative years in the early 1990s. Although the business of the Board is somewhat similar today as it was then, the organization has come a long way in its operation and this is due to the many members who have served on the Board and volunteered in a number of capacities to ensure the smooth running of the BCFO.

Each year, the AGM conference is the largest gathering of our members. In 2004, we held a very successful AGM in Tumbler Ridge and we will be returning there in 2017. It is an excellent location not only for the birds but also for its palaeontology. In a *Globe and Mail* article in 2015 on Tumbler Ridge, the article states

*"Enthusiastic locals ... go*

*looking for dinosaurs tracks with the obsession that some people go bird watching..."*

Our birders' enthusiasm will be on display from June 9 to 11. We are currently in discussion on facility arrangements for the AGM and full details will be provided in the March issue of *BC Birding*.

The AGM conferences are always a highlight but the Board is currently working on another exciting initiative. The International Ornithological Congress will be held in Vancouver in August 2018 and the BCFO will be an associate organization of the conference. One of our major responsibilities will be in providing planning and leaders for field trips to birding sites throughout BC. The BCFO will also have a booth at the event. George Clulow, Past President, has been leading the discussions for the BCFO.

As a result of the discussion of our finances at the Cranbrook AGM, our Treasurer, Mike Fung, has reorganized the BCFO accounts into a General Account, showing annual revenue and expenses, and an Education and Conservation Account, which will receive surplus revenue from fundraising activities

and from donations to the BCFO. The revenue from this account will be used for grants, awards and the Young Birder Program.

We are very pleased to announce that the first donation to the new Education and Conservation Account is a very generous donation of \$5,000 from Stephen Partington. We look forward to using Stephen's donation and other donations to the BCFO in our conservation efforts to preserve birds and their habitats. Stephen has been recognized for his donation in the Members section of the BCFO website.

The next major event on most birders' calendars will be the Christmas Bird Count, or should I say Counts since many of our members participate in more than one count. The information gathered on these counts provides valuable data on the status of our common birds and the post-count gatherings are great events to share the experiences of your counts with fellow birders.

On behalf of the Board, I wish you an enjoyable Christmas holiday with family and friends and best wishes for the New Year.

Mike McGrenere, President

## Welcome New Members



Adrian Dorst - Tofino  
(2017)

Kim Wetten - Nanaimo

Ken Wilson - Black Diamond, AB

Kathryn Manry  
- Heriot Bay

Sachi Snively -  
Nelson (2017)

Joe Matheson- Richmond

Barry Lancaster -  
Oliver (2017)

Herbert Gaskill - Courtenay (2017)

Jacqueline Chamberlain - Black Creek

Dave Whiting - Kamloops



# BC Listers' Corner

The March 2017 edition of this news-magazine will once again include listing tables. To take part, please report your life list totals as of December 31, 2016 for any or all the areas listed below. You may wish to submit specialized lists such as birds seen above 1500 metres in BC or areas not previously listed. If the list for a new area is covered by a checklist, please provide the total number of species on the current list. Most areas listed are those with published checklists. 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. Space permitted, 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 (NMT) consists of species seen/heard using self-powered locomotion (walk, run, bicycle, canoe, etc.) from your home location.
- ATPT comprises the totaling 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 2015. If more than one family member is submitting a list, individual forms need to be submitted.

Email your list to [lawrencecowan@shaw.ca](mailto:lawrencecowan@shaw.ca) or mail the following form to:

Larry Cowan #45, 12268 -189A Street,  
Pitt Meadows, BC V3Y 2M7

## Deadline

Deadline for submitting listing totals is February 1, 2017.

## 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 2016

Name..... Date.....

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| ..... British Columbia (240)                 | ..... West Kootenay (150)      |
| ..... ABA (400)                              | ..... Creston Valley (120)     |
| ..... Canada (350)                           | ..... Fraser Valley (150)      |
| ..... World (900)                            | ..... Blackie Spit             |
| ..... Vancouver (190)                        | ..... Semiamhoo Peninsula      |
| ..... Okanagan Valley (160)                  | ..... Kamloops (130)           |
| ..... Yukon (40)                             | ..... Mount Robson PP (80)     |
| ..... Northwest Territories (40)             | ..... Princeton (80)           |
| ..... Alberta (190)                          | ..... Salt Spring Island (110) |
| ..... All Ticks Prov & Territories<br>(ATPT) | ..... Haida Gwaii              |
| ..... Washington (190)                       | ..... Pitt Meadows             |
| ..... Victoria (120)                         | ..... North America (500)      |
| ..... Vancouver Island (190)                 | ..... over 1,500 metres        |
| ..... Peace River Area (130)                 |                                |
| ..... Sea & Iona Islands                     | (Other)                        |
| ..... Westham & Reifel Islands               | .....                          |
| ..... BC Winter Seasonal list                | .....                          |
| ..... World Families (120)                   | .....                          |
| ..... Non-motorized (NMT)                    | .....                          |
| ..... North Pacific Pelagic Waters           | .....                          |
| ..... Manning PP (90)                        | .....                          |
| ..... Prince George (130)                    | .....                          |
| ..... Sunshine Coast (120)                   | .....                          |

## Short Notes

### Lucky BCFO Caps?

Thomas Hulten, our BCFO member from Finland, emailed his appreciation in receiving his cap, adding: "It came in handy. Just to let you know: Finland's first Upland Sandpiper was found yesterday in southern Finland. I did the 900-km twitch today with my buddies. I guess we were lucky because of the new cap!"

### Thanks ...

... to Dennis Leonard, a member from Clearwater, who has donated a complete set (four volumes) of Wayne Campbell's *Birds of British Columbia* to the BCFO library.

### Photos

Photos are needed for the next edition of this publication. Don't wait to be asked!

## Regional Reporters Wanted

*BC Birding* is in need of regional reporters. Lots of interesting things are happening in different parts of the province that deserve to be covered in this newsmagazine. Several items in this edition – such as the Clark's Nutcracker item below – were picked up by accident from local birding listservs, and it would have been a great shame if they'd been missed. Other good items *are* being missed too regularly.

People administering a listserv, or who regularly contribute to a listserv, would be in an ideal position to become regional reporters. The task could be as simple as forwarding interesting posts, photographs, etc., to the Editor, or alternatively a section of the news magazine could be devoted to a more complete coverage of local news summarized by the regional reporter.

If you are willing to take on this role, contact the Editor at [clive\\_keen@hotmail.com](mailto:clive_keen@hotmail.com) or the Associate Editor at [virginiainbc@gmail.com](mailto:virginiainbc@gmail.com).

*Below: One of an extraordinary seventeen Clark's Nutcrackers on a lawn in McBride on October 23, 2016. Even more extraordinary was that they represented only around half of the flock – Elsie Stanley had seen at least thirty in her yard, where they were eating fir seeds, the pine having all been lost to beetle kill. Photograph by Jeff Dyck.*





# BCFO

## Two-day Trips

### Quesnel Area, June 7–8, 2017

Trips for 2017 are currently being worked on. The first that has been agreed is a trip aimed partly at people planning to attend the Tumbler Ridge AGM and preferring a break on the way. Further details will be provided in future editions of this newsmagazine, but the bare bones are:

- Wednesday, June 7, 2017: Soda Creek – West Fraser loop.
- Thursday, June 8, 2017: Barkerville Highway to Wells (to include the option of very good fish n' chips at Big H's in Wells).

Brian Murland and Adrian Leather will lead the trips.

### 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.

### Ideas Needed for Other Trips

The executive are considering whether it might be better to make at least some of the trips three days long rather than two. People that need to travel considerable distances would possibly find a longer trip more worthwhile. Tell us what you think – contact Adrian Leather at [q-birds@xplornet.com](mailto:q-birds@xplornet.com). Adrian would also be interested in any sugges-

tions for the locations of two- or three-trips. Volunteers to host trips would be particularly welcome.

## Trip Report: Vancouver Shorebirds

*Brian Self*

### September 24–25, 2016

Eight birders had signed up for this weekend and they represented the diversity of our membership. We had participants from Quesnel, Clearwater, Rossland, Salt Spring Island, New Westminster, Langley and Vancouver. And me, the Tsawwassenite.

We met on Saturday morning at the Ladner Park and Ride bus loop, consolidated vehicles, and headed out to our first birding stop, Ladner Harbour Park. This is an area of large Cottonwood trees set on an island in Ladner Slough with the Fraser River the other perimeter. There were 26 species here, including one of the black race of Northern Flicker which I was hoping we would get to see. It produced considerable interest and a few pictures were taken. I have found these birds nowhere else; they seem to be restricted to this park and some of them really are dark all over. I first saw them ten or more years ago when we were doing raptor surveys and their numbers are few but they do persist in reproducing an all-black version of a Northern Flicker.

We moved on to the Reifel bird sanctuary on Westham Island where the highlights were a

Great-horned Owl, Sora and Virginia Rail. The Sora well seen, the rails were heard but not seen. The usual case here. As the tide was now rising we managed to locate six species of shorebirds also. A Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, both Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher and two Snipe.

On our way off the island we stopped off to briefly look at staked out Barn Owls which the non-Lower Mainlanders were pleased with, a bird they don't often get to see.

There were reports of Snow Geese being seen along the foreshore so we diverted out to Brunswick Point and managed a brief look at 25 birds in flight off the end of the Point. On our walk back to the cars we heard another Great-horned Owl call from the woodlot but could not get in to search for it as the blackberries had taken over the narrow trail.

When we arrived at the end of River Road to walk out to Brunswick, there was a Red-tailed Hawk perched on a power pole and a closer inspection revealed a badly deformed upper mandible. The upper bill was so hooked it almost touched the face below the lower mandible. This was an adult bird so had survived this far, but eating prey must be an issue with a bill that shape. More pictures taken here.

As we were now at the top of the tide and running later than I had planned, we arrived on Boundary Bay to walk the dyke from 104th Street back towards 96th Street. Among the 300 or so Black-bellied Plovers we found both American and Pacific Golden-Plovers, life birds for some of the party, one of them a Vancouver year bird for me, so good success here. We very carefully looked through the juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers hoping for a Sharp-tailed but not this time.

On to the foot of 96th Street and "The Mansion" where a freshwater outlet attracts birds. Today mostly gulls but there were a handful of Dowitchers

*Black Oystercatcher at the Tsawwassen dyke. CNK photo.*



here with the usual Yellowlegs.

This ended our first day and I introduced some of the party to the Boundary Bay Airport restaurant for supper and a review of the day.

Sunday, like Saturday, started overcast, mild and dry. We walked the Beach Grove woodlot in Tsawwassen over the low tide. A five-foot (1.54-metre) low and the water almost a kilometre off the dyke. To successfully shorebird in Vancouver a tide table is essential. On to the Tsawwassen ferry jetty where the first of the fall waterfowl are starting to congregate. Surf Scoters, a Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck, four species of grebes and half a dozen Common Loons. Among the many gulls here we found 14 Bonapartes. Two reliable shorebird species here from September to April are Black Turnstone and Black Oystercatcher and both put in an appearance.

Today we arrived in Boundary Bay well ahead of the incoming tide, pulled on rubber boots or sandals and headed out across the mud and sand to tideline. Looking through the Black-bellied Plovers we found another American Golden, Killdeer, Dunlin, Western and Pectoral Sandpipers, some of these birds almost at our feet. You can do this with fall migrating shorebirds; they

seem relaxed, have all the time in the world and allow quite close inspection. A spring migrating shorebird is wound up, nervous and has places to go – they don't allow you near them in my experience. Back on the dyke by the pilings, Monica had found us a lone Marbled Godwit which we scoped at leisure.

A quick look at The Mansion produced a perched Peregrine but no shorebirds and ended the trip.

We managed 96 species in the weekend, including 16 species of shorebirds and everyone seemed to enjoy the variety of habitats we visited.



## Shorebirds at Roberts Bank

On the subject of shorebirds, readers will be interested in a feature on the migrating shorebirds of Roberts Bank currently being published in two parts by *Hakai Magazine*.

Part one covers, first, the fascinating discovery that shorebirds fuel their migration not by eating small crustaceans,

worms and molluscs, as was thought until recently, but by eating what is now called “biofilm,” though the words “slime” and “snot” were used readily for a while.

Biofilm, it turns out, is highly nutritious: it is composed of bacteria and diatoms and a mucous-like carbohydrate they produce and which binds them together. It is now known to be essential to shorebird migration – the tongue of the Western Sandpiper, for instance, is specially adapted to make use of this food source.

However, there is a proposal to build a new \$2 billion shipping terminal at Roberts Bank on its own new island. This could seriously impact the millions of shorebirds dependent on the Fraser Delta for migration refuelling.

You can read the first instalment by heading to the *Hakai* website at [www.hakaimagazine.com/article-long/slimeshorebirds-and-scientific-mystery](http://www.hakaimagazine.com/article-long/slimeshorebirds-and-scientific-mystery).

The second instalment, to be published just after this newsmagazine is completed, will look at the environmental assessment process for the port expansion.

**Hakai**  
magazine

Coastal Science and Societies



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Western sandpipers flock by the thousands during migration, one of the natural world's great spectacles. Photo by Donald M. Jones/Minden Pictures



# Upcoming Meetings & Events

Compiled by Wayne C. Weber

The following meetings and other events are those that take place in BC and immediately adjacent areas or that potentially include information on birds that occur in BC. Information on additional meetings is listed in the bimonthly *Ornithological Newsletter* at [www.birdmeetings.org](http://www.birdmeetings.org) and on the BIRD-NET 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.

## 2016 EVENTS

Nov. 19-20-- FRASER VALLEY BALD EAGLE FESTIVAL, Harrison Mills, BC. For information, check the festival website at <http://fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca>, send an email to [info@fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca](mailto:info@fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca), phone 604-826-7361, or write the Mission Chamber of Commerce, 34033 Lougheed Highway, Mission, BC V2V 5X8.

Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 (2017)-- CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS. For information on dates of counts and contact information for count organizers, check the BCFO website in November and December, or check the December issue of *BC Birding*.

## 2017 EVENTS

Feb. 17-20-- The GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and Bird Studies Canada. For information and to participate, check the GBBC website at <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc-title=Great/howto.html>.

Feb. 22-25-- 44<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING, PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP, Tacoma, Washington. For information and to register, visit the conference website at <http://www.pacificseabirdgroup.org/index.php?f=meeting&t=Annual%20Meeting&s=1>.

Feb. 27-Mar. 3-- SOCIETY FOR NORTHWESTERN VERTEBRATE BIOLOGY meeting at the Blue Lake Casino near Arcata, CA. This will be a joint meeting with the California North Coast Chapter of The Wildlife Society. For information and to register, visit the SNVB website at

<http://thesnvb.org/annual-meeting>.

March-April (dates not yet scheduled)-- BRANT WILDLIFE FESTIVAL, Qualicum, BC. For information, phone Robin Rivers at 1-866-288-7878 (in Greater Vancouver, 604-924-9771), e-mail [rrivers@naturetrust.bc.ca](mailto:rrivers@naturetrust.bc.ca), or check the festival website at <http://brantfestival.bc.ca>.

Mar. 9-12-- WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY annual meeting at Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers, Florida. For further information, check the WOS website at <http://www.wilsonsociety.org>.

Mar. 10-12-- 15<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL WINGS OVER WATER BIRDING FESTIVAL, Blaine, WA. For information, phone the Blaine Visitor Information Center at 1-800-624-3555, send an e-mail to [dharger@cityofblaine.com](mailto:dharger@cityofblaine.com), or check the website at <http://www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com>.

Mar. 24-26-- 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL, Othello, WA. Check the festival website at <http://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org>, or contact the Grant County Conservation District at 1107 South Juniper Way, Moses Lake, WA 98837 (phone 509-765-9618).

Apr. 7-9-- OLYMPIC BIRD FESTIVAL, Sequim, WA. For information, visit the festival website at <http://www.olympicbirdfest.org>, or contact the Dungeness River Audubon Center by phone (360-681-4076) or by e-mail ([info@olympicbirdfest.org](mailto:info@olympicbirdfest.org)). Registration is open now.

Apr. 7-9-- HARNEY COUNTY BIRD FESTIVAL, Burns, OR (focused on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge). For information, check the festival website at <http://www.migratorybirdfestival.com>, or phone the office at 541-573-2636.

Apr. 19-25-- GODWIT DAYS, Arcata, California. It's a little way away, but Godwit Days is one of the premier birding festivals in North America. For information, check the festival website at <https://godwitdays.org>. Registration opens in December.

Early May (dates not yet scheduled)-- GRAYS HARBOR SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL, Aberdeen, WA. For information, contact the festival office at PO Box 470, Montesano, WA 98563 (phone 360-289-5048) or check the website at <http://www.shorebirdfestival.com>.

May 4-7-- BC NATURE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Lillooet, BC, hosted by the Lillooet Naturalists. For information and to register, check the BC Nature website at <http://www.bcnature.ca>, or phone Betty Davison at the BC Nature office (phone 604-985-3057; e-mail [manager@bcnature.ca](mailto:manager@bcnature.ca)).

May 8-14-- WINGS OVER THE ROCKIES FESTIVAL (21st annual), Invermere, BC. Contact the Pynelogs Cultural Centre, PO Box 2633, Invermere, BC V0A 1K0, phone 1-855-342-2473, e-mail [info@wingsovertherockies.org](mailto:info@wingsovertherockies.org), or check the website at <http://www.wingsovertherockies.org>.

May 18-22-- MEADOWLARK NATURE FESTIVAL, Penticton, BC. The schedule of events and registration may not be available for awhile, but please check the festival website at <http://meadowlarkfestival.ca/>.

May 18-21-- LEAVENWORTH SPRING BIRD FEST, Leavenworth, WA. For information, email [info@leavenworthspringbirdfest.com](mailto:info@leavenworthspringbirdfest.com) or check the festival website at <http://www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com>.

June 9-11-- BC FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Tumbler Ridge, BC. For details, check the BCFO conference page at <https://bcfo.ca/bcfo-agm-tumbler-ridge-2017>.

July 31-Aug. 5-- 135<sup>TH</sup> STATED MEETING, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, AND 87<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, at Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI. For further details, to register, or to submit a paper for presentation, please visit the AOU/COS website at <http://americanornithology.org/upcoming-meetings>.

Aug. 8-12-- ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WATERBIRD SOCIETY, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland. For details, check the society website at <https://waterbirds.org/annual-meeting>.

Aug. 16-20-- ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS at Pueblo, Colorado. For further

details, check the WFO website at <http://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php>.

Sept. 23-27-- 24<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY, Albuquerque, NM. For information, check the TWS conference page at <http://wildlife.org/learn/conferences-2>.

Nov. 8-12-- RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION annual meeting, Salt Lake City, Utah, hosted by HawkWatch International. For information, check the RRF website at <http://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org/conferences/upcoming-conferences>, or contact the chairperson, Dave Oleyar, by email at [dolyar@hawkwatch.org](mailto:dolyar@hawkwatch.org), or by phone at 206-972-0163.

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*Below: a Lucy's Warbler, photographed by Michelle Lamberson on November 12, 2016. She'd first spotted the bird on September 25 at Sunset Drive Park in Kelowna, but it stayed around, to be relocated by Chris Charlesworth, Chris Siddle, Ann Gibson, and Michael Force. The four were looking successfully for a Green Heron and a very late Least Flycatcher, which would have made for a great day, but the Lucy's certainly topped those successes. This bird is just the second Lucy's to be seen in BC, but it has been highly cooperative, and has now been seen by a number of BCFO members. See also the back cover of this newsmagazine.*





## Young Birders Program

### Trip Report: Coquihalla Summit

*Melissa Hafting*

**September 10, 2016**

We had a fantastic trip with eight people in the Coquihalla Summit area. We spent eight hours on the mountain and hiked 14.5 km; it was a challenging but very beautiful hike! Our mission was to search for White-tailed Ptarmigan. It started off very foggy and then once we got to the top the fog cleared and the sun came out, showing us beautiful views all around us! It sure was rewarding after the long hike. The youth were troopers through it all.

We hiked to a beautiful alpine lake under the peak of Flatiron and saw many animals during the day including pika, hoary marmots, red squirrel, golden-mantled ground squirrels and yellow-pine chipmunks.

We had such a fantastic time together, telling stories and laughing the whole day through. The youth all worked together scouring large areas for the Ptarmigan. We did not end up seeing any White-tailed Ptarmigan but did find fresh scat and feathers so we knew they were in the area. We ended up with great birds today regardless.

The species list is as follows: Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches, four Bohemian Waxwings (which is early for this species), Northern Pygmy-Owl, Townsend's Solitaires, Gray Jay, American Pipits, Sharp-Shinned Hawks, Steller's Jay, Northern Flickers, Merlin, Dark-eyed Juncos, Common Raven, Red-tailed Hawk, American Crow, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pacific Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Varied Thrush, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers, White-crowned Sparrows, Song Sparrow, Red Crossbill, and Pine Siskins.

On the way home we stopped at the Hope Airport to see the continuing Lewis's Woodpeckers and we ended up seeing eight birds, which was a great way to cap off our great day together.

## The BCFO Young Birder Award

### Call for Nominations for 2017

Since 2014 the BCFO has been sponsoring a 'Young Birder Award' program in which talented young birders are welcomed into the birding community and recognized for their accomplishments, contributions, and engagement with birds and birding in the Province. We are now seeking additional nominations for the next round of Young Birder Awards. Each recipient receives a plaque, a spiffy BCFO ballcap, and free BCFO membership until age 18. Our previous awardees (see *BC Birding* issues for March 2014, 2015, and 2016) are carrying on in impressive fashion, and we expect there are more like them out there to be discovered.

To be selected for a Young Birder Award, recipients must meet all of the following criteria:

- Be no more than 18 years of age as of January 1st, 2017;
- Have demonstrated exceptional observational and birding skills well beyond the "novice" level;
- Have made significant contribution to activities in the birding community such as posting to list-servs; entering data to eBird or participating in local surveys, counts, and field trips;
- Be sponsored and nominated by a BCFO member who has direct knowledge of the candidate.

Please send queries and nominations to [cgio@telus.net](mailto:cgio@telus.net).

*At the alpine lake beneath the peak of Flatiron. Photos by Melissa Hafting.*





*Right: The group with Needle Peak in the background before the start of the descent.*

### Young Birder Wins!

Young birder Isaac Nelson has won the Young Birdathoner prize (8x32 binoculars from Eagle Optics) from Bird Studies Canada for the Great Canadian Birdathon.

*Bottom right: Young Birder Award recipient Liam Singh, showing his plaque.*



# Christmas Bird Count for Kids 2016




**BIRD STUDIES CANADA**  
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX



**Where:** Reifel Bird Sanctuary  
5191 Robertson Road, Ladner  
**When:** December 10th, 2016  
**Time:** 9 am until 1pm  
**Admission:** 1.50\$

Please bring a lunch, binoculars, toque, warm rain proof jacket and pants, boots, gloves, camera and scope.

Adult Birders who want to volunteer to lead children on routes are needed.

Please contact me to register at:  
[BCbirdergirl@gmail.com](mailto:BCbirdergirl@gmail.com)

U.S. Program Partner: 

Supported by:  





# Trip Reports

## Grand Forks, June 23-29, 2016

Gareth Pugh

### Day 1

Seven of us – Bob Puls, Josh Inman, Lin Inman, Pauline O'Toole, Wim Vesseur, Viveka Ohman and myself – left Aldergrove at 8 a.m. on our annual birding trip. With light traffic most of the way we made good time, stopping in Keremeos for lunch and picking up some fruit, and arrived at the PV Ranch in the Granby River Valley by 3:30. Leona and John Breckenridge had travelled up the day before so were already there getting our supper ready. The ranch has three well-appointed cabins along the river with hay fields on one side where meadowlarks could be heard while across the river were high cliffs where a family of Merlins could be heard calling to each other as the fledged young practiced their flying skills overhead and White-throated Swifts could be heard and seen around the cliffs. By the time we had settled in, it was Happy Hour followed by a lovely meal then off for a walk to explore the neighbourhood. We found a good variety of birds to start the trip well, lots of Chipping Sparrows, Western Meadowlarks, a family of American Kestrels, Brewer's Blackbirds, Bullock's Orioles, Northern Flicker, Mourning Dove, etc. As the light faded on our return journey, we saw at least fifteen white-tailed deer in the hay fields making their way to the river.

As none of us knew the area, our plan was to start by visiting the seven hotspots listed on eBird: Jewel Lake, Boothman's Oxbows, Gilpin FSR, Wards Lake, Wilgress Lake, Phoenix and the Grand Forks sewage lagoons. We had also committed to doing a Nightjar Survey for Wild Research.

### Day 2

After a good night's rest we set off for Jewel Lake. The logging road chosen by the navigator, using the Backroads map, was, unfortunately, not in regular use and in poor shape so we made slow progress, taking a couple of wrong turns on the unposted roads before eventually coming to a better road. See-

ing a small pond we stopped for a quick look and as we got out of our vehicles, the pond exploded as a large bull Moose, which had been lying submerged in its private bath tub, jumped out of the water and stood for a moment on the bank looking at us, long enough for some good photos, before heading into the bush. From there we soon reached a paved road and were soon at Jewel Lake where the owner of the local resort/camp site gave us permission to walk around. She had nest boxes which were being used by Tree Swallows and House Wrens and a variety of birds were found in the marsh, on the lake and in the trees.

Much of the lakeshore is private property so we drove to the Provincial Park at the north end and walked around the campsite where we found a Pileated Woodpecker but very few other birds. From there we made a quick detour into Greenwood for gas and ice-cream before heading back to base.

In the evening we drove up the North Fork Road which runs alongside the river, stopping at intervals to check the different habitats. We saw an Osprey, not a common bird in the area, and also found a Veery nest with eggs but nothing else of note.

### Day 3

Our first stop of the day was Wilgress Lake for which 51 species had been recorded on eBird but we found very few. The only place we were able to gain access to the lake was at the rest area on Highway 3 which was noisy, making it hard to hear bird calls. We did try to access the lake from a gravel road on the South side but the only way in was a private driveway so we returned to the highway and headed for the Phoenix Mountain Ski Area, stopping at the ski hill for lunch and recording several species that were not on the e-Bird list for the area.

The weather was warming up so we stopped for coffee/ice cream on the outskirts of Grand Forks before heading up Reservoir Lake Road where our first stop was at Saddle Lake, the best spot yet! Yellow-headed and Red-wing Blackbirds abounded, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, a lone Great Blue Heron (the only one we saw on the trip), American Coot and other species made for very enjoyable viewing.

Our next stop, Wards Lake, was very productive with a number of new species being added to the list as we

scoped the lake including Sora and Virginia Rail. We met a local couple who kindly invited us to visit their property on the other side of the lake where we spent a very enjoyable half hour watching a variety of birds in their garden and at their feeders including three Calliope Hummingbirds. Nearby a Wilson's Snipe could be heard drumming and a Nashville Warbler was singing in bushes along the roadside.

### Day 4

We drove down North Fork Road then Granby Road, stopping at likely spots along the way. One spot we found was very productive and we had very good views of a Northern Waterthrush collecting food for its brood. Eventually we arrived at City Park in downtown Grand Forks where we soon found our target bird, Lewis's Woodpecker, a lifer for some. Grand Forks bills itself as the "Lewis's Woodpecker capital of BC" and there are certainly plenty of them to be found there. As we walked along the river, a Prairie Falcon flew by and a Ring-necked Pheasant was heard.

Our next stop was the Boothman's Oxbows Provincial Park where we tallied 31 species including a colony of Bank Swallows, young Spotted Sandpipers, and a pair of Solitary Sandpipers along the river. With a sizeable wetland surrounded by open grassy areas, berry bushes, cottonwood stands, and the river this is a very good habitat for which 73 species have to date been recorded on eBird.

From here it was only a short distance along the highway to the start of the Gilpin Forest Service Road which winds its way up into the hills above the town. Almost immediately we saw a Chukar on the road, a lifer for some of us which we later discovered was a new species for that area. We drove on up the road through an extensive burned area from a fire earlier in the summer so there was not much birdlife to be seen. However as we got higher into ponderosa pine forest, we found a number of typical species and even two Western Wood-Pewee nests. It was now early afternoon and getting too hot for some of our party, so we headed back to the ranch for siesta and an early supper. Our hosts had invited us to visit another ranch they owned farther up the valley so we spent the evening there, walking around the buildings and through the hayfields down to the river.

**Day 5**

As we headed down the Granby Road, a Bobolink was spotted in a hayfield so we stopped to take a better look and saw a total of five very active males and a couple of females. This was the only location where we found them, but much of the valley bottom is suitable habitat so no doubt there are more in the area.

In town again we visited the sewage lagoons and quickly added several new species to our list. We also saw a pair of Prairie Falcons circling lazily above the town. From there we travelled to Christina Lake to walk a section of the Trans Canada Trail which at this point descends along the mountainside with great views of the river and valley below then turns through mixed deciduous and conifer/pine woods so a good variety of species was found here including good numbers of Lazuli Buntings and a Rock Wren singing on the talus slopes above us. It was another very hot day so at the end of our walk we returned to base to relax before going to a restaurant for supper followed by carrying out a very successful Nightjar (Common Nighthawk) Survey when a total of 52 birds were recorded at 12 stations.

**Day 6**

We started our last day by driving up Almond Creek Road, stopping at intervals to walk and observe, hoping to find an American Three-toed Woodpecker as we had seen ample evidence of their presence but were unsuccessful. We did, however, find a good variety of other species and also found a Dusky Flycatcher nest. In addition we came across three places where a large number of butterflies were gathering for moisture. The first location was at a wet spot on the edge of the river, the second was a large puddle, and the third was a pile of bear droppings. In each location most of the butterflies were Lorquin's Admirals, the most common species we saw in the area. The final bonus was discovery of a Spotted Sandpiper nest with four eggs, possibly a second brood as most of the birds we saw had already fledged due to the early spring.

**Day 7**

We made an early start so that we could stop in Manning Park to check out the alpine flowers and make it home in time for supper.

In all we found 131 species of birds

in the Grand Forks area as follows:

**Geese, Swans, Ducks**

Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye, Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck.

**Upland Game Birds**

Chukar, Spruce Grouse, Sooty Grouse, Dusky Grouse, Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse, California Quail.

**Loons, Grebes, etc.**

Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Virginia Rail, Sora, American Coot, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper.

**Pigeons and Doves**

Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove.

**Owls, etc.**

Great Horned Owl, Common Nighthawk, Black Swift, White-throated Swift.

**Hummingbirds, etc.**

Anna's Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher.

**Woodpeckers**

Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker.

**Flycatchers**

Western Kingbird, Eastern Kingbird, Western Wood-Pewee, Willow Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe.

**Falcons**

American Kestrel, Merlin, Prairie Falcon.

**Shrikes and Vireos**

Red-eyed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Cassin's Vireo

**Jays and Crows**

Steller's Jay, Gray Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Black-billed Magpie, American Crow, Common Raven, Horned Lark.

**Swallows**

Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Northern Rough-

winged Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Bank Swallow.

**Chickadees**

Black-capped Chickadee.

**Nuthatch/Creepers/Wren, etc.**

Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pacific Wren, House Wren, Rock Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Mountain Bluebird, Western Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Veery, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing.

**Warblers**

MacGillivray's Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Nashville Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Western Tanager, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush.

**Sparrows**

American Tree Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Dark-eyed Junco.

**Blackbirds**

Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Bullock's Oriole.

**Finches, etc.**

Purple Finch, House Finch, Cassin's Finch, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, Evening Grosbeak, House Sparrow.

We also saw the following butterflies, all identified by Bob Puls from his photos:

Lorquin's Admiral, Cabbage White, Western Tiger Swallowtail, Clouded Sulphur, Silver Spotted Skipper, Pink-edged Sulphur, European Skipper, Pale Swallowtail, Lustrous Copper, Canadian Tiger Swallowtail, Thicket Hairstreak, Edith's Checkerspot, Fritillary (Freija?), Lilac-bordered Copper, Nastes Sulphur.



## Media Review

### *Birds of North America:* Killer App?

Cornell's by-subscription online *Birds of North America* (BNA) has been updated and upgraded. Many BCFO members have no doubt been subscribers for years, but for the rest of us, the upgrade raises the question – is this a killer app, making all other sources of information on North American birds redundant?

Not too long ago, BNA was available just as a huge series of printed monographs, with one booklet per bird. The depth of information on each was encyclopedic, but four shelves of bookcase, plus a lot of boxes, were needed to house the 750+ booklets, and keeping them in some sort of order was a constant challenge. The move to online availability was thus a great relief, and with the space-and-sorting issue solved, and sounds and videos added, taking out a subscription seemed a no-brainer. But given the cost (currently US\$46 a year), I opted to pay for occasional one-month access. Now that BNA has been further developed, is it time to fork out for permanent access?

But first, the details. At the BNA landing page (birdsna.org), you are immediately invited to type in the name of a bird species, which will take you to an introduction to the bird – the sort of general overview that you get from

most good online guides. But then you can move to another *fifteen* subsidiary webpages for the details. These pages are entitled Appearance, Systematics (regional variation, subspecies, related species), Distribution, Migration and Habitat, Sounds and Vocal Behaviour, Behaviour, Breeding, Demography and Populations, Conservation and Management, Priorities for Future Research, Acknowledgements, About the Author, Multimedia, Tables and Appendices, and References. Often each of these webpages is quite extensive. Who could ask, or indeed want, for more?

In spite of the depth, the reader is not overwhelmed with information. One of the great merits of the online format is that one only needs to click on subsidiary pages that are of interest. The drop-down menus make it even easier to find the information that is needed by displaying the headings of each sub-page. People interested in, for example, the nest, would ignore pages such as Systematics and get the information they want very easily with just a click or two.

The fact that space is unlimited is also a major advantage over other media. Thus, there are 14 photos of the Stilt Sandpiper in the “Media” section, with a link to more, and it could easily be expanded in the future.

So, do we subscribe with no more delay? Some caveats:

1. BNA is written by, and largely for, ornithologists rather than the amateur enthusiast. This is not a particular problem; ornithologist-speak is not impenetrable to the rest of us and can easily be followed with the help of an online dictionary. Words like “clade,” and “polyphyletic” are worth looking up anyway.

2. Rather more serious is that the publication covers only birds that are known to breed in the U.S. or Canada. Thus, when I look up a bird that appears on an annual basis in my local lagoons – the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper — I get a “no match” message. Since it is the rarer birds that many of us are most likely to look up, this is very regrettable. The Sharp-tail and many other North American non-breeders are fairly well covered in nearly all my field guides and field guide companions, so BNA certainly doesn't replace them.

3. Surprisingly, the information can be quite dated. With printed booklets, becoming dated is of course unavoidable, but online publishing should largely resolve the issue. The problem seems to be that BNA is still modelled on the monograph, where an author completes a publication and retains responsibility for it, but might move on to other things. The Cornell folk say that there will be gradual updating, but a different approach, allowing multi-authorship, might be necessary to ensure that it happens at a reasonable pace.

4. The publication is sometimes less authoritative than we would expect. Looking for further information on the Stilt Sandpiper, I find that the range map, repeated both in the Introduction and Distribution pages, shows that the bird is never to be found in British Columbia. Any visitor to my local (Prince George) lagoons, where five Stilt Sandpipers are mudpecking happily away as I write and are seen in some numbers every year, would have doubts about the credibility of the rest of the text. Fortunately, eBird distribution maps are also added, though they look rather odd

### Explore BNA

Comprehensive life histories of North American breeding birds

Q Enter a species name...

Browse Taxonomy



next to range maps which they clearly contradict.

5. For those whose primary interest is correct identification, BNA is OK, but not a market leader. It neither gets us straight to the quick-and-easy field-marks that can uniquely identify the less challenging birds, nor provides the incisive commentary helpful for the tough ones. This is understandable; the publication is not currently aimed at people whose focus is on correct identification. If the Cornell folk wanted to cater to the enthusiast, though, this would need to be a higher priority. At least one of the fourteen photographs of the Stilt Sandpiper would then show it in its highly distinctive headstand pose.

### Conclusion

Many readers would not dream of being without BNA. The above comments, though, show that it can not at the moment be a considered a cross-over from the academic world to become birding's killer app. As the Cornell people know perfectly well, though, the publication can be improved in many ways, and it could quite easily, over time, turn into the Bible of all serious birders. If Cornell had serious ambitions in this direction, BNA should at least carry "stubs" for the large number of non-breeders that visit the U.S. and Canada. The most important change, though, would be to move right away from the one-author, monographic, approach and fully embrace dispersed creation. There are certainly moves in this direction: one of the latest updates credits seven authors. Links to the Macauley Media Library and to eBird also broaden the expertise on offer. But continuous improvement – on-the-fly upgrading by anonymous contributors as new information becomes available – is antithetical to the academic way of doing business. It would be good to see authorized specialists tinkering across the board: a cartographer might replace the often simplistic and dated range maps currently provided, for instance. But the academic world gets very sniffy at something looking like a Wikipedia, as academics want both ownership of their work and to be clearly credited. In the Internet age, that can hold things back.

To see if BNA is for you, head to <https://birdsna.org>.

CNK

## Avian Encounters

### Nemesis Bird: Search for the White Mountain Pigeon

*Ben Keen*

My relationship with White-tailed Ptarmigan has not been a fruitful one. In the five years I've been birding, I've ticked off species after species, but no matter how many times I go looking for ptarmigan they refuse to put in an appearance. They were "out with friends," "at home washing their hair" – whatever the excuse for their absence, they became my nemesis bird. It even grew into something of a joke with friends. When the subject of birds came up, I'd face the inevitable question: "seen the ptarmigan yet?" to which I'd have to respond in the negative, yielding howls of laughter and good-humoured mockery. And it was funny at first (in fact, I remember even being pleased that I'd taught these awful people what a ptarmigan was) but as time passed the humour waned. The range maps in my bird books would compound the misery, showing where they could be found: basically everywhere. Only a

blind person or a (shudder) non-birder would have failed to have found them by now.

Such was the status quo when I headed off to Flatiron Mountain, just 20 minutes north of Hope. I'd received a hot tip, confirmed on eBird, that that was where I was going to find them. If truth be told, I didn't really think I'd actually find any, but Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur and Northern Pygmy Owl had all been recently spotted at the location, so it shouldn't be a wasted trip.

A cursory web search spoke of the Flatiron hike as a picturesque, albeit difficult, six-hour round trip. Knowledge attained and full of the right stuff, I set out. My hiking technique generally involves three rules: (a) forgetting things, (b) wearing the wrong clothes, and (c) cursing a lot. This trip was no exception. At the foot of the mountain I couldn't decide which of my coats would be more appropriate for the top, so on the spur of the moment brought them both, thereby doubling the weight to carry. In an astonishing feat of memory, I'd remembered to pick up a couple of bottles of water in Hope, but then left them in the car. That morning in my sleepy daze I had thoughtlessly put on a pair of ancient running shoes with large holes in them. I now peered at them moodily at the base of the

*Photos of White-tailed Ptarmigan on Flatiron Peak by Ben Keen.*







having any water or being stuck with poor footwear, really take their toll on the old psyche. Dreadful, unreliable species!

It was then that I saw them. Beautiful, trustworthy species! Always there when you need them! My first, absurd impression was that they were like a herd of miniature sheep: little white dots, grazing on the ground, looking up, wary, moving around in pockets. They were considerably whiter than I expected; the photos posted by another eBirder a week before showed birds more in their summer plumage. I pulled out my camera and slowly made my way towards them. The trick was to move slowly – even a slow walk would spook them, so I inched closer, taking photos the whole time. It took over 20 minutes to reach them at that pace, but by the end was able to get within a few feet.

“Magical” doesn’t really do it justice. They’re such delightful little birds, calling quietly to one another. I tried recording their exchanges on my phone, but the blistering wind prevented it. My fingers were frozen to the bone but I couldn’t have cared less. The heavy coat I’d lugged up the mountain lay in my backpack, untouched: I wasn’t about to risk unpacking it and startling them. So we sat quietly in a group for just shy of 45 minutes while I took the occasional picture, watching one another. Finally they decided they’d had enough of me and that it was time to

mountain: will they survive? (Spoiler alert: they didn’t.)

All considered, my hike was not, perhaps, a feat of forethought.

But no matter! Up the mountain I go. The trail to Flatiron Peak is via the Needle Peak trail, which any objective reviewer would describe as: several kilometres of miserable slog through a dark, muddy, bird-free trail, heading at an approximately 90-degree incline in both directions. After an hour, I was astonished to find that I was still able to go on. A couple of years ago I doubt I could have done so: my wife had talked me into going to a personal trainer to offset my sedentary, beer-drinking existence, and it was thanks to her that I was able to continue the hike today. My trainer is the type of person who spends half her life hiking places like this, and for some inexplicable reason gives every appearance of actually enjoying it. (A non-birder, poor soul, but we all have our flaws. I’ll return to her at the end.)

Eventually the trail improved, flattened out, and emerged from the forest. Here things picked up: a pair of Band-tailed Pigeon flew close by, and an ornery American Three-toed Woodpecker called incessantly and afforded some close-up shots. A flock of something that I suspected of being rosy-finches flew by at a distance, but too far off for me to be sure (“bird sp.” tick!). Another couple of kilometres brought me to Flatiron Lake – a lovely spot – and then

before I knew it I was at the summit.

I’m generally a pretty positive guy, but this hike had been far from a triumph. The closer I got to my destination, I found my mood worsening. And now, wandering around the entirely bird-free peak, I once again found myself cursing the name of the White-tailed Ptarmigan. The problem with dipping on ptarmigan, I thought, is that it isn’t like dipping on many other birds: it’s a gruelling, full-day dip. It involves hard work and time, and completely unavoidable things like, say, not



push off. I sat and watched them go.

As you can imagine, I was pretty euphoric the trip down. I tripped a couple of times and got covered in mud, my shoes finally gave up the ghost, and I lost the trail and thought I'd found a faster way down, which ultimately meant backtracking 30 minutes to re-find where I'd left the path. Despite those trips to the gym I was completely knackered by the time I got back to the car. Bliss.

I was still feeling pretty triumphant a couple of days later when I visited my trainer, showing her some pictures on my phone. I awaited her response, knowing she'd be stunned by their grace and beauty. "Oh theeeeesse," she responded, handing me back the phone with an air of surprise. "I've seen loads of these when hiking – I thought they were just funny white mountain pigeons."

## Merlin versus Magpie

*Chris Siddle*

On the rainy morning of Saturday, October 9, 2016, a male Merlin silently ate his prey atop our backyard utility pole at 6131 Silver Star Road, Vernon, B.C. He had finished his meal and was cleaning his face with a few swipes of his foot when a Black-billed Magpie perched on the wires about one metre away (photo 1, below).

Appearing to push his luck as magpies so often do, the magpie hopped even closer to the Merlin (photo 2, top).



My shutter caught the magpie halfway through his move in the midst of his landing, giving the Merlin a playful look as if he were bouncing on the wire just to bug the Merlin. I was reminded of the way one child will willfully tease an older sibling for the thrill of it.

The Merlin reacted with a powerful combination take off-dive at the magpie. In a burst of tail feathers and pinions, the magpie dives down towards the hedge at the base of the pole. When last seen, the Merlin was close on the long tail of the magpie as both streaked out of sight around the neighbour's house.



## Multiple Pygmies

Jeff Dyck of Prince George spotted seven Northern Pygmy Owls in the area over a single weekend. Two of them were on the Bowron Forest Service Road, four on the Yellowhead Highway between the Bowron Intersection and McBride, and one on Upper Fraser (Eaglet Lake). The photo to the right was taken with a Canon 1DX and a Canon 800mm f/5.6L IS lens.



## Hummingbirds & Nectar

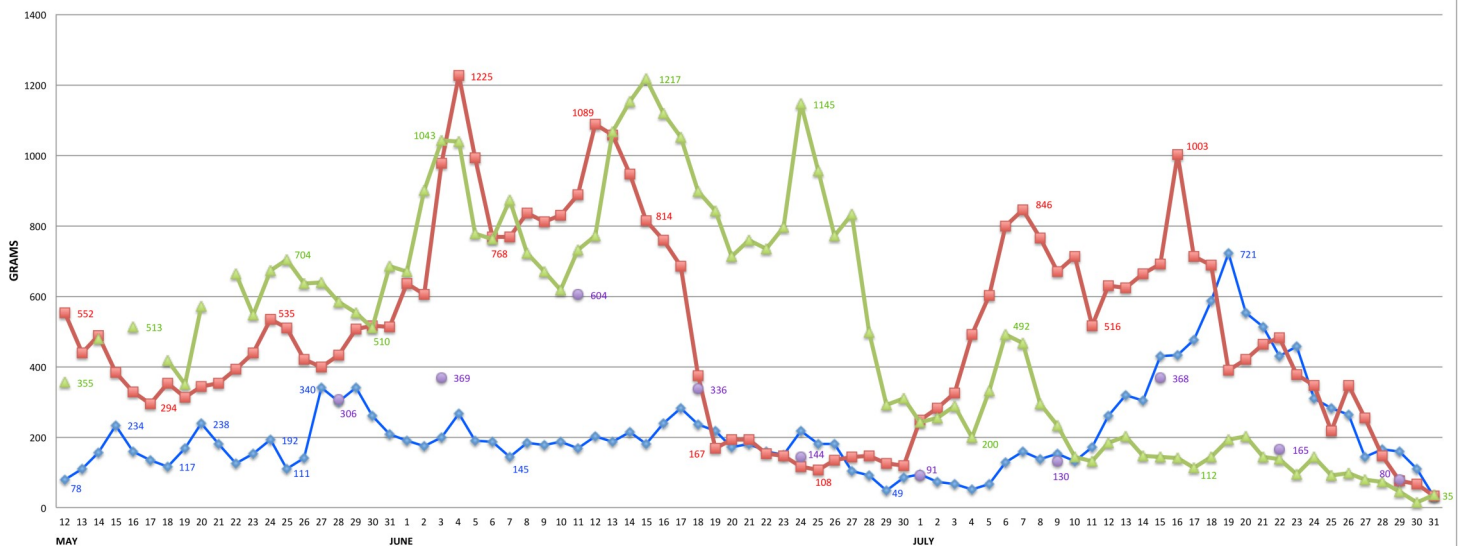
In 2013 Dennis Leonard connected with Michael Hoebel about his hummingbird research, which needed people to measure nectar consumption over 24 hours once a week for one season. This hooked Dennis and led to three years of measurement of the nectar consumption in his feeders. The chart below summarizes the findings.

Making some assumptions based on Michael Hoebel's findings about the relation between consumption and hummingbird numbers, Dennis calculated that the peak number of hummingbirds each year would approximately be

- 2014: 229
- 2015: 231
- 2016: 136

NECTAR CONSUMPTION OF HUMMINGBIRDS 2013-2016  
Clearwater, British Columbia

— 2016 — 2015 — 2014 — 2013



## Briefings

Summaries and additional reporting  
by M. Church

### Birdbrain, Eh?

Most birds are relatively small creatures. They have correspondingly small brains. Nonetheless, they achieve some remarkable feats. The most intelligent birds – parrots and corvids – are able to make logical inferences (see “Pretty Brainy Polly”; *BC Birding*, December, 2012); they use tools; they plan for future needs (cf. food caching), and anticipate the behaviour of other birds on the basis of their own experience. Birds are capable of mutually advantageous cooperative behaviour without specific training (see “Avian pointer;” *BC Birding*, September, 2016). They learn complex vocalizations (birdsong). Parrots, in particular, can even learn words and



Gray Parrot (Creative Commons photo).

communicate with humans. What is the basis for these remarkable capacities, which match those of much larger brained primates and outstrip those of all other mammals (except, perhaps, us)?

It turns out that bird brains pack very high densities of neurons, particularly in the pallium – the avian equivalent of the mammalian neocortex, the large superior portion of the brain that houses cognitive and decision-making functions. Researchers examined neuron density in eleven parrot species, six corvids, seven other songbirds, Barn Owl, and some more primitive birds, including Emu, Rock Pigeon and Red Junglefowl (the ancestor of barnyard chickens). They found that the ad-

vanced birds have more than twice as many neurons per unit brain mass as mammals and about twice the density even of primates. For example, the brain of the European Goldcrest (a close relative of our Golden-crowned Kinglet) weighs 0.36 grams and contains 164 million neurons; in comparison, a mouse brain typically weighs about 0.42 grams but contains only 71 million neurons. Parrot brains weigh up to 21 grams and contain as many as 3.2 billion neurons. Parrots and songbirds have a larger brain in comparison to body mass than sub-primate mammals, and corvids and songbirds have an exceptionally high proportion of all brain neurons contained in the pallium. In comparison, the more primitive birds have lower neuron densities in the upper brain, which suggests a measure of evolutionary development.

So what? So, in proportion to total size, bird brains match the capacity of primates. More critically, the close packing of neurons promotes very rapid signaling amongst them, so that birds can comprehend observed phenomena and make consequent decisions very quickly. For animals that fly through trees and brush, and may hawk for food in the air, this is a critical capability, and the evolved brain structure very likely is the successful evolutionary response to this need for super-fast decision-making. Absolute size is not a measure of brain capacity. The aerial acrobatics of swallows and the ability of sparrows to quickly navigate brambles are easily observed proofs of that. So, if someone labels you a “birdbrain,” you might smile smugly and take comfort from the abilities of actual bird brains or, if provoked, you might return the insult by proposing that your tormentor is, more specifically, chicken-brained.

#### Reference

Olkowicz, S., Kocourek, M., Lucan, R.K., Porteš, M., Tecumseh Fitch, W., Herculano-Houzel, S., and Nemec, P. Birds have primate-like numbers of neurons in the forebrain. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (U.S.A.)* 113: 7255-7260.

For anyone interested in delving more deeply into birds’ brains, a just-

published book is Emery, N. 2016. *Bird Brain: An Exploration of Avian Intelligence*. Princeton University Press (available as an e-book).

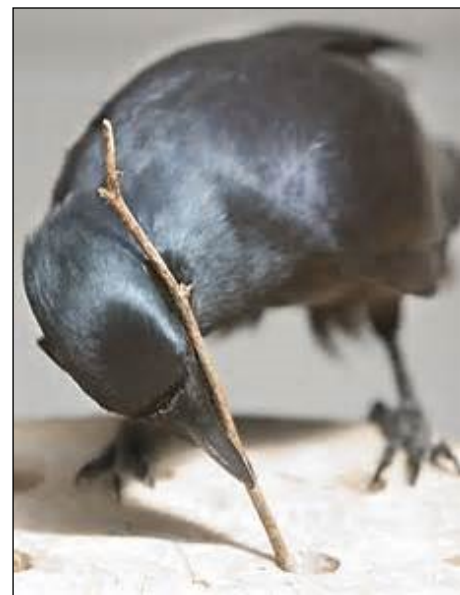
### Tooling Up

New Caledonian Crows (*Corvus moneduloides*) are famous for their use of twigs as tools to extract insects and other food items from holes and crevices. It now transpires that the Hawaiian Crow (*C. hawaiiensis*) (‘Alalā in the Hawaiian language) is similarly talented. The bird is extinct in the wild after a precipitous decline in the late 20th century. The current population is restricted to 109 birds held in two aviaries where a captive breeding program is designed to eventually return the species to the wild.

Birds in the aviaries were observed using twigs and, upon investigation, it was found that 78 per cent of the birds use tools. Most of the non-tool users were juveniles, but observations of young birds held in isolation demonstrated that they begin spontaneously (without demonstration by older birds) to use tools and gradually gain dexterity until, by age three years (the birds live 15–25 years), they are experts. Tool use appears to be a near-universal and spontaneous behaviour.

The Hawaiian Crow’s nearest relative (curiously) is the Old World Rook (*C. frugilegus*). These birds do not ha-

New Caledonian Crow (Creative Commons photo).





bitually use tools in the wild, but they readily learn in captivity to use twigs as probes, and even to fashion them by creating hooked ends. They have also readily learned to use stones, notably to drop them into a tube of water in order to raise the water level so they can snatch floating grub. Other species of the genus *Corvus* have proven less adept, and it is surmised that a straight bill and relatively good binocular vision (hence eye position) – features possessed by all three of the above species – are important factors allowing effective tool use.

As the brainiest of birds, it is perhaps not surprising that some corvids have mastered tool use. But a small number of other birds use tools too. The Woodpecker Finch (*Camarhynchus pallidus*), one of Darwin's Galapagos finches, uses twigs and cactus spines to extract food items from recesses. As much as half of its diet is gained in this way, exceeding the proportion obtained in this manner by the famously tool-using chimpanzee. A notable variation in tool use is presented by the Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*) of the American southeast; it uses flakes of bark to pry loose other bark flakes in order to get at insects hiding beneath. And wood is not the only tool that birds can use. The Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) and the Australian Black-breasted Buzzard (*Hamirostra melanosternon*) both drop stones onto the eggs of large birds (ostrich, emu) to crack them open. They have a definite preference for round stones!

So once more Nature proves to have been first to think about a supposed bastion of human ingenuity; as tool users we are by no means unique (though our tools certainly are).

Red Junglefowl (Creative Commons photo).



## Reference

Rutz, C. + 11 others. 2016. Discovery of species-wide tool use in the Hawaiian Crow. *Nature* 537: 403-407.

## The Chickens and the Church

Domestic chickens are not exactly wild-fowl, but this story is too good to miss. We all know that modern chickens are descended from the Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) of southeast Asia, probably hybridized with the Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*) of India, and probably others. But the junglefowl are slim, active and colourful birds, whereas modern chickens are plump, slow, and often monochrome. How did the change come about? According to recent research, the Pope (of Rome) willed it!

Archaeologists have found that the incidence of chicken bones in European middens increased significantly from the 10th century on, while geneticists, analyzing ancient DNA from those bones, have determined that a particular genetic mutation that affects animal metabolism and egg-laying became suddenly dominant at about this time. Post-10th century chickens grew more plump and produced eggs more continuously than the earlier, more scrappy fowl. The evidence strongly suggests that, around the 10th century – just over 1,000 years ago – people began to selectively breed chickens for these traits, hence the emergent dominance of the tell-tale gene mutation. The reason inferred for this development is that, in the mid-10th century, the importance of religious observance was being urged anew on the population of Catholic Europe in a reform movement inspired by the Benedictine monastic order. Such observance included 130 fast days a year. “Fasting” consisted of not touching the meat of any four-legged animal (commonly goats, sheep, and cattle) on those days. Hence, a burgeoning interest in fish and in chickens, who conveniently have only two legs. It is supposed that the source of this movement must have been the Bishop of Rome.

It appears, however, that

history is more complex. By the 9th century most of the great monasteries of Europe were dominated by secular clerics, not ordained priests or monks. The Benedictines initiated a reform movement on the continent to reimpose ordained authority and the discipline of St. Benedict of Nursia – the inspiration for their order – which included observance of the fast days. The movement reached England in the mid-10th century, where the archaeological evidence is particularly clear, in what is known as the *English Benedictine Reform*. It was supported by King Edgar (959-975) and Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, and led by Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, beginning in 963. The popes of the day were drawn from the Roman aristocracy and seem to have been far more consumed with secular affairs (including murdering each other) than religious ones. Papal support for the reform movements was likely granted mainly in absence of mind, though, in 970, Pope John XIII (965–972; styled “John the Good”) issued the Regularis Concordia, a papal bull in support of the Benedictine reforms.

However that may be, it appears that the 10th century events can fairly be said to be responsible for the evolution (by selective breeding) of modern domestic chickens, and to lie at the base of the huge popularity of chicken meat and eggs, at least in the western world, today. It seems that politics can influence even animal evolution.

## References

Online post by Ann Gibbons at <http://scim.ag/popechick> (sponsored by the journal *Science*). The *English Benedictine Reform* is written up in a full article on Wikipedia.

## Epidemic Birds

Birds are important agents of human welfare. The readers of this Briefing find great pleasure in observing and studying wild birds. More prosaically, domestic poultry provide the predominant source of meat in global diets as well as eggs and derivative products, including the raw material of influenza vaccines. The global poultry population exceeds 50 billion birds. But birds can also pose significant hazards to human health.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses (HPAIVs) periodically erupt and spread around the world. While the birds appear more or less to tolerate the viruses, they cause great misery and even death amongst humans, and large economic costs. Avian influenza viruses appear to be endemic in some wild birds; HPAIVs are thought to originate in poultry populations. An instructive case occurred in 2014–15, when the influenza-type H5N8 erupted and rapidly spread across the Northern Hemisphere. (H stands for hemagglutinin and N for neuraminidase – molecular constituents of influenza viruses.) The 2014–15 outbreak apparently originated in gallinaceous (chickens) or domestic anseriforme (ducks and geese) birds in southern China sometime after 2000. The infection remained relatively localized until 2014, when it suddenly jumped to Korea and the Russian subarctic. From there it spread in the winter of 2014–15 to western and central Europe and western North America, where it caused major flu epidemics and required the culling, at great cost, of many millions of domestic chickens. How did it spread so explosively?

There are two possibilities: the international trade in domestic poultry and wild bird migrations. Records of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization indicate that East and Southeast Asia are overwhelmingly importers, not exporters, of poultry. In particular, there were few exports from Korea in 2014, and the evidence thus points squarely at wild long-distance migrants.

The H5N8 virus was in fact detected in a number of winter residents of the Korean peninsula, including Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Baikal Teal (*A. formosa*), Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*), Bean Goose (*A. fabalis*), and Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*). The Korean Peninsula is an important resting area on the East Asian flyway for birds moving from winter grounds in southern China and Indochina, birds that presumably came into contact there with domestic fowl and carried the virus north. Infected birds would then have carried the virus onward to summer grounds in Siberia. Travel of the virus to northwest and central Europe via the East Atlantic flyway may have been effected by Common Teal and Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), while in western North America the virus was detected

in American Wigeon (*A. americana*) and Northern Pintail (*A. acuta*) arriving via the Pacific Flyway. All three of these flyways come together on the summering grounds of subarctic Siberia and western Russia, where the virus can be swapped amongst species. An interesting feature of the vector birds is that they are all freshwater-oriented species: the numerous sea ducks that travel the same routes do not appear to have been involved.

More local transmission of the virus within East Asia and the receiving regions was effected by local migrants, including, in East Asia, Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*), Gadwall (*Anas strepera*), Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*), White-naped Crane (*Antigone vipio*) and Hooded Crane (*Grus monica*); in Europe, Mallard and Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*); and in North America, Mallard, Canada Goose and Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*). The list includes only species that have been tested positive; it likely is not exhaustive.

The virus certainly spread to humans from domestic poultry. In most commercial poultry operations in Europe and North America, the fowl are well isolated from wild birds. Contact with infected materials, particularly droppings, delivered to poultry pens via machinery wheels, boots and tools is suspected to be the chief means of transfer of the virus.

Controlling such epidemics is problematic. It is unrealistic to consider culling the wild birds (which would, in any case, violate several international conventions for the protection of the birds). Forewarning would be a helpful measure.

The most practical way to achieve that may be to regularly monitor the health of migrant bird populations on the subarctic summer grounds. The costs, though substantial, would be less than the costs of a renewed epidemic by several orders of magnitude.

## References

The Global Consortium for H5N8 and related influenza viruses [39 authors]. 2016. Role for migratory wild birds in the global spread of avian influenza H5N8. *Science* 354:213–217. (The article is largely about the characterization of the virus.)

Russell, C.A. 2016. Sick birds don't fly...or do they? *Ibid.* 174–175. (A more informative read.)

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*Red-breasted Sapsucker photographed  
by Joshua Brown in Coombs,  
Vancouver  
Island, summer 2016.*





# The Reflective Birder #17

Clive Keen

## Reflecting on Birding Humour

The last *Reflective Birder* article was rather sombre, so to make up for it, here's one making the same point but through a bunch of jokes. It's still reflective, since that's the title of the series, but the reflections are in the service of good cheer as well as good understanding. If you want just the jokes, though, and not the reflections, stick to the bulleted paragraphs.

- Why did the chicken cross the Mobius strip? To get to the same side.

One of the most popular theories of humour is that they confound expectations. They point us in one direction, and then pull the rug out from under us. "A collision between two frames of reference" as academics like to put it. It certainly makes sense, I believe, of nearly half of birding jokes, including the one above.

- *Question:* How do you keep a turkey in suspense? *Answer:* I'll tell you tomorrow.

One of the most pleasing things about birding humour is that the oldest theory of humour – the schadenfreude theory – rarely seems applicable. This theory says that laughter is the result of "momentary glorying in our own superiority." This is used to explain banana peel, newfie, sexist, etc., jokes. If birders were a mean lot, we'd be making lots of jokes about beginners and non-birders, but I've hardly ever come across an example. The turkey joke above might seem to fit the schadenfreude theory, but I suspect it's really explained by "incongruous juxtaposition," i.e., the confounding of expectations. The only time I really see birders using the schadenfreude type of joke is in self-deprecating humour, which you'll see often in the pages of this publication. Note that we laugh *with*, not *at*. Aren't we a nice bunch.

- Notice on a birding club wall: Keep Calm and Mark It *Larus (sp)*.

A third theory of humour sees tension-release as key to jocularity. It's a good theory for many types of humour. Fifty years ago, most jokes seemed to be about sex, because there was so much tension surrounding it, but the various sexual revolutions have made the old jokes passé and boring. Where tensions do exist, jokes abound. It's a very human way of coping with often terrible situations, a way of saying "We can deal with this!" But that is why I had to look long and hard for a birder joke based on tension. We might get a bit uptight about a *Larus* that we can only count as a *sper (sp)*, but, by and large, we aren't just a nice bunch, but really rather relaxed. Perhaps it's all that fresh air.

- The vulture had trouble boarding the aircraft, because it had too much carrion.

Perhaps surprisingly, some theorists of humour exclude puns, saying that they are not properly sources of laughter.

Certainly, in many cultures, people aren't expected to laugh at puns, but rather to nod in appreciation of the verbal cleverness. In my circle, too, the best puns never get laughs, but are rewarded with the loudest groans. Should a decent overall theory of humour exclude puns? This leads me directly to Keen's Theory of Humour.

It seems to me that all the above theories fail to address the issue of what humour is actually up to. I came to this understanding when I was in a committee meeting with a roomful of naturalists representing different opinions. We were bogged down and getting nowhere. Then, one of the members slipped in a joke which, by all objective standards, was far from great. But we all howled. We thought it

was the funniest thing we'd ever heard. We practically rolled off the committee room table in convulsions. "You had to be there" covered the content of this, and a million other killingly-funny-at-the-time jokes. Why the heck was it funny? It didn't matter in the slightest if it was based on a pun, or made us momentarily superior, or released tension. What it did was make us forget our individual stances and turn us into a we're-OK group. As a result, we found the way forward. That's what humour is really for. When a group is trying to bond, jokes provide the catalyst. However well constructed a joke might be, it will fail if the group just doesn't *want* to bond. Bonding is what humour is all about. And when, as birders, we need to make important things happen as a group – and we do – we must never forget this key ingredient.

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*A Boat-billed Heron deserves, at the very least, a quiet chortle. This one was spotted by the author near San Blas.*







*Two more great shots of the Kelowna Lucy's Warbler (see page 10), this time by Gary Davidson.*