BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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One of the Long-billed Curlews spotted in April in the famous Shelley curlew field. Photo by Jeff Dyck.

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A subscription to this quarterly is a benefit of membership in the society. Members will also receive a copy of the annual journal, *British Columbia Birds*.

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 PO Box 45111, Dunbar, Vancouver BC, V6S 2M8.

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To submit material to this publication, contact the Editor by email (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:

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Vice President: Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows, 604-465-1402 lawrencecowan@shaw.ca
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Common Merganser, photographed by Joshua Brown while twitching the Black-headed Gull at Trout Lake in Vancouver.

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See page 15 for Peter Candido's avian encounter.

President's Message

Looking Back, Looking Forward … Again

Looking Back, Looking Forward… That was the title of my inaugural President's Message of August 2012. It felt apt then, and it certainly does now that my term as your president comes to its end. It's been a fulfilling experience – great organization, great people, great birds.

By a nice coincidence as I started my duties as President, 2012 was the final year of field work for the BC Breeding Bird Atlas. 2016 sees the completed atlas published online in its full glory. It really is a milestone for ornithology in British Columbia, and is perhaps a perfect example of what BCFO is all about: the successful collaboration of birders and professional ornithologists. BCFO members not only contributed funding for the Atlas, but also contributed significantly to the massive body of data collected during the four years of fieldwork. We birders take joy in our birding but we also add to the scientific understanding of birds.

I've enjoyed my term as President immensely. It's been marvellous to work with people who have made things happen for the organization, both on the Board and among the general membership.

The following, in no particular order, all thoroughly deserve my thanks, and that of the membership:

June Ryder, Mark Habdas, and current editor Clive Keen for their work on our excellent newsmagazine, *BC Birding*.

Art Martel for his continuing editorship of our journal *British Columbia Birds*, which goes from strength to strength.

Neil Dawe deserves thanks for his support work on the journal as production editor, and also for helping me out with some of the trickier aspects of managing the website, and for archiving our publications there.

I can't mention archives without acknowledging Les Gyug's work keeping our archives in good order, and producing scanned copies ready for the website. Les has also been a great contributor and supporter of AGM related activities over the years, including leading field trips.

Vice-President Larry Cowan continues as our Membership Secretary, watching carefully as BCFO's membership has grown over the last few years, and issuing the politest reminders to forgetful members.

Treasurer Mike Fung has kept our financial ship in order as BCFO continues to sail in calm financial waters. Mike also helped in setting up our online payment system and has provided significant help with logistics related to the AGM.

Wayne Diakow was for many years BCFO's go-to person for organizing the AGM. We've had a lot to learn since taking over his duties.

All that minute keeping, and circulating them for meetings wouldn't get done without Mary Taitt our Recording Secretary, who is also coming to the end of her term on the board this

month. The board will miss her.

Jude Grass continues in her all round support role for the organization: AGMs, plaque engraving, and stand-in recording secretary and other related duties that happen to fall in her direction.

Adrian Leather has very successfully steered the Two-Day Field Trips program and continues to arrange many memorable excursions for members.

Mike McGrenere, newly returning to the Board last year, has been serving on the Nominations Committee, and has organized this year's AGM field trips.

Wayne Weber continues to serve as Chair of the Cannings Award Committee, and as our representative to the Canadian International Joint Venture.

Carlo Giovanella has been the organizer and presenter of our Featured Photographer section on the website, and has been central to the development of the Young Birder Program recognizing the Province's up and coming birding youth.

Mel Hafting's involvement with the Young Birders has created a huge leap in its activities and status. Now an official program of BCFO, not only do we recognize the province's young birders, we also have a program of field trips and activities tailored to them. Looking forward indeed!

As you can see from the above, the leadership of BCFO is in excellent hands and augurs well for the future. As for me, I'll have a bit more time for birding, but will continue in a support role for BCFO.

Looking forward to it.

George Clulow

25th Anniversary

The BCFO was formed in 1991—making this year our 25th anniversary. To commemorate the fact some caps have been created, which will be on sale at the Cranbrook AGM, at $25.

Some caps have already been donated to the Young Birders Program, as you can see from the photo below of Rebecca Reader-Lee and Bridget Spencer on page 10. (Photos by Melissa Hafting.)

Letter

Re: Rick Wright's article (*Captain Cook's Birds of Canada,* March 2016), during four years of a project that took me to Chile several times per year and going birding each time, I learned from local birding guides that "quebradahuesos" refers to both the giant-petrel and to the Andean Condor. In Spain it refers to the Lammergeir, but of course there isn't any Lammergeir in Chile. Chileans speak a kind of old form of Spanish left over from the colonial era, and the settlers five centuries ago must have applied the term to the only other large vulture—but not to the smaller vultures (black, turkey) or to other large raptors such as eagles or the Southern Caracara. "Quebradahuesos" means "break bones"; although I speak a little Spanish, the etiology of the word isn't clear to me, and I can't see how breaking bones applies to either of the Andean Condor or the Southern Giant-petrel. But I do see how the early Spanish sailors could see a Southern Giant-petrel and be reminded of a Lammergeir.

Lee Harding

Editorial

A Challenge

Something very peculiar is likely to be happening at the BCFO AGM, just as this newsmagazine is being printed. Groups will be heading off on birding trips, and in one group there is likely to be some biologists, physicians, professors, government officials and even the odd captain of industry. They'll have been birding for decades, will have read a library stackload on birds, and around their necks will be optics whose combined worth could pay off half the national debt. *But they'll be following a thirteen year-old. When he points, they will look. When he talks, they will listen.*

It's not necessarily that the kid is a birding guru, a Mozart of Ornithology, though he's being treated as one. No, what the kid will have is thirteen-year-old eyes, and ears that aren't much older. These are beyond price on any birding trip. At one conference I ferried a teenager around, and when we stopped at a likely spot, we both looked and listened. I was pleased to write down six birds. The kid wrote down fourteen.

Those of us with high-mileage eyes could just sulk at this, but far better is to reflect and see what we can learn. Lesson one is that any upwardly mobile kid would do very well indeed to take up birding and go to birder get-togethers. Character references, career advice and door-opening contacts would flow like a river. But there's a quite different lesson for the rest of us.

Serious birders are often urged to mentor young folks, and the reasons given are always altruistic. Help overcome nature deficit disorder in the young; get them away from their video games into the great outdoors; ensure the future of birding by bringing on the next generation, etc etc. Now altruism is all very well, but if you really want to make things happen, you can't beat mutual benefits. And the above story shows that benefits really can be mutual.

If you know a youngster that you might take birding, don't patronize and say it would be good for him or her to get out into nature. Say you'd really appreciate some help in spotting the birds. The kid would put you onto a lot of birds you'd otherwise miss, and you'd mentor him *en passant* by naming the birds he'd find. The kid would feel great at all the success, praise, and new discoveries, and you'd be delighted with a trip that seemed far more birdy than usual. You'd both surely want to repeat the experience, and perhaps a birding star of the future would be born.

Of course, lots of us don't have handy kids lying around that we could invite on a birding trip. What, then, to do? It's an issue that cries out for some matchmaking. Perhaps Big Brothers and Sisters could work with naturalist clubs and set something up? Perhaps school parent-teacher meetings could lead to something creative?

This is a challenge for the readership of this editorial: put on your thinking caps and see if you can find ways of bringing those great pairs of eyes together with people that would really appreciate them. For kids, birders, and the future of birding, it'd be a win-win-win.

CNK

BC Breeding Bird Atlas Published

As supporters since its inception, BCFO members will be especially gratified to see the completion of *The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of British Columbia,* Canada's first online bird atlas. BCFO members were huge contributors to all aspects of the program beyond "just" finding the birds in the field, and were well represented among the 30 authors, 20 editors, 45 coordinators, 1,300 dedicated field volunteers, 30 photographers and 150 generous partners and supporters of the Atlas.

The Atlas contains more than 1,500 high-quality maps and graphs depicting precisely where each species occurs, how common they are, and the types of landscapes they choose to breed in. Packed with innovative, user-friendly features, this entirely free new resource is designed for almost everyone, whether you are a bird watcher, environmental professional, a nature lover, a guide, a researcher, an educator or a student. There is a short site tour on the homepage, and those interested can register for free webinars hosted by Bird Studies Canada starting this June.

For the big picture of the state of BC's birds, the atlas has told us that more than 65% of BC's 320 breeding bird species appear to be stable. About 25% seem to be expanding. But 10% are probably in trouble. These are encouraging proportions by modern standards.

At the scale of individual species, 16,500 new Species at Risk records are being used to identify critical habitat and protect new breeding locations for birds like Lewis's Woodpecker, Barn Owl, Western Screech-Owl, Williamson's Sapsucker, Black Swift, Sandhill Crane, and Nelson's Sparrow.

The Atlas is a great resource to consult before making field trips for pleas-

A stunning male Bufflehead, photographed by Joshua Brown during a lovely day at Esquimalt Lagoon near

BCFO Atlassers depart for high elevations on the Chilcotin Plateau, June 2011. Photo by co-opted bystander.

ure or work. Several areas of the province remain poorly-known, like the far northwest, where the bird community is similar to the Alaskan Arctic. Remember that you can use eBird http://www.ebird.ca to enter data from previously un-surveyed or under-surveyed regions.

With 630,000 records of 320 species, it is now THE go-to source of bird information for environmental assessments and is being used widely to inform purchase and management priorities for both conservation and industrially managed lands. The dataset is ideally suited to academic research and has already been widely applied at undergraduate to post-doctoral levels.

The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of British Columbia is part of a national program mapping Canada's birds, led by Bird Studies Canada and Environment Canada. The British Columbian partners who made this project possible are the BC Field Ornithologists, BC Nature, the BC Ministry of Environment, Louisiana Pacific Canada Ltd., and the Pacific Wildlife Foundation.

You'll find all the excitement at: www.birdatlas.bc.ca

Scholarship Winners

Young birders Alice Sun and Liron Gertsman, who were featured in the March edition, are winners in the 2016 North American Nature Photography Association (NANPA) High School Scholarship Program. They will be participating in the week-long program at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tremont, Tennessee in July. Details of the program can be found at http://nanpafoundation.org/high-school-scholarships/ .

Listers' Corner Correction

Gwynneth Wilson's name was inadvertantly added to the World section of the Corner list. Gwynneth points out that she doesn't keep a world list.

Apologies for the error.

Mary Paul, 1926-2016

Long-time BCFO member Gertrude "Mary" Paul passed away in Vernon on April 4th. Mary and her husband Frank, who died in 2012, were both trained biologists, founding members of the BCFO, and known to many in the wider naturalist community. A celebration of Mary's long life was held on April 30.

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 and on the BIRDNET website at http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/ornith/birdmeet.html .

For most meetings, festivals and other events, the website is the main source of information, and registration can often be accomplished online as well. Wherever information can be obtained through a phone number or e-mail address, we have included these as well; if no contact information is listed, it can be assumed that none was provided, by the time 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.

May 27-29. BCFO AGM, Cranbrook, BC.
Full information is on the BCFO website at https://bcfo.ca/cranbrook-2016-latest . If you haven't registered by the time you read this, it may be too late!

June 2-6. WASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Walla Walla, WA. For information, including registration details, check the WOS website at http://wos.org/annual-conference/current-year .

June 3-5. 27th ANNUAL MOUNT ROBSON PROVINCIAL PARK BIRD BLITZ. For information, contact Gail Ross at gailross1@telus.net, or Nancy Krueger at 250-563-7896.

June 17-19. MANNING PARK BIRD BLITZ, MANNING PROVINCIAL PARK, BC (based at Loneduck Campground on Lightning Lake). For information and to register, check the website at http://hopemountain.org/programs/manning-park-bird-blitz-june-19-21-2015. Inquiries may be made by e-mail at info@hopemountain.org or by phone at 604-869-1274.

June 25. First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the summer/fall season from Westport, WA. This is the first of 18 trips scheduled from June through October 2016. For information, visit the Westport Seabirds webpage at http://www.westportseabirds.com .

Aug. 16-20. NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONFERENCE, Washington, D.C., USA. This is the combined meeting for 2016 of the American Ornithologists' Union, Cooper Ornithological Society, Wilson Ornithological Society, and Association of Field Ornithologists (together with several smaller organizations). The website is located at http://naoc2016.cvent.com/events/naoc-2016/event-summary9cca73ad2f044f8790ca08d7f1d28536.aspx .

Sept. 9-11. OREGON BIRDING ASSOCIATION annual meeting, Bend, Oregon, featuring full-day field trips on Saturday, half-day trips on Sunday. For details, check the OBA website at http://www.orbirds.org/2016meeting.html . Registration details to be announced.

Sept. 9-11. PUGET SOUND BIRD FESTIVAL, Edmonds, WA. For information and to register (starting Aug. 1). check the festival website at http://www.pugetsoundbirdfest.com , or contact Sally Lider at the City of Edmonds Parks Dept. (phone 425-771-0227, or at sallylider@edmondswa.gov).

Sept. 16-18. 30th ANNUAL OREGON SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL, Charleston, OR (near Coos Bay). Includes a pelagic birding trip as well as shorebird field trips. For information or to register, visit the festival website at http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Bandon_Marsh/visit/visitor_activities/shorebird_festival.html, phone Dawn Harris at (541) 867-4550 (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service office in Newport, OR), or email Dawn at dawn_harris@fws.gov .

Sept. 18. WEST COAST PELAGIC BIRDING TRIP from Ucluelet, organized by Edmonton Nature Club. For information or to buy tickets, contact James Fox by email at fox.james.ed@gmail.com . (There is no WildResearch pelagic trip in 2016.)

Sept. 20-23. 40TH ANNUAL MEETING, THE WATERBIRD SOCIETY, New Bern, North Carolina. For information and to register, visit the conference website at http://www.waterbirds.org/annual_meeting-2015 .

Sept. 28 - Oct. 2. WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL MEETING, Fortuna, CA (Humboldt County). For details, check www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php .

Oct. 6-9. WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION annual meeting, Point Reyes Station, California. For general information, check the WBBA website at http://www.westernbirdbanding.org/meeting_2016.html . For details, contact Marlene Wagner (mawagner@sfu.ca) or Steve Albert (salbert@birdpop.org).

Oct. 15-19. 23rd ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY, Raleigh Convention Center, Raleigh, North Carolina. For further information and to register, visit the conference website at http://wildlife.org/tws-23rd-annual-conference . Registration opens on May 15.

Oct. 16-20. RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Cape May, New Jersey. For further details, visit the conference website at http://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org/conferences/current-conference .

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 , 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*.

BCFO Two-day Trips

Vancouver Shorebirds

September 24-25, 2016

Organization

Leader: Brian Self, Delta, 604-943-9378; brianself@eastlink.ca
Registration/Admin: Adrian Leather, Quesnel, 250-249-5561, qabis4@gmail. com

Itinerary

Saturday

- Morning: Ladner Harbour Park; Reifel Bird Sanctuary, Westham Island
- Afternoon: Boundary Bay
- Tally-up at Skyhawk Restaurant (Boundary Bay Airport, Unit 102-7800 Alpha Way, Ladner, 778-434-1238).

Sunday

- Morning: Tsawwassen Jetty
- Afternoon: Boundary Bay

Accommodation

- Beach Grove Motel, Tsawwassen (5921 12 Ave Delta, 604-943-2632). $125.35 per night inc. tax.
- Other Accommodation: Coast Inn, Tsawwassen (1665 56 St, Delta, 604 -943-8221)
- Delta Town & Country Inn, Ladner (6005 Hwy.17.A. Delta, 604-946-4404)

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.

John Gordon writes: On the last day of the Langley Field Naturalists visit to Princeton May 6-8 we stopped off at one of our hosts' (Vermilion Forks Field Naturalists) homes where a flock of Cassin's Finches and Evening Grosbeaks were visiting a feeder. For many of the club members the Cassin's was a lifer and a rare opportunity to see both male and female birds.

Young Birders Program

Bridget Spencer got a lot of compliments on her new BCFO birder hat. Photo by Melissa Hafting.

The program is growing and now includes 23 kids. A number of events are planned for the summer:

June 4: Merritt Trip
The trip is already full. Targets are Black Tern, Swainson's Hawk, Meadowlarks, Clay-coloured Sparrow, Black-billed Magpie, Eared and Horned Grebe in breeding, American White Pelicans, Lewis' Woodpecker, Bluebirds, Burrowing Owl, Ruffed and Dusky Grouse (possible Spruce and Sharp-tailed), Calliope Hummingbird, Osprey, Ruddy Ducks, Vesper Sparrow, Williamson's Sapsucker (possible), Chipping Sparrow, Common Loon with chicks, Red-necked Grebes with chicks, Townsend's Solitaire, House Wren, Eastern Kingbird, Western Kingbird, Say's Phoebe, Red-naped Sapsucker, Bullock's Oriole, all three Nuthatch species, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Horned Lark, Redhead, All three Teal species, Gray Catbird and possibly a Great Gray Owl.

July 16: Catbird Slough and Grant Narrows
A lot of kids have signed up for this. Targets include Eastern Kingbirds, Redstarts and various other warblers.

August 27: Pelagic
This trip filled up within two days of getting the word out. It is from Sooke with Sooke Explorations in the Juan De Fuca Strait. There will be chumming and Ilya Povalyaev will be the spotter. Expected birds include Pink-footed and Sooty Shearwaters, Jaegers and Northern Fulmars. There should be a good chance at seeing whales also.

Other Trips
If there is enough interest the group might also hike to Flatiron Mountain for Ptarmigan this summer.

For information, contact Melissa Hafting at bcbirdergirl@)gmail.com .

Avian Encounters

Great Gray Surprise

Bob Steventon, Prince George

I walked past a window, took a few steps and the thought struck me … the swallow house didn't look right. A return to the window confirmed that a Great Gray Owl was perched on it.

I got my camera and situated myself on the landing at our side door. The owl was studying the snow still covering much of our yard on March 11. It was late in the day so I boosted the camera's ISO to 3200 and waited for the owl to fly. I shot a burst when it moved from the birdhouse to one of the poles that support the anti-moose electric fencing around our garden.

The owl looked at me from time to time but didn't seem particularly concerned that I was watching. I didn't want to wade through the snow to try to get closer. I fetched a chair so I could watch in comfort and rested my camera on the railing. The owl studied the snow and watched an aircraft that passed overhead. It moved from one garden pole to another over a period of about an hour and made several forays down to the snow. I didn't see it catch anything. When the snow was gone, there were indeed vole runways in the grass but the snow was hard and about a foot deep when the owl was here.

The owl returned at the same time on the following day but we haven't seen it since.

These images have been cropped and were shot at ISO 3200. I'm always surprised at how well the current crop of DSLRs do compared to what was possible just a few years ago.

(Nikon D800E, Nikkor 80-400 f/4.5-5.6G ED VR Lens.)

Very Grumpy Dusky Grouse

The following is an extract from a May 9 article by Phil Tomlinson in the website of the Alpine Club of Canada, Calgary Section.

...It didn't seem too worried about us and we enjoyed the opportunity to see a bird none of us were familiar with up close.

Aww, isn't he pretty?

And then everything went to hell.

I've always sort of figured, during long, solo trail runs, that if I run into a black bear, or a cougar or something, that being reasonably tough, reasonably fit and having survived a lot of years of being an idiot, I could fight it off or something. Now I know that if anything bigger than a chipmunk attacks me, I'm toast.

See, first the grouse walked over and we thought it was cute. I took a photo of it, Susan took her phone out to record a video. And then it started charging us. We tried to fend it off with our poles – it didn't get the message. I tried to sweep it away from us – at which point Susan yelled at me "Don't hit it, it's nature!" and it kept coming. Shortly thereafter, I heard Susan wondering if birds can get rabies.

All of a sudden our cute encounter with nature had devolved into a running battle. The last words uttered by Susan in the video she captured were, and I kid you not "Run Katherine, save yourself!". I yelled at the others to run while I fended the stupid bird off as it charged me over and over again. Susan then watched my back as I sprinted down the trail – but the stupid bird kept coming.

For more than a kilometre, we would run down the trail a bit, look over our shoulder and see this idiotic bird coming after us. It was like someone had transplanted the soul of a polar bear into a 1kg bird – it was hunting us, and it would not rest until we were dead. One cannot adequately convey the bizarre, confused terror of running down the trail and having a bird relentlessly stalking you. It didn't run, it just kept coming – like some sort of terminator bent of ridding the world of us.

Eventually we got to the base of the climb and the stupid bird was still coming. We threw rocks near the bird to try and scare it away – it kept coming. The rocks got bigger but did nothing to dissuade the bird as it chased us around the belay stance. Three of us, each 50 times the size of the bird and we were losing the battle.

We had started off trying to be very careful to not hurt the bird in any way. Eventually that became trying to not kill the bird but appreciating that keeping it from pecking us to death might require the sort of encouragement to leave that could have us inadvertently injure the bird. My entire life I've been taught to respect nature and not harm

A Dusky Grouse in a much more benign mood. CNK photo.

even a tree if I can possibly avoid it – and here I was attempting to keep this stupid bird from pecking me, while desperately trying to not hurt the thing. Eventually, as it simply did not get the message after I repeatedly deflected its attacks with my ski pole, I found myself wondering if I was going to have to kill this stupid bird and what the implications of that action might be. Does Parks Canada consider it acceptable to kill a bird that has been attacking you for nearly an hour as you flee over a kilometre down the trail? Can you consider injuring something that can't actually hurt you in any meaningful way self defence? Would they send me to prison for very long if I strangled the thing? Would they at least let me eat the stupid thing after I killed it?

For some reason, I don't know that I will ever know for sure, the bird all of a sudden took off (could have been it finally got tired of getting shooed, could have been that it saw Susan teeing up with her pole to take its head off like a tee-ball) and calmly soared away – apparently completely uninjured and simply bored of attempted murder. All of a sudden the battle was over and the bird was gone – and yet for hours afterwards we would flinch at every movement – terrified the psychotic bird was back.

Later research has turned up grouse attacks all over the place and with similar results. Turns out male grouse get really grumpy and are incredibly hard to drive off. I feel like this is a major failing on the part of evolution since I'm guessing that doing the same thing to a grizzly bear would go poorly for the grouse – it just got lucky to run into three mountaineers who between them couldn't fight off a three-pound bird.

Iona Osprey

John Gordon

Since early April a pair of osprey have been feasting on fish, probably introduced bullheads, at the Iona Inner Ponds in Richmond. The best time to watch them is later in the afternoon and until sunset when the soft light bathes the birds in 'sweet light.'

Some birders think there are actually three different birds: one pair nesting close to the Botanical Gardens at UBC, and another lone bird. The birds circle the pond first hovering before diving from about 20 metres. During their hunting sessions the bird were constantly harassed by male red-winged blackbirds. The Ospreys' success rate is a catch about one in every five attempts.

Although I* have seen osprey many times I had never been so close and with such beautiful light to work with; it was a most rewarding experience.

(Nikon D500 and 500 AFS F4 1/1600 F5.6 ISO 400.)

First in Clearwater

Dennis Leonard

"What could be making this?" was likely the thought Allen had going through his mind. "Only thing to do is follow it." So he trudged along a fairly long trail in the deep snow which looked like a penguin had traveled on its belly leaving wing marks on each side. The large, bowl-shaped yard had banks

of snow in several spots which forced the creature to search in another direction. The trail ended near the door of the workshop. The bird, a waterfowl of some sort, was easily picked up and a "pond" created using a large tote of water with a rock to climb on to get up onto a carpeted shelf in one corner.

So it was December 26, 2014, that I received a call from my neighbour Allen with a baffling description of the bird he found on his other property in a subdivision overlooking frozen Dutch Lake in Clearwater, BC. The call forced me to investigate further with the result being, "Oh my gosh, what is this? Definitely not a specie I've ever seen, but it seems to be a seabird." Sibley's identified it as an Ancient Murrelet. "What is a seabird doing in Clearwater?"

A call to the local veterinarian resulted in him not being home and his wife unable to reach him through the evening. Later, a call to the Kamloops Wildlife Park indicated a concern that the bird might lose its insulating abilities if it was out of the water very long. Since it had a "pond" that didn't seem to be a problem. A suggestion to feed it thin strips of fish was promising as Allen had trout in his freezer. Another option was to transport the bird to Kamloops Wildlife Park. The murrelet was paddling, preening, and a few strips of fish left on the shelf had disappeared. Shrimp did not tempt it.

The sad phone call of its passing came the next morning. Ildiko Szabo, the Assistant Curator of the UBC Beaty Biodiversity Museum, Cowan Tetrapod Collection was interested in receiving the deceased murrelet. After transport to UBC, further communication indicated, "the Ancient Murrelet has been prepared and turned out beautifully. Next time you are at the museum, do ask to see the specimen. She was a female. Cause of death was extreme starvation which can be from malnutrition or extended migration. The breast muscles had atrophied but more importantly the liver and other internal organs had shrunk to about 1/3 normal size. In such cases the heart remains the same size or grows slightly."

So that is the story of the first reported sighting of an Ancient Murrelet in Clearwater, BC. One is left wondering what events transpired for the Ancient Murrelet to become grounded in a snow-filled subdivision so far from the ocean. It was an emotional roller coaster finding a rare bird only to have it pass away.

Left: Ancient Murrelet. Photo by Dennis Leonard.

Cooperative Peregrine

From an ncenbird message from Jeff Dyck

"I was able to locate a Eurasian Wigeon amongst the large flock of American Wigeon. Just as I was concluding my counts, the whole field of ducks erupted upward as a Peregrine Falcon came rocketing across the field. The real cherry on the evening was that after buzzing the field a couple times the Peregrine landed in an open snag directly in front of me and stuck around for a few minutes allowing me to get some good photos, albeit at a high ISO–3200."

Curious Chickadee Nestsite

Peter Candido

Having just finished birding at Iona Island in Richmond on the morning of May 16, 2016, I was sitting in my vehicle preparing to leave when a movement caught my eye. I saw a Black-capped Chickadee perching on and then entering a cigarette disposal container which was mounted on a post at the edge of the parking lot. Having my camera handy, I sat and waited to see and record the birds' behaviour. The bird (I assumed a pair was present, though I saw only one individual) was making frequent trips to carry clumps of moss and other soft plant material into the unit, and on its way out it usually carried away a cigarette butt!

This reminded me of a study I had read about a few years ago: some biologists had noted that nests of many urban birds had incorporated cigarette butts. Since nicotine is toxic and repellent to arthropods such as mites and other parasites, a controlled study was carried out to see if nests with cigarette butts had lower parasite loads than those without them, using nests of House Finches and House Sparrows. Indeed, the number of ectoparasites in the nests was inversely proportional to the quantity of cigarette material.* Some bird species add fresh plants to the nest, plants which likely contain volatile compounds that repel parasites. The use of cigarette butts is thus an extension of an ancient adaptive behaviour.

Perhaps the chickadees in this case were taking this process one step further – or was their choice of nest site simply a reflection of the extremely tight housing market in Metro Vancouver?

After being informed about the nest, the park manager decided to remove it for the safety of the birds and place a nest box nearby for them.

*Suárez-Rodríguez, M., López-Rull, I. & Garcia, C. M. "Incorporation of cigarette butts into nests reduces nest ectoparasite load in urban birds: new ingredients for an old recipe?" Biol. Lett. http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/

rsbl.2012.0931 (2012).

Briefings

Summaries and comments by M Church

Climate Change and The Birds

Climate change is real, despite what arguments the remaining naysayers may advance. The best indicators do not derive from the notoriously variable weather, but from various physical and ecological effects that respond to the cumulative effect of weather – which is climate. Such indicators include glaciers, Arctic ice, winter snowfall, leafing and flowering time of plants (known as 'phenology'), and ranges and annual timing of activities of animals. Amongst these, population trends, ranges and activities of birds are a prominent example. Mostly small creatures whose individual survival is always tenuous, birds are all environmental canaries.

A group of researchers (33 of 'em!) has taken advantage and looked at bird population trends in Europe and North America (actually, the U.S.) over the period 1980-2010 – the period within which climate change has accelerated to the point of being convincing. They studied 145 European species that are tracked by the Pan-European Common Birds Monitoring Scheme and 380 North American species using data from Breeding Bird Surveys. Only six of the species are common to both continents. They analyzed data from individual countries in Europe and individual states in the U.S., then combined the results into a summary index for each continent. First they gathered data of species abundance for each study unit and correlated the birds' occurrence with mean climate data. These results were then applied to annual climate data for the study period to determine whether year-to-year variations in weather tended to favour or discourage the birds' occurrence. The outcomes were aggregated into two groups for each continent: those birds favoured by climate trends and those birds discouraged. The summary index that resulted was called a 'climate suitability index' (meaning more or less suitable for the birds' welfare).

Striking differences and similarities appear between the continents. In Europe birds apparently favoured by climate change have maintained but not increased their populations; birds disfavoured have markedly declined. In North America, favoured birds have increased, while disfavoured ones have maintained static populations. Yet the divergence between the favoured and disfavoured groups is similar on both continents.

The researchers do not speculate on reasons for the different trends on the two continents. One reason could be greater habitat loss in Europe. Another may be geography. A warming climate may prompt birds to move north and upslope, and to arrive on breeding grounds earlier in the spring. In Europe, birds returning from a winter in Africa encounter the formidable barrier of the east-west oriented alpine regions (Pyrenees, Alps, Carpathians, Caucasus), where wintry conditions persist at high elevations. In the Americas, the mountains are oriented north-south and easily bypassed by migrants and range extenders. Further research is in order.

Reference

Stephens, P.A. + 32 others. 2016. Consistent response of bird populations to climate change on two continents. Science 352: 84-87.

How to Carry Out an Extinction Event

Everyone knows about the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon (Ectopistes migratorius). The last bird died in captivity in 1914, but they were effectively extinct in the wild by 1900 or shortly thereafter. Yet they had once been the most abundant bird in North America – at an estimated 3-5 billion individuals, possibly the world. The details of their decline are instructive. A staple food of native North Americans, they came under increasing hunting pressure after European settlement. After 1850 (with the advent of the railways) large commercial markets developed for pigeon meat and annual harvests of the easily slaughtered birds reached many millions (there is a disturbing account of the hunting methods on Wikipedia). Between 1870 and 1890 their numbers declined catastrophically.

Habitat destruction and reproductive failure have also been considered as causes of their decline; reproductive failure because the birds fed on acorns, chestnuts and beech nuts and so, in their numbers, relied heavily on mast years for adequate food supplies. Locally, they did vary dramatically in numbers as they roamed the eastern North American woodlands in search of masting stands. Recently, a researcher at Stony Brook University has constructed a mathematical model of Passenger Pigeon population dynamics that takes account of all the factors that might have affected their numbers. She finds that, under any plausible assumptions about habitat loss (which might have halved the size of the viable population) and natural population dynamics, only hunting can account for the rate of decline and ultimate extinction of the birds. The estimated effective harvest rate was 4 million birds per year.

The purpose of this model study was actually to address the question 'under contemporary conditions of wildlife management, could the Passenger Pigeon have been saved?' In particular, would the red list of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) have flagged the decline in time? Decisions about listing animals (or plants) as vulnerable, threatened or endangered are based mainly on censuses of their numbers, reviewed every decade or so. By this process, there would scarcely have been time to flag the deteriorating state of the Pigeons: the decimation of the initially abundant population occurred over about half a century and the most precipitous decline occurred in about two decades. The researcher concludes that we need to compare population numbers with rates of loss (by harvest or other means) to adequately classify the status of potentially threatened biota.

An exact parallel seems to playing out in Eurasia today. The Yellow-breasted bunting (Emberiza aureola) is a formerly 'superabundant' inhabitant of Eurasia, with several hundred million birds on breeding territories stretching from Finland to the Pacific coast of Russia. The birds winter in southeast Asia and they funnel through eastern China to get there. In China and in Indochina they are trapped and sold as a somewhat prestigious food item.

Beginning in about 1990 the population began a precipitous decline. Today, 25 years later, it has become effectively extinct in the westernmost part of its summer range, its range limit having apparently retreated eastward by 5000 km (that is 200 km/year!). Quickly alert to the issue, Chinese authorities banned taking the birds in 1997, but enforcement has not been effective. Hundreds of thousands to over a million captured birds are still seized by officials each year. The bird has advanced from 'near threatened' status to 'endangered' in just 10 years. Researchers constructed a model of population dynamics exactly parallel to that conceived for the Passenger Pigeon study and concluded, again, that only the harvest rate could explain the rapidity of the bird's decline.

Other Emberizid finches follow the same migration route and may be on their way to the same fate. The problem of gross over-harvesting of what seem to be abundant populations appears to apply in today's world to other situations as well. It probably accounts for the crash of the western Atlantic (read Newfoundland and Labrador) Northern Cod stocks in the 1990s, and one fears that it applies to the poaching of elephants for their ivory that remains a serious problem in central and southern Africa. Our management of rapidly declining populations and even our methods for early detection of impending trouble in seemingly numerous populations appear still to be decidedly imperfect, despite the century-old lesson of the Passenger Pigeon.

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Stanton, J.C. 2014. Present-day risk assessment would have predicted the extinction of the passenger pigeon (Ectopistes migratorius). Biological Conservation 180: 11–20. doi: 10.1016/j.biocon.2014.09.023.

Feral Fowl

About 1 000 years ago (no; this is not a fairy tale), Polynesian voyagers remarkably reached the Hawaiian Islands. They brought with them all that they needed for their survival, including coconut seeds, taro, sweet potato, dogs, pigs – and chickens. Their chickens were not like the domestic fowl of today; they were much closer to the ancestral red jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus*) of southeast Asia. Nor did they farm them the way we do; the chickens were allowed to run free around their villages. Inevitably, some disappeared into the woods. Modern domestic chickens arrived with the Europeans. While they are more closely guarded, some just as inevitably have 'gone native' too – especially, it seems, during the general confusion of hurricanes, when poorly built chicken coops might be blown apart. The end result is a distinctive hybrid chicken that runs wild in the islands.

Europeans also brought predators with them, notably the mongoose, that have largely decimated the wild chickens in most of the islands. But the predators are absent from Kauai, the most northwesterly of the major islands, and from its small neighbours. Here the chickens thrive to the point of being both a significant nuisance to local farmers (they eat seed crops and scratch out seedling orchard trees) and an integral part of the local culture. Tourists in the parks discover that they are inveterate panhandlers.

The feral fowl of Kauai are unlike either of their ancestors. They are intermediate in size between jungle fowl and domestic poultry (the latter, of course, being bred for rapid growth and large size), are more agile, have larger brains than domestic fowl (not surprising; they need to think quickly to survive), and – while having plumage dominated by the red and orange of the jungle fowl – may carry badges of white feathers inherited from European chickens. They appear to lay eggs seasonally, rather than continuously, and brood the eggs – essential to produce offspring but unlike the continuous laying habits that have been bred (by selection) into domestic fowl. Yet they vocalize like domestic fowl (and so the roosters can be a

Swainson's Hawks have as usual been passing through Prince George in small numbers during migration, but the race is now on to find the first proof of breeding in the region. CNK photo.

considerable annoyance at 4:00 a.m.)

The interesting thing about these birds is the challenge they pose to the simple dichotomy of animals as being either 'domestic' or 'wild'. They seem to be reversing the normal path from wild to domesticated. Genetics, however, tells us that this is not precisely so. They are evolving traits necessary for their survival but, in a human-dominated world, these are not entirely the traits of the red jungle fowl. Many other animals in effect share this situation, but it has not much been thought about. Our local pond Mallards are an obvious example – one often finds among them an obvious 'barnyard Mallard'. Then there are the wild horses of the western plains and Sable Island, examples that are not hybrids but do demonstrate a reversion of characteristics. The last supposedly real 'wild' horses – Przewalski's horses of the Mongolian steppe – turn out to possess an embarrassing amount of domestic horse DNA. So, what is wild? Does it matter? Can you list your sighting of a feral chicken when next you visit Kauai? (If not, you'd better stop listing Rock pigeons.)

Reference

Callaway, E. 2016. When chickens go wild. *Nature* 529: 270-273 (news article)

Champion Traveller

The Blackpoll Warbler (Setophaga striata) breeds across the boreal forests of Canada and winters in northern South America, principally Venezuela and Colombia. How does it get from A to B? In spring they (the eastern birds, at least) hop the Caribbean to Cuba, thence to Florida and up the eastern seaboard of the US to New England and into the boreal forest. But in autumn, while there are few sightings of these birds in the southeastern U.S., there are records from Bermuda and from ships at sea. Then they turn up in Puerto Rico and on Hispaniola (Dominican Republic and Haiti). So do these diminutive (average weight 12 g) migrants actually fly over the ocean from New England and Nova Scotia to the Caribbean?

To find out, researchers attached daylight time recorders (average weight 0.5 g) to 37 birds in Vermont and Nova Scotia. From daylight timing it is possible to work out the bird's position (latitude and longitude) at any time (though the beasts' habit of diving into shady woodlands muddies the record). The following year five recorders were recovered. Incredibly, they showed that these birds do indeed depart the New England shoreline in October and fly directly to the Caribbean over the Atlantic Ocean. Overwater distances varied from 2270 to 2770 km – and these are minimum, straight-line estimates since the recorders were not sufficiently precise to record deviations from a straight course. Non-stop flight time varied from 49 to 73 hours (average 62 hours) at speeds varying from 39 to 48 km/hr. One bird left Long Island and landed in the Turks and Caicos Islands, having covered 1500 km at an average speed of 83 km/hr!

Comparing migratory flight distances amongst species, the researchers calculated that Blackpolls cover 233 km/gram weight (based on average weight -- the birds are actually heavier at take-off, having fuelled up for the flight. The recorded birds averaged 16 grams when 'wired up'). The Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) travels 3400 km, mostly over water, from the Canadian Arctic to the United Kingdom, for 136 km/gram. And the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilocus colubris*) is thought to cross the Gulf of Mexico, which would be slightly farther (the bird weighs 3-4 grams and the distance is at least 850 km), but no firm tracking data exist. Nor is it known how Blackpolls from farther west in North America get from A to B. On the basis of their departure weight and distance travelled, the researchers estimate that a Blackpoll could travel a maximum distance of 3800 km non-stop in 81 hours. Truly an amazing feat.

Reference

DeLuca, W.V., Woodworth, B.K., Rimmer, C.C., Marra, P.P., Taylor, P.D., McFarland, K.P., Mackenzie, S.A. and Norris, D.R. 2015 Transoceanic migration by a 12 g song-bird. Biology Letters 11: 20141045 .doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2014.1045.

How The Birds Got Their Feathers

(with apologies to Rudyard Kipling)

Once upon a time birds were dinosaurs. Now dinosaurs exercised only partial, or perhaps little, control over their internal temperature. In this circumstance, it would serve them well to have a nice warm coat. And so some dinosaurs sprouted hair-like protofeathers that insulated them. This was a good thing, for the insulation reduced bodily heat loss and the energy saved could be put into faster growth and more active metabolism, the better to eat your neighbor. (The feared Tyrannosaurs were feathered, contrary to the usual artist's conception of T.rex.) Insulation also gave some advantage to small dinos: since a smaller creature has a larger surface area to body mass ratio, it has a proportionally greater need to conserve heat. Once feathers appeared, body size decreased quickly in the lineage that ultimately led to the birds (which is why we don't have flying T.rex today).

However, feathers also posed a problem. The drab colour of filamentous feathers robs the wearer of sexy colouration, which might have been present on bare skin. The answer to this dilemma was the development of overlying pennaceous feathers (that is, ones with a stiff spine and barbed filaments to lend structural strength). These feathers developed special surfaces that reflect light (hence the iridescence seen in many birds) in such a way that they projected brilliant colours in the eye of the beholder (the more so if you are a bird, for then you would have 'tetrochromatic' eyesight: the ability to see ultraviolet light as well as the red-green-blue that our eyes are adapted to see). Eventually, these feathers provided several functions, including communication (to prospective mates or rivals about who you are), a degree of protection (camouflage), and the stiff surfaces necessary for winged flight.

So feathers preceded flight, and weren't initially intended to support flight. Interestingly, those birds that today lack pennaceous feathers (kiwis, ostriches, cassowaries – all ratites) are notably drab (except that cassowaries have skin colour on unfeathered areas) and can't fly! And why, you may ask, did mammals not develop similar plumage (or, 'why can't pigs fly')? The theory is that, being mostly nocturnal, early mammals had no need for bright coloration, so they developed fur and guard hair instead, remained drab and, like us, see only red-green-blue. One is left to

wonder what a peacock looks like in the ultraviolet.

Reference
Koschowitz, M.-C., Fischer, C. and Sander, M. 2014. Beyond the rainbow. Science 346: 416-418

Trip Note

Very Unexpected Sighting in Vallarta

The following was written by Greg R. Homel in his blog birdingadventure. *Since then the report has created quite a stir down south.*

In recent years, an exponential influx of birding pioneers to and within the Vallarta region has really started to ramp up local knowledge of our ornithological richness. And the growing species list — which now numbers around 400 — is impressive to say the least!

Sometimes it's tempting to assume "everything" has been discovered by now.… But every once in awhile a discovery is made that so knocks the socks off even the most avid birding pioneer, that other sightings pale by comparison. Such was the case for Canadian birder, John Gordon, who, on March 20th, decided to take a bus from Old Town Vallarta to Vallarta Botanic Garden.

Luckily for the rest of us, Mr. Gordon — who is an excellent birder — made that fateful day trip. It was his first visit… and he made history! Among the birds John Gordon saw, photographed and posted on his blog, TheCanadianWarbler.blogspot, was a mysterious raptor flying directly over the garden "against the cobalt blue sky [in] a kettle of vultures and hawks!"

A week later, Mr Gordon contacted me, asking for help identifying some of the species he photographed… possibly assuming the photos he provided were commonly-occurring species. Included in the impressive collection was an image that made my jaw drop: It was Jalisco's only recorded Black-and-White Hawk-Eagle!

This Neotropical species ranges primarily in montane and lowland forests from southeastern Mexico through Central America to Amazonia and Argentina, with a small number inhabiting Oaxaca and Chiapas' Sierra Madre del Sur in West Mexico. There are, however, occasional, disjunct (by more than 1000 kilometers) sightings in southern Nayarit.

In recent years two other hawk-eagle species—Ornate and Black—have been recorded in Cabo Corrientes' wild interior, along with Double-toothed Kite. Combined with the presence of such keystone species as Hook-billed Kite, Military Macaw, Jaguar, Mexican Beaded Lizard and others, these sightings emphasize just how important Cabo Corrientes is to biodiversity in West Mexico/

Many recent sightings of significance are reported by first-time visitors like John Gordon. And some of the best sightings have occurred right here at Vallarta Botanic Garden! So keep your eyes and lenses pointed skyward, you may be the next to make such a discovery!

Book Review

North American Hummingbirds: An Identification Guide

George C West, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2015, 233 pp illus, $32.50 CDN

It's been more than a decade since the two dominant hummingbird field guides (Sheri L. Williamson's *A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America(Peterson's Guide*) and Stephen Howell's *Hummingbirds of North America: The Photographic Guide*) were published, so it was definitely time to see a new entry into this field. Getting ahead of the 2nd edition of the Peterson Guide scheduled for 2016, George West's *North American Hummingbirds: An Identification Guide* hit the bookstores in November 2015. In his new book, West describes seventeen dependable species and eight accidental or vagrant species of hummingbirds found north of Mexico.

West is a hummingbird bander and along with Sheri Williamson and Barbara Carlson of California, formed the Hummingbird Monitoring Network in 2002. As a licensed hummingbird bander, West had an advantage over many other observers, as he was permitted to capture and photograph hummingbirds in the hand. Most of the abundant photographs in the book are his own. These allow the reader a close-up look they may never experience in person. In addition to the detailed photographs, each species is also illustrated by simple but clear drawings, allowing direct comparisons between sexes and age classes.

Each species account profiles the physical differences between ages and sexes, sounds made, similar species, distribution, migration, courtship and nesting and nutrition and molt. Only the physical characteristics are illustrated, however; there are no range maps or other diagrams in the book.

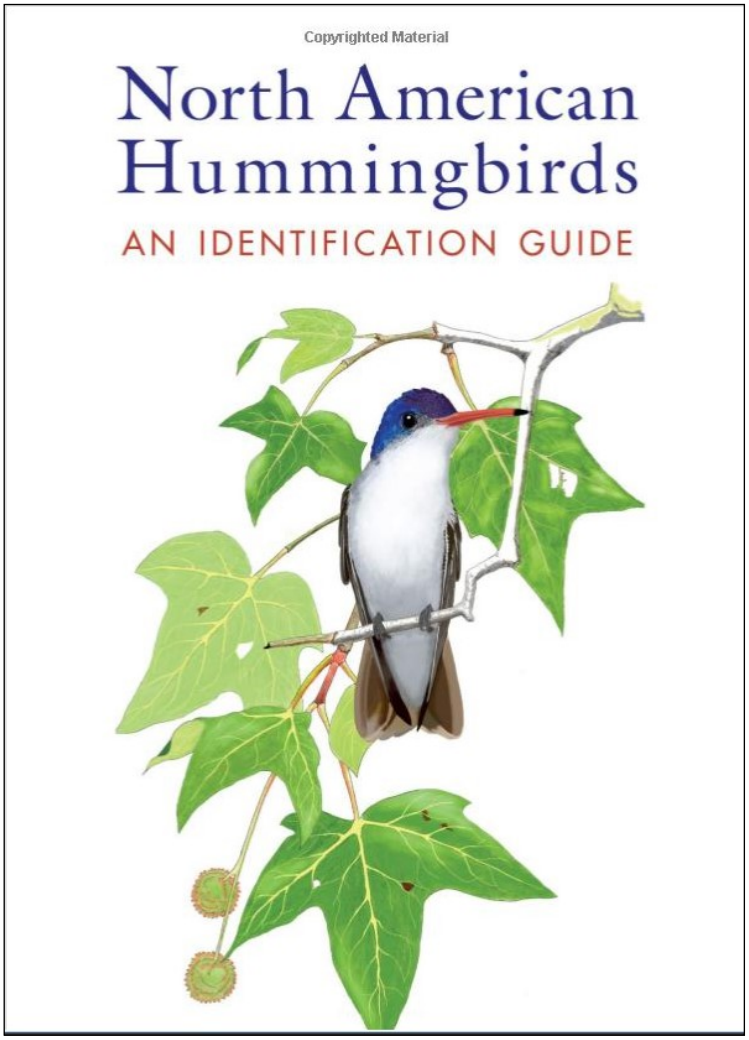
West targets two distinct audiences with this book: birders and hummingbird banders, something that unfortunately may make this book less appealing to both. Much of the descriptive text is appropriate for birders, but it is interspersed with precise measurements (to a tenth of a millimeter) and somewhat cryptic codes used by banders. Many of the characteristics that allow determination of a bird's sex and age while the bird is in the hand are simply not visible in the field. That said, some of the details provided may help hummingbird photographers analyze and categorize their photos.

My biggest concern about the book is the format. As a birder, I found myself faced with too little, and then too much, information. The diagram that shows terminology that is used throughout the book appears at the end, rather than at the beginning where it might be more useful. Without range maps, it was difficult to picture where I might travel to find a species (despite a written description) and no information was given about abundance. Detailed photographs were interspersed in the species account in such a way that a descriptive sentence might begin on one page and not end until ten pages later. It seems there is an assumption that the reader has enough experience to understand where on the bird to find a p9 or r5 (or other coded) feather.

As a bander, I found the photographs of the tails and other body parts the most valuable content in the book. These can be very useful, especially in the identification and sexing of juvenile hummingbirds and I can see having this book on hand as a reference. However, the organization of the book into large, medium, and small hummingbird confused me. This is such a subjective assessment and is based on the reader's prior experience. Having made the bold move to classify the birds this way, the author did not follow through in the same manner with the vagrants and accidentals, further confusing the order of presentation.

The author and his wife spent many years of their lives banding more than 14,500 hummingbirds. The book shares what must be only a small part of what they learned about these charismatic birds over that time. Despite its shortcomings, I think this book may well be enjoyed by people who are familiar with hummingbirds in general, and wish to delve a little more into the detail usually reserved for those privileged enough to be banders.

Ann Nightingale



BIRDS AGAINST BUILDINGS

THUNK!..... Oh no! Not another bird? But yes, there's a little corpse on the deck. It's still warm when I pick it up. *What can I do to prevent these casualties???*

Every year in Canada about 25 million birds die when they collide with glass, primarily windows. *Birds are completely unfamiliar with glass.* Lethal collisions occur because windows have two deadly properties: they are *transparent* (invisible) and *reflective*. A bird will fly headlong into a glass barrier that it does not see, and it will fly into glass that is reflecting familiar habitat, such as trees, a garden, or sky. Birds also collide with other structures that consist of clear glass: greenhouses, solariums, transit stations, bus shelters and glassed-in walkways. Flying birds hit glass head-first. Many die on impact, while those that flutter away or appear to recover are likely to die later due to brain injuries.

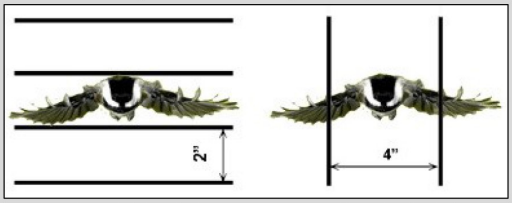
House windows account for most bird deaths because houses are by far the most numerous type of building. But birds are also killed by multi-unit residences, including high-rise towers, and any building that has windows.

Local habitat also affects the risk of bird/window collisions. If your building is close to attractive habitat, there will be more birds nearby and a higher risk of collisions. Shrubs, trees, plants with berries or seed-heads, long grass and weeds, gardens and water (especially moving water) all attract birds. If you live in a high-rise, you will find that birds are active, (e.g., hunting for flying insects) up to slightly more than the height of nearby vegetation. So window and balcony-glass collisions are possible up to one or even two floors higher than the local tree-tops.

Fortunately, there are many options available to us that can drastically reduce the number of bird deaths. For example, simple dots on window-glass (see below) can reduce collisions by as much as 80%! New technology is currently enabling the production of non-reflective glass and glass that is visible to birds, but these products are not yet widely used by the construction industry.

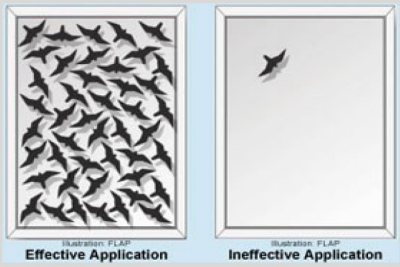
To deal with clear glass, first check your home from a bird's-eye view. From any outside window, can you see right through the building and out of another window? Birds commonly fly through "tunnels" in their natural habitat, so they may try to take a short-cut through your home. Be sure to check corner windows (two windows at right angles) where a bird cutting the corner would collide with glass. Block such potential flight paths with curtains or screens. Also check for indoor plants behind windows, and especially *plants on balconies or decks that are behind clear glass.* Any such plants are likely to attract birds that will hit the glass. There are many ways in which we can make clear glass visible to the birds. For starters, an easy option is to never wash it -- just let dust, splotches and stains accumulate!

A very effective way to address both the visibility and reflectivity problems is to subdivide the glass into clearly defined (to a bird) small areas that are each too small for a bird to attempt to fly through. These small spaces must be be no more than 5 cm high and 10 cm wide (or 2" x 4").



From Fatal Light Awareness program, Toronto (F.L.A.P.)

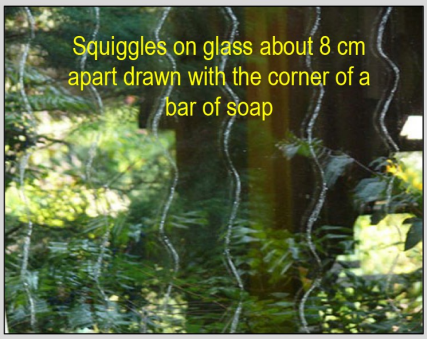
You can do this in a number of ways. Lines can be drawn on the glass with various kinds of markers (e.g., dry-erase, highlighters -- yellow is particularly effective; black may be best for pale reflections and white for dark. Tempera paint can be used or even the corner of a bar of soap (both wash off easily). Tape can also be used to make lines and patterns. Lines can trend in any direction, but *uniform patterns are usually best.* Stick-on window film with small dots or other patterns appropriately spaced is very effective and available commercially. Decals can be used but are hard to arrange around small spaces (see below). BUT do *make sure that whatever method you choose, the paint or material is applied to the* ***outside*** *surface of the glass.* (Anything on the inside will not eliminate reflections).

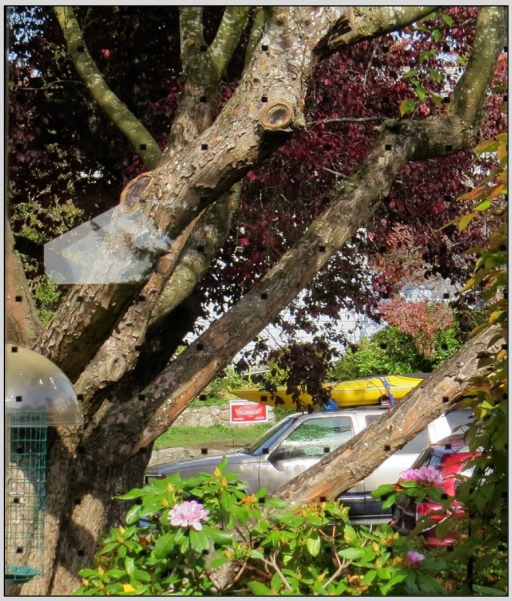


Application of decals

From F.L.A.P.

There are also some well-proven ways to eliminate bird collisions without actually modifying the glass. Lengths of cord (e.g. avalanche cord) hanging in front of a window and spaced 9–10 cm apart (commercially known as 'Acopian Birdsavers') are effective – and barely noticeable from inside when you get used to them. Although it requires a little more effort to construct, a 'window screen' is a very reliable way to stop birds from crashing into your large picture window while maintaining your view. This consists of a frame around the window that supports taut, dark netting with a fine mesh (e.g., ¾") 10-15 cm in front of the window. The netting is barely visible. Birds will fly into it but will bounce off unhurt, as if it were a trampoline.





Window film with small dark squares has been attached to the outside of this window

If you have bird feeders, you can reduce the likelihood of collisions by placing them either very close (less than 1 m) to a window (try using suction cups on the glass) or more than 10 m away *and* use dangling cords in front of the nearest window. This will allow birds fleeing from the sudden appearance of a hawk (for example) to either hit the glass before they gain any momentum, or to have time to avoid the window.

In addition to window collisions, many birds are killed by flying into buildings (particularly high-rises) when they are attracted by bright lights but then become confused and disoriented. Cities such as Toronto and Chicago have held "lights out campaigns" to reduce bird deaths, which are especially numerous during spring and fall migration periods. We do not yet know the extent of this problem in Vancouver (research is underway), but it would probably benefit the birds (bats too) to turn off outside lights and close drapes after dark if you live in a high-rise.

Censuses, such as the annual Christmas Bird Counts, show that the Pacific Coast populations of many of our forest and garden birds are declining. For example, Varied Thrush (below right) has declined by 54% and Golden-crowned Kinglet by 69% since 1970. This is attributed to a variety of causes, including loss of habitat (shrinking green spaces, removal of trees), inadvertent human impacts (e.g., collisions with motor vehicles) competition for nest sites with introduced species (e.g., cavity-nesting grey squirrels and starlings), and predation by cats, as well as window/glass collisions. Yet birds are an invaluable part of our human environment. They bring a garden or a forest pathway to life with their songs and chatter and endless 'here, there and everywhere' flights searching for food. They also provide essential ecosystem services such as insect control, pollination, and seed distribution. We should all do what we can to minimize unnecessary loss of our feathered friends.

FINAL NOTE If the remedies suggested here seem too onerous or awkward, be aware that doing just a little is much better than nothing at all. Perhaps deal with just one window – the one that is closest to your feeders. Even just closing the drapes *may* help. Or make the window more visible by drawing just a few lines with a marker or a bar of soap, or stick on just a few decals). These actions, although less than ideal, could still save a bird!

SOURCES OF INFORMATION: Many internet sources provide advice about how to minimize bird/window collisions. Some advice is good and appropriate, much is commercially oriented, and some is out of date. *So be cautious!* If you choose any commercial window-film product (and some are excellent), make sure that it eliminates reflections as well having a pattern with spaces that are sufficiently small to block potential flight paths.

Recommended Websites:

- Vancouver City's "Vancouver Bird Strategy" www.vancouver.ca Follow links to "Bird Friendly Design Guidelines Expanded Note, part 10: Building Design Guidelines".
- Toronto's "Fatal Light Awareness Program", www.flap.org was set up to deal with the problem of bright lights, but also includes useful "Bird-Window Collision Reduction" information.
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology, http://www.birds.cornell.edu : go to "All About Birds", and search for "Window Collisions" (2 articles)

For local advice, call Bird Studies Canada at 604-350-1984, or Canadian Wildlife Service at 604-350-1900 or 604-350-1984, or email krista.degroot@canada.ca .

INEFFECTIVE AND UNCERTAIN REMEDIES for prevention of collisions:

- pasting silhouettes of hawks on windows (birds don't recognize these as a danger and will avoid the shape but fly into the adjacent clear glass;
- dangling strings of CDs, coloured tapes, streamers: *ineffective if widely spaced -- narrow spacing is key* –see FLAP figure on p.1.
- drawing on the *inside* of the glass;
- closing drapes or blinds may help depending on local conditions, but *does not eliminate all reflections*;
- owl decoys;
- *a few* decals or other objects stuck on a window will likely be ineffective but may help slightly; ultra-violet-reflecting tape or decals *may* be effective.
-

FIRST-AID If you find a stunned bird on the ground with no obvious injuries, do not leave it there to recover because it could well be taken by a predator. Pick it up gently and place it in a clean paper bag or small cardboard box. Make a few *small* air-holes if necessary; do not add food or water. Put the container in a quiet place away from people and pets. After about 30 min, or when you hear or see signs of movement, *take the container outside* and open it a crack. A recovered bird will immediately take to wing and head for freedom. If the bird appears to be injured, contact a local wildlife rehabilitation organization (e.g., Wildlife Rescue in Burnaby at 604-526-7275) for advice.

Varied Thrush: left - Jared Hobbs, above - David Bradley

Compiled by J.M.Ryder
Nature Vancouver

The Reflective Birder # 15

Clive Keen

Focus!

If you've not been sending your bird observations to eBird, I thoroughly recommend that you start to do so – but not for the reasons you might think.

eBird, as you no doubt know, is a huge database of bird sightings. Around a hundred thousand birders, worldwide, are now sending their observations to the eBird server, and as a result are contributing to citizen science. The data "will become the foundation for a better understanding of bird distribution across the western hemisphere and beyond," the eBird folks tells us. They add that sharing your sightings also allows other birders to benefit, as it will help them know where they can find the birds you've spotted.

All great stuff, and all splendidly altruistic. But I've also got a very good, entirely self-interested, reason to participate: it will enrich your birding experience far more than you might think.

This realization just struck me as I was returning from a very enjoyable walk around my favourite birding haunt. The last two trips there had been rather a disappointment, and I realized that it had something to do with the fact that I hadn't been carrying my iPhone. On my iPhone, I have the nifty *Birdwatcher's Diary* app, which allows you to tally the birds you are seeing, and then with two presses of a button, upload the findings to eBird.

In the absence of my phone, I had walked round my usual haunts looking just for anything unusual. Sure, there were Coots, and Mallards, and Song Sparrows, and all the other usual suspects, but so what. They are always there, so I essentially ignored them. With nothing unusual about, I soon called the trip to a halt.

Next time I went, I still didn't have my phone, but I did keep a tally of the number of species present, so even Coots and Mallards and Song Sparrows were noted, as they added to the overall species list. I enjoyed the trip a bit more, but still cut it short.

Today, though, I had my iPhone, with an app that allows you not just to tally the species seen, but makes it very easy to record the numbers of birds of each species – something that the eBird people encourage you to do. I found, on this occasion, that I spent far longer birding, and left reluctantly, though there was still nothing unusual around.

Why was it so much more satisfying? To make sense of it, I'll take a quick detour into the world of music appreciation. I'd taken a number of music appreciation courses over the years, and eventually started teaching the subject. Before doing so, though, I had to solve a problem that had always bothered me. Music appreciation courses tell you a lot of things about music, in fact they stuff you with a great array of facts, but why should this make you *appreciate* – i.e. *like* – the music any more than when you started? Eventually I realized why, as the notes for my opening lecture explain:

> *This is a course on music appreciation. We're going to hear lots of music, and talk about such things as musical form, musical periods, musical styles, etc – and you might wonder how on earth this knowledge will help you appreciate the music more. The reason is that it will help you to listen ACTIVELY. Most people don't do that. Music washes over and past them; they don't really take it in. They are likely to be thinking of something else entirely while they "listen." But, the more you know about the music, the more you will focus and genuinely engage with it. You'll be much more able to recognize and follow the long line that runs through a piece of complex music and holds it together. This is the essential secret of music appreciation, and it's why I'm going to talk about apparently obscure things like passacaglias and homophony and all those other words in your course notes containing lots of syllables….*

So, *focus* is the secret of music appreciation. And so it is with birding. If I glance briefly over a pond and note that there's nothing unusual there, I'm really not paying attention to what *is* there. If I have to tally the species present, my attention goes up a notch. If I have to tally not just the species, but the number of birds of each species, I'm significantly more engaged in the observation. A glance shows that there's Mallards and Shovelers and Coots present, but finding how many there are of each requires much more than a glance. Then, I'm looking actively, not just letting the general impression wash over me. And it's amazing what you can start to notice when your looking is active and purposive.

To start or deepen your eBirding, just head to http://ebird.com and, as they say, follow the links.

"…A glance shows that there's Mallards and Shovelers and Coots present, but finding how many there are of each requires much more than a glance…." CNK photo.

Snow Goose landing at Iona. Photo by Jeff Dyck.