# BC BIRDING

**Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists**
**ISSN 1206-1611 BCFO.ca Volume 27 Number 2 / June 2017**

*Pacific Loon photographed by John Gordon during the WildResearch pelagic trip out of Ucluelet, May 7, 2017*

**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) 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.

**Photographs**

***Back Cover:*** Painted Bunting at La Penita, Nayarit, Mexico, by John Gordon

***Right:*** Peter McAllister notes that an unusually large number of Townsend's Solitaires were spotted over the winter and spring on Vancouver Island. This is one he photographed on Salt Spring Island.

# BCFO Officers & Directors

**Officers**
*President:* Mike McGrenere, Victoria, 250-658-8624, mi8624@telus.net
*Vice President:* Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows, 604-465-1402, lawrencecowan@shaw.ca
*Secretary:* Marian Porter, Salt Spring Island, 250-653-2043, quetzal2@telus.net
*Treasurer*: Mike Fung, Vancouver, 604-266-0238, mike.mikefung@gmail.com

**Other Directors**
Jude Grass, Surrey, 604-538-8774, judegrass@shaw.ca
Clive Keen, Prince George, 250-963-9520, clive_keen@ hotmail.com
Adrian Leather, Quesnel, 250-249-5561, q-birds@xplornet.com
Art Martell, 250-334-2979, Courtenay, amartell@shaw.ca
Monica Nugent, New Westminster, 604-220-8816, monica_nugent@telus.net

**Ex Officio**
*Immediate Past President:* George Clulow, Burnaby, 604-438-7639, gclulow@shaw.ca

**BCFO Committees & Representatives**
*AGM Planning Committee*: TBA
*Archivist:* Les Gyug
*British Columbia Birds (Journal) Editor*: Art Martell
*BC Birding Editor:* Clive Keen; *Associate Editor: Virginia Rasch*
*BC Bird Records Committee Chair:* Nathan Hentze
*BCFO two-day trips:* Adrian Leather
*Canadian International Joint Venture:* Wayne Weber
*Cannings Award Committee*: Wayne Weber
*Featured Photographer Committee:* Carlo Giovanella
*IOC Vancouver 2018:* George Clulow
*Librarian*: Andy Buhler
*Membership Committee:* Larry Cowan
*Website*: George Clulow, Neil Dawe
*Young Birder Awards Committee:* Carlo Giovanella
*Young Birders Program*: Melissa Hafting

# Contents



For several weeks in April this Burrowing Owl hung around the inside of YVR airport. Then it took up residence on one of the busiest corners of Sea Island where it allowed itself to be photographed and viewed by many. After a month in the Vancouver area the bird moved on. When not posing for photographs it hid in a concrete block.

— John Gordon

# President's Message

The Annual General Meeting and Conference in Tumbler Ridge is the next major event on the BCFO calendar. Field trips have been arranged to provide opportunities to observe a wide variety of bird species which nest on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains as well as species that spend the breeding season at higher elevations.

If you are driving to Tumbler Ridge, you will have the opportunity to do some birding with other BCFO members in the Quesnel area as part of our two-day field trip program (field trip is now full). This will offer some great birding in areas where many members have not been before. After the AGM, the extension trip to the Dawson Creek, Fort St. John and Pink Mountain areas will take participants to fabulous birding areas where they should be able to observe species that spend the breeding season in northeastern BC.

The AGM offers a great opportunity for birding and to reacquaint with fellow members but it also signals the end of a financial year for the BCFO and the beginning of a new operating year. Some of our board members will be stepping off the board at the AGM and we are looking for new members to assist the organization. Board members are elected for a two-year term and can serve a maximum of three consecutive terms (six years). The current board members are spread around the province and live in the northern interior (2), the lower mainland (4) and Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands (3).

Two of our board members have served for six consecutive years and will be stepping off the board. Larry Cowan is the Vice-President and is responsible for Membership. We have all received an email or two from Larry for various reminders or notices. He has done an exceptional job handling this responsibility and we are very fortunate that Larry has indicated he will continue to handle the membership duties as a non-board member.

The other board member stepping down is our Treasurer, Mike Fung. Mike has been the Treasurer for six years and kept us on track financially over that time. Mike assisted in establishing our online payment system and most recently reformatted the spreadsheet of our finances to show an operating account and a conservation/education account.

Other board members are making valuable contributions to the organization. Two of the board members serve as publication editors — Clive Keen, editor of our news magazine, *BC Birding*, and Art Martel, editor of our journal, *BC Birds*. Adrian Leather organizes the two-day field trips around the province which allows our members to experience birding opportunities that are available away from their home turf. Marian Porter is our Secretary responsible for recording board and AGM minutes. Jude Grass and Monica Nugent will be handling the organizational responsibilities for registration and field trips at the Tumbler Ridge AGM.

George Clulow is our Past President and is very busy assisting the organization. George has been arranging BCFO-led field trips for the 2018 International Ornithological Congress in Vancouver. Also, he is the board contact for the BC Bird Records Committee and assists the board with the Young Birders Program.

Other non-board members who contribute to the organization are: Les Gyug, Archivist and Librarian; Virginia Rasch assists with the newsmagazine; Wayne Weber, Chair of the Cannings Award Committee; Melissa Hafting, Young Birders Program; Carlo Giovanella, Featured Photographer Committee and Young Birders Awards; Nathan Hentze, BC Bird Records Committee Chair; and Neil Dawe and George Clulow who handle the website. I would like to thank Andy Buhler who recently stepped down as our Librarian. Andy and his wife, Marilyn, were long-time editors of *BC Birding*.

I look forward to seeing our members in Tumbler Ridge and to the wonderful birding opportunities in this area. Now I must get out the field guides and recordings to get myself up to speed with those eastern passerines.

Mike McGrenere

## Laurie Rockwell

Laurie Rockwell, well known to many BCFO members, passed away in March at his home in Summerland.

*Les Gyug writes:*
Laurie was an avid birder, tireless volunteer and a seemingly never-ending source of humour and running commentary on BCINTBIRD. Since retiring he spent a lot of time birding including his 20+ year study of Gray Flycatchers, his Summerland Nocturnal Owl Survey routes, his regular surveys of Trout Creek Ecological Reserve and Sun-Oka Provincial Park, and helping out with many other surveys. Laurie was on the executive of BCFO as a director from 2000 to 2002.

I particularly enjoyed the two summers I spent with him doing Northern Goshawk and Williamson's Sapsucker surveys where his cheerfulness and wit outlasted the entire field seasons. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him. My sincere condolences to his family and many friends.

*Wayne Weber writes:*
I greatly enjoyed the times that I spent with him. Laurie and I did several Okanagan Big Day Challenges together, and all of these were memorable occasions. Another memorable event was my participation with Laurie in the first Okanagan Mountain Park Bird Blitz in 1993 with a couple of other folks. The highlight of this was our sighting of two Parasitic Jaegers high overhead, at about 3800 feet altitude and at least 2–3 miles inland from Okanagan Lake!

Among other attributes, Laurie had an infectious and tireless sense of humour, which agreed very well with mine. We got along together like a house on fire whenever we went birding together.

Laurie was a frequent contributor for many years to BCINBIRD, and his sense of humour showed through on many of his messages. He was "Mr. Summerland" to me, and was undoubtedly the top expert on the birds of that area. Laurie was one of the best-known and best-loved birders in the Okanagan Valley.

My sincere condolences go out to Laurie's relatives and friends.

# Short Notes 1

## Young Birders Program on Website

The BCFO website now has a Young Birders section. From any BCFO.ca web page, hover first on *Features,* then on *BCFO Young Birders*, and you'll be able to click on a page covering the program, or a page on YB field trips.

## Membership

Membership Secretary Larry Cowan reports that BCFO membership continues to grow. As of May 15 there were 290 regular members compared to 262 at this point in 2016. There were 34 new members in the year to that point, compared to 28 in 2016.

There are in addition a number of honorary, complimentary, institutional and Young Birder members, so total membership is now in excess of 320.

## Name That Bird!

Jim Turnbull posted a challenge on the BCINTBIRD listserv to give the current names of birds listed in the 1923 field guide, *Birds of the Pacific Coast*, by Willard Ayres Eliot. Chris Siddle named them all correctly. See if you can do the same. The answers are on page 7.

1. Seattle Wren
2. Tule Wren
3. Golden Pileolated Warbler
4. Lutescent Warbler
5. Slender-billed Nuthatch
6. Arkansas Kingbird
7. Nuttall Sparrow
8. Gairdner Woodpecker
9. Harris Woodpecker
10. Desert Sparrow Hawk

## Royal Society Note

Paul Levesque notes that when he was reading a recent edition of the Proceedings of the Royal Society, the image on the front cover looked familiar — it turned out to be the same image that is on the cover of *The Birder's Guide to Vancouver*, published by Nature Vancouver. More kudos for photographer and BCFO member Michelle Lamberson.

## Not for the Alberta List

If you see a very unusual falcon in Edmonton, remember that it's not countable. Edmonton Airport is using a robotic Peregrine Falcon to keep runways clear of birds. The machine is really very impressive in flight, and prey birds won't be only ones fooled. See:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gc8kBmzOOI

*Photo below: Western Sandpiper on Comber's Beach by Young Birder Liam Singh.*

# BCFO Two-day Trips

**Quesnel Area, June 7–8, 2017**
*There are two groups for this trip, but both are now full.*

- 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 are leading the trips.

**Ideas Needed for Other Trips**
Contact Adrian Leather at q-birds@xplornet.com if you have proposals for the locations of future trips. Volunteers to host trips are particularly welcome.

## 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.

# BCFO Trip Report: Birds of the Herring Spawn

*Dave Aldcroft*

March 11 & 12, 2017, Dave Aldcroft (leader) plus nine participants.

We met at 8:00 am in Parksville and decided to head north to our first stop — French Creek. This was very quiet. Observed were two Pigeon guillemots, some red-necked grebe, and a mixed flock of 500 gulls with California Gulls predominant. Second stop was Columbia Beach South which was also very quiet except for a constant stream of gulls heading south. We also saw our first flock of Long-tailed Duck. We then went to Columbia Beach North where there were two Eurasian Wigeon and our first flock of Brant, approximately 200 individuals. Again, predominant on the shore were over 5,000 gulls.

From Columbia Beach we headed up to the viewing platform at Qualicum. Here we counted 20 Bald Eagles on the foreshore, with seven Black Oystercatchers and a small flock of Black Turnstones. Again, 5,000+ gulls.

The next stop was Seacroft Road where some fir trees provided some protection from the elements. This respite from the weather was also being appreciated by two Audubon-type Yellow-rumped Warblers. Approximately 3,000 Surf Scoters, 200+ Long-tailed Ducks and 200 Greater Scaup were seen along with the 5,000+ gulls.

Then we went to Kincaid Road where we saw 7,000 gulls, one of which was an adult Glaucous Gull. By now the rain was really coming down and the wind had picked up. Other birds seen were 100 Brant and 80 Greater Scaup.

Next we headed to the Big Qualicum estuary where six Trumpeter Swans were sheltering in the river mouth along with 28 Bald Eagles, 3,000 gulls, 17 Black Turnstones and three Killdeer plus an assortment of dabbling ducks.

We stopped on the highway beside Henry's Kitchen. There were 550 Surf Scoters, 15 White-winged Scoters, 40 Long-tailed Ducks and 30 Harlequins along with 60 Bufflehead and 30+ Common Goldeneye. By now the rain was mixed with sleet so we decided to stop for soup, coffee and a warm-up at the Sandbar Café. Over coffee we decided to look for a reported Black-backed Woodpecker that was seen in the Wilson woodlot, (south Nile Creek area).

A Ruby-crowned Kinglet was singing at the entrance to the woodlot. We followed the trails to where the bird had been seen but only managed to find Dark-eyed Juncos, one Robin and three Golden-crowned Kinglets. There was still three inches of slush underfoot in this area.

From here we headed up to Deep Bay. The horrendous weather continued so we were lucky to see a flock of waders roosting on the foreshore. We had just got the scope on them when they

were flushed. There were 300+ Dunlin, 70 Black Turnstones and three Surfbirds.

As there was no sign of the weather abating we decided to call it a day. We arranged to meet later at Lefty's Restaurant in Parksville for dinner. Lefty's treated us very well providing two two-for-one gift vouchers. In addition, their menu had gluten-free and vegetarian options.

Day 2 was grey and windy but the rain had stopped. Our first stop was Parksville Recreation Area. There was a large flock of Greater Scaup in the bay, estimated at 750, with good numbers of other sea ducks mixed in. Again we estimated over 5,000 gulls, mainly California, Mew and Glaucous-winged. On the shingle we noticed a small group of shorebirds comprised of 85 Dunlin, 38 Black-bellied Plover and three Greater Yellowlegs. As we were heading back to the car a Western Meadowlark was singing.

From here we headed to the Englishman River where we walked the trail. Purple Finches were singing as well as two Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and we managed to see most of the common passerines as well as our first Gadwall.

We crossed over to the oceanside of Englishman River and had good views of 60 Harlequin Ducks. Then on to the north end of Rathtrevor Park. After a short walk we reached the ocean.

By now the wind had picked up from the southeast and we were starting to get showers. There was a large flock of sea duck, 3,000 Surf Scoters, 50 Long-tailed Ducks and 25 White-winged Scoters. While we were scanning the flock, a first winter Iceland/Kumlien's gull was seen feeding.

It was now about noon, so some of the party members decided to head for home. The rest of us continued to the main parking lot in Rathtrevor Park. Again 7,000+ gulls were just offshore along with 200 Brant and 30 Dunlin. From here we headed to Northwest Bay, but it was very quiet bird-wise, though there was a cacophony coming from the log booms where hundreds of sea lions had hauled out.

Heading south we called in at Legacy Marsh, where the highlight was great views of a Hutton's Vireo. We also managed to find a pair of Wood Ducks. By now it was about 3:30, so we called it a day.

Despite the miserable weather conditions we still managed to see eighty species for the weekend. On the Saturday night I felt guilty about collecting the ten dollars from the participants because of the weather. I felt like I should be paying them for sticking with me. I have since donated the hundred dollars collected to the "Bring back the Bluebirds project" based in the Cowichan Valley on behalf of the BCFO. I would also like to thank the Sandcastle Inn in Parksville for giving the BCFO a reduced room rate.

# Short Notes 2

## Anna's in Winter

Lee Harding of Coquitlan found that keeping a feeder thawed, through frequent changes during the coldest snaps,

allowed a family of Anna's Hummingbirds (a male, a female and at least one juvenile) to successfully overwinter. Photo by Lee.

## National Bird

The lead article on Canada's National Bird (the Gray Jay) in *Canadian Geographic* included a photo by BCFO Young Birder Ian Harland. See:

www.canadiangeographic.ca/magazine/dec16

## Classified Ad

*Note:* BCFO members are welcome to send brief classified ads to this publication at no cost. See page 2 for more information on advertising.

Bruce Whittington is downsizing his library of ornithology (mostly) books and monographs. A list of titles and prices can be found at http://www.strayfeathers.ca/private-sale/ or contact brucewhittington@shaw.ca to view the collection in Ladysmith.

*Rock Sandpiper spotted by Melissa Haflting in Sechelt.*

## Quiz Answers (page 5)

1. Bewick's Wren
2. Marsh Wren
3. Wilson's Warbler
4. Orange-crowned Warbler
5. White-breasted Nuthatch
6. Western Kingbird
7. White-crowned Sparrow
8. Downy Woodpecker
9. Hairy Woodpecker
10. American Kestrel

# Young Birders Program

*Melissa Hafting*

## First Pelagic Trip

On May 6 we went on our first overnight trip ever in the Young Birders Group. The kids were extremely excited and some parents told me that their kids have been talking about the trip for a week straight. The weather looked good and we all piled in the rental van on the 10:15 am ferry to Nanaimo. On the crossing over we spotted some Common Terns.

We stopped and had a great lunch at a local bakery in Port Alberni and then went straight to Ucluelet. We checked into our hotel rooms and went to meet up with the Vancouver Island and Fort St. James Young Birders who were meeting us at Amphitrite Point. Two young birders, Liam Singh and Liron Gerstman, spotted some Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels just past the lighthouse. This was an incredible start – we watched many breeding Pacific Loons fly by and watched Black Oystercatchers forage amongst the black rocks. For many kids on the trip this was the first time they had ever been to Ucluelet or Tofino. They were amazed by the gorgeous scenery and expansive beaches.

I was so amazed how well the new kids integrated into our group and it was so cool to meet Willa from Fort St. James and Toby and Cedar from Tofino for the first time. Their enthusiasm and knowledge and great attitudes blew me away. This was the first trip that we had kids from all parts of the province including Fort St. James, Kelowna, Victoria, Tofino and Vancouver.

After this stop we went on to the Tofino mudflats at the Sharp Road Lookout. Here we saw 275 Short-billed Dowitchers in large flocks and this was really cool for the kids since they rarely see so many Short-billeds all together. We also found seven Whimbrels, six Black-bellied Plovers and three hundred Western and five Least Sandpipers, plus a few Dunlin and Common Mergansers. We also saw an Osprey diving for fish. We got to watch a Peregrine Falcon zoom right in and successfully catch a peep! It was a great thrill for the kids to see nature in action like that.

In the woods on the way out we had Hutton's Vireo, Pacific Wrens, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Golden-crowned Sparrows, Steller's Jays, and Orange-crowned and Townsend's Warblers.

We were next off to the Tofino Airport. Here Ilya Povalyaev found four Pacific Golden-Plovers for us. The birds were in various stages of moult and one was in spectacular breeding plumage. The kids were thrilled with this and as we were looking at these beautiful birds we turned around when Bridget Spencer spotted a female Red-necked Phalarope in breeding plumage swimming in the pond behind us. Right after that, Ian Harland spotted a Olive-sided Flycatcher which was perched above the Phalarope! Other birds we saw there were a Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpipers, Killdeer, Dunlin and a large flock of Semipalmated Plovers.

The kids were all on a high and after getting a call from Ian Cruickshank I decided to take them to Long Beach to look for the breeding Red Knots he had found earlier. Unfortunately, we did not find any Red Knots but we saw Semipalmated Plovers and Sanderlings, and the kids got to see the beauty of the majestic, pristine beaches of the West

Coast of Vancouver Island. We also picked up some Orange-crowned Warblers and Northern Flickers.

After a nice visit here we were off to Comber's Beach to look for the second-year Iceland Gull that Adrian Dorst found a few hours earlier. We never did see the gull but since there were many warning signs up for wolves in the area the kids were hoping to see a wolf on the beach. Unfortunately, we never did see a Coastal Wolf but we did find some tracks. Here the bird activity was pretty slow despite a few Black Oystercatchers but again the kids marvelled at the gorgeous beach. During the walk back up through the rainforest and boardwalk the kids found a Brown Creeper, Pacific Tree Frogs and Townsend's and Orange-crowned Warblers and a Hairy Woodpecker.

We ended the day with a great meal at the Floathouse Restaurant in Ucluelet and chatted about the day's events and what we hoped to see the next day. Many wanted to see a Tufted Puffin, Black-footed and Laysan Albatross, Manx Shearwater and Cassin's Auklet.

The next morning (May 7) at 6:15 am, we met up with Cedar and Toby and her dad Marcel at the Main Street Pier. Here we met about 50 other birders who had signed up for the WildResearch pelagic. We checked in and got on the ship called the MV Frances Barkley. All the kids had taken their Gravol and were excited and ready for the adventure. This was WildResearch's annual fundraiser which helps to raise money for their conservation programs including Iona bird banding observatory. For more info on WildResearch and their programs see wildresearch.ca.

Ilya Povalyaev was spotting during the trip and helping to get everyone, especially all the kids, on the birds, which I appreciated very much and so did the kids.

The weather was sunny and bright and there was very little wind. Surprisingly we did not have a single albatross. This was a little disappointing for the kids, as it was their main target. It was the first time I had not seen a Black-footed Albatross on a pelagic as well. We also had no Tufted Puffins, which was another surprise and a much wanted target for the children. However, we had some great birds including an adult stunning Pomarine Jaeger that flew right alongside our boat, giving us all great views. We also had an uncommon light-morph Northern Fulmar with some dark morphs and Pink-footed Shearwaters that did the same. Another highlight for the kids were Red Phalaropes in breeding plumage and Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels.

*Pink-footed Shearwater by Bridget Spencer.*

The biggest moment of the trip came when sharp 13 year-old Young Birder Liam Singh spotted and photographed a Manx Shearwater almost at the end of the return trip. The bird was six kilometres south-west off of Amphitrite Point in Ucluelet. Unfortunately, everyone did not get on this bird, including myself, but luckily six Young Birders — Bridget Spencer, Katya Kondratyuk, Toby Theriault, Cedar Forest, Willa Crowley and of course Liam Singh (and a few others on board) — all saw and photographed it.

We also saw some great mammals on the trip including a sea otter, humpback whales, California and Steller's sea lions and harbour seals.

Here is our official checklist for the day:

1 Greater White-fronted Goose; 1 Brant; 30 Cackling Geese; 2 Surf Scoter; 12 White-winged Scoter; 5 Red-breasted Merganser; 70 Pacific Loon; 3 Common Loon; 5 Northern Fulmar; 5 Pink-footed Shearwater; 30 Sooty Shearwater; 10 Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwater; 1 Manx Shearwater; 10 Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel; 30 Brandt's Cormorant; 1 Pelagic Cormorant; 1 Bald Eagle; 200 Red-necked Phalarope; 3 Red Phalarope; 1 Pomarine Jaeger; 10 Common Murre; 2 Cassin's Auklet; 15 Rhinoceros Auklet; 10 Sabine's Gull; 1 Bonaparte's Gull; 1 Western Gull; 30 California Gull; 10 Herring Gull; 50 Glaucous-winged Gull; 150 Western X Glaucous-winged Gull (hybrid); 1 Sooty Tern.

We got back to the dock at 2:00 pm and made it back to Vancouver by 8:00 pm via the 5:45pm ferry.

## Future YB Trips

**June 24**
Manning Park or Whistler. 7:00 am departure.

**July 15**
Bowen Island. Meet at Horseshoe Bay at 9:00 am.

**Aug 12 (Tentative Date)**
Banding Workshop.

**Sept 23**
Sooke hawk watch. Meet at Ladner Exchange at 6:15 am. (Vancouver Island participants meet at East Sooke Regional Park at 10:00 am. )

# 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 bi-monthly 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 email address, we have included these as well; if no contact information is listed, it can be assumed that none was provided by the organization, at least not on the date when this listing was compiled. It is usually not necessary to contact a particular individual, except for scientific meetings when one is interested in making a presentation. Names and contact information for individuals are listed whenever they are available.

June 3— OKANAGAN MOUNTAIN PARK BIRD BLITZ. This annual survey of the birds of Okanagan Mountain Provincial Park near Kelowna has been held every year since 1993, except for two years after the huge 2003 wildfire. For information or to participate, contact the organizer, Les Gyug, at les_gyug@shaw.ca , or phone him at (250) 769-5907.

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 .

June 16-18— 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-16-18-2017 . Inquiries may be made by email to La Vern at lklassen@hopemountain.org or by phone at 604-869-1274.

June 24— First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the summer/fall season from Westport, WA. This is the first of 15 trips scheduled from June through October 2017. For information and to sign up for a trip, please visit the Westport Seabirds webpage at http://www.westportseabirds.com .

July 31-Aug. 5— 135TH STATED MEETING OF AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' SOCIETY, AND 35TH STATED MEETING, SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS, at Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI. For further details, to register, or to submit a paper for presentation, please visit the website at http://aossco2017.fw.msu.edu/

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 www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php .

Sept. 1-3— 31st ANNUAL OREGON SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL, Charleston, Oregon (near Coos Bay.) Field trips will include a pelagic trip, and featured evening speakers are Noah Strycker and Paul Bannick. Full details not available yet, but check the website of Cape Arago Audubon Society (http://www.capearagoaudubon.org ) after July 1st.

Sept. 15-17— OREGON BIRDING ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING, at the Malheur Field Station, near Burns, OR. For information and to register, check the OBA website at http://www.orbirds.org/2017annualmeeting.html .

Sept. 15-17— PUGET SOUND BIRD FESTIVAL, Edmonds, WA. For information and to register (starting Aug. 1). check the festival website at http://www.pugetsoundbirdfest.org , or contact Jennifer Leach at the City of Edmonds Parks Dept. (phone 425-771-0227), or email her at jennifer.leach@edmondswa.gov .

Sept. 21-23— FALL GENERAL MEETING, BC NATURE, Vernon, BC, hosted by the North Okanagan Naturalists. Full details not available yet. For information, check the BC Nature website at http://www.bcnature.ca , or contact the office at manager@bcnature.ca .

Sept. 21-25— WASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Semiahmoo Resort, Blaine, WA. No details posted yet other than the dates and location, but check the WOS website (http://wos.org/annual-conference/current-year ) closer to the conference date for details and to register.

Sept. 23-27— 24TH 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 , or by phone at (206) 972-0163.

Nov. 18-19— 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 (2018)— 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*.

# Introduction to Birding in Western Mexico

*Adrian Dorst*

It is mid-January on the south coast of BC and 3 degrees Celsius with heavy overcast. Rain is gushing down and the prospect for the next week or two is more of the same, the weather man tells us. If you're like me and grow tired of the dismal winter weather, this is a good time to board a plane for tropical climes. About a million and a half Canadians are reported to visit Mexico each year. Unlike most of my fellow Canucks, however, I don't have a hankering for basking on the beach, beer in hand. I'm a birder and there are birds to be discovered.

Many birders mistakenly believe that North America ends at the Rio Grande. However, that notion is based largely on the American Birding Association (ABA) having drawn the southern boundary of the continent on the Mexican border. In actual fact the continent continues to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and thus includes most of Mexico except for the Yucatan Peninsula and Tabasco and Chiapas provinces. If we accept this fact, the North American bird list suddenly gains, by my count, an astonishing 382 additional species, which will keep us birding for the rest of our lives.

Over the years, beginning in 1964, I've made numerous trips to Mexico, the first one south to Vera Cruz province and Oaxaca, and in later years road trips to the tip of the Baja peninsula. For the past dozen years my location of choice has been the village of Yelapa, located on the south shore of the Bay of Banderas, 20 miles southwest of Puerto Vallarta on the west coast and easily accessible by water taxi. I usually spend four weeks hunkered down at that one location, though sometimes longer.

Why so much time in one place? There are many reasons, not least of which is the great variety of birds found there. The village is situated among wooded hills in a region of high biodiversity and is far removed from the bustle of the city. As well, the place of my accommodation, which I now regard as my home away from home, is idyllic. The large hacienda where I stay, Casa La Loma, is perched on a hill with a fabulous view of the village and bay below, and it has a top deck that's great for watching soaring birds. On a good morning you can check off thirty species of birds in an hour without leaving the breakfast table. Evening meals at a restaurant a ten-minute walk away are to die for and inexpensive as well. To top it off, the climate is as near perfect as it gets. Situated on somewhat of a point, Casa La Loma is almost always blessed by a gentle sea breeze; thus it is never too hot.

Birding in an area year after year is very different from paying a brief visit. A friend of mine who has done extensive birding around the world once told me that he leaves an area and moves on when his expectation of daily lifers is reduced to four or five species. My friend fails to grasp that patience is required for many species, as some are very elusive. Personally, I am delighted to reacquaint myself with ones I already know from previous years. It's like greeting old friends and I find myself fascinated all over again. Besides, how does one get inured to such spectacular species as Squirrel Cuckoo, Elegant Trogon, Russet-crowned Motmot, Pale-billed Woodpecker, and Black-throated Magpie-Jay, to name just a few. Do we give up birding at home just because we fail to tick off a lifer every day?

Birding in Yelapa has taught me that it takes time to find everything that lives in a given area. In the first few years I missed some of the buntings entirely because they were hiding in weedy fields that seemed largely devoid of birds. When I looked a little closer, however, there they were – Blue Grosbeak, Painted Bunting, Orange-breasted Bunting, and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. The latter bird I did not discover until last year, having overlooked it on all previous trips. I should point out that because the majority of buntings and seedeaters in winter are females or drab males they are easily overlooked, as well as a challenge to identify.

So habitat-specific are some birds that you will find them only on a small patch of land no larger than an urban backyard. One year I could always count on finding Painted Buntings in a small weedy patch beside a trail. The following year they were gone. Someone had cut the vegetation. Likewise, the most reliable location to find Orange-breasted Buntings was a scrubby, neglected lot beside a grassy field.

The walk I do most frequently is on

*Russet-crowned Motmot. Photo by Adrian Dorst.*

the road above the village. Although Yelapa's streets are too narrow for normal vehicular traffic, there is a road that comes down the mountain and ends just short of the village. Few conventional motor vehicles, however, brave the steep, rutted road, leaving it largely abandoned to the occasional horse and rider, trail bike, ATV or pedestrian. Conveniently located a short distance from my place of lodging, the road traverses a variety of habitat. Also convenient is the fact that for a good part of it one can remain in the shade provided by trees. Birds seen on this upland walk are mostly passerines, woodpeckers and raptors, as there are no bodies of water here. Among the birds regularly seen here are Elegant and Citreoline Trogons and Russet-crowned Motmots. On the lower portion of the road watch for Blue Mockingbird, which otherwise can be very elusive. Blue Buntings can almost be guaranteed on any given day, as well as Varied Buntings in some years. Four Myarchis flycatchers are found in the area, though they can be a challenge to identify. When in doubt, I try to see the underside of the tail, or I use my small camera with a 60X lens to photograph the bird and identify it later.

Swifts are seen only occasionally, though sometimes in numbers. White-collared and Great Swallow-tailed Swifts are always a thrill to see when they appear. Howell and Webb's book, *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*, shows the range of the White-collared Swift as being far to the south of Yelapa, but the book is mistaken on this count. I have numerous records for this species in Yelapa.

Three members of the parrot family are found in the area, and two of them are seen on most walks on the lower road. One is the Orange-fronted Parakeet, which is common here and is seen in moderate to large flocks, and the other is the Military Macaw. These large birds are quite spectacular when they are seen well, though here they are usually seen passing high overhead in pairs. You'll hear their loud squawks long before you spot them. As many as 30 to 35 have been seen flying over the hills above the river, and if you hike two miles upriver you may get lucky enough to see them up close. Lilac-crowned Parrots were seen almost daily when I first came to Yelapa, but they are now rare, the illegal pet trade likely being responsible for their demise. Nevertheless, a flock of nine birds was seen flying over the village on my last visit.

Additional species that may be seen along the lower road are Yellow Grosbeak, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Thick-billed Kingbird, Red-breasted Chat, Grayish Saltator, and six species of vireo – Golden, Bell's, Plumbeous and Black-capped among them, the latter being the rarest. Above 800 metres elevation I once found a seventh vireo, the Yellow-throated. Raptors are often seen from the road, with the three most common being Common Black Hawk, Gray Hawk and Short-tailed Hawk. The Zone-tailed Hawk is seen only occasionally and the Crane Hawk and Crested Caracara rarely.

*Lineated Woodpecker by Adrian Dorst.*

To view water birds in Yelapa one needs to visit the river. Walking barefoot in the shallow water allows one to have very closeup looks at herons, egrets and ibis, totalling ten species or so, as well as a few shorebirds, notably Willets and Black-necked Stilts. So accustomed are these river birds to people that they move only reluctantly at your approach and you can easily photograph them with a point-and-shoot camera. In most winters moderate numbers of Laughing and Heermann's Gulls congregate in the harbour and river mouth, and in some years, Elegant and Royal Terns as well. On a morning river walk you can easily log 30 or 40 species.

Besides herons and egrets, there are many other birds to be seen here such as Green Kingfisher, Groove-billed Ani, Great Kiskadee, Social Flycatcher, and if you're lucky, Boat-billed Flycatcher. Golden-cheeked Woodpeckers are common and with a little luck you will see the large and striking Pale-billed Woodpecker and the Lineated Woodpecker. West Mexican Chachalacas are common in the village and are sometimes seen foraging like chickens in people's yards. Crested Guans are in the area as well but are elusive. I once found them at high elevation but locals report that these large birds now come down into the village regularly.

As a result of birding in the same area year after year, Yelapa sometimes produces surprises. On 18 February, 2012, having hiked the road up to the 800 metre level of the mountain, I spotted two large raptors soaring slightly higher than eye-level. Too far away to identify with certainty, I took several photos using a long lens. When blown up, the photos unequivocally showed Ornate Hawk-Eagles, a species not recorded in the area before. The home range of the species lies far to the east, though a map in Howell and Webb's book on Mexican birds shows that a disjunct population exists not far south of Yelapa.

Two years later, I recorded no fewer than three extralimital species. First, two Double-toothed Kites, far outside their known range, were seen and photographed on the mountain, again at

800 metres elevation. Then, just four days later I photographed a Black Hawk -Eagle above the road just outside the village. Remarkably, both these species were hundreds of kilometres northwest of their known range. The third sighting involved a large juvenile gull of questionable identity on the shore in the village that I had initially identified as a juvenile Western Gull. After considerable debate and dispute about the photo on eBird, I am now confident it is a Kelp Gull. Although native to South America, they have turned up in widely disparate locales, including the United States.

More surprises were to come. In the years 2016 and 2017, Black Hawk-Eagles were again seen and photographed at Yelapa, and Black-and-white Hawk-Eagles as well. The latter species too has a home range hundreds of kilometres to the southeast and was virtually unknown anywhere in the west. Exactly a month after the first Yelapa sighting, John Gordon took an excellent photo of a Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle at the botanical gardens, located less than 20 kilometres by air from Yelapa, thereby firmly establishing its occurrence in western Mexico. Both these raptors have been recorded in Yelapa by two other Canadian birders – Bruce Ferry of Toronto and Aziza Cooper of Victoria. Recently there have been a number of sightings of the Black - and-white Hawk-Eagle far to the north near San Blas.

*Streak-backed Oriole by Adrian Dorst.*

Why are so many raptors from the south and east now being seen on the Pacific slope? Have they been overlooked, or are they new arrivals expanding their range? I shall leave that for others to ponder. My point in relating all of the above is that in Mexico, expect the unexpected. Ornithologically significant discoveries still happen relatively frequently compared to back home in BC. Finding birds that are many hundreds of kilometres outside their known range certainly adds another dimension to birding.

*Adrian Dorst lives in Tofino where he works as a bird guide in summer. He currently offers guided birding trips in Yelapa, Mexico. He can be reached at adrianusdorst@gmail.com*

# Easter in Arizona

*Adam Dhalla*

Over this past Easter weekend, my dad and I went to that southwestern mecca for birders, Arizona. It was great to get away from the constant, chilling drizzle of "Raincouver" and find some lifers in a dry, sunny and hot climate. I grew excited as we flew over canyons far below our iron bird and approached our destination.

Once we got there, we were birding as soon as we got into our rented SUV. In Phoenix, we had a great time with Roadrunners, which circled the paths of Desert Botanical Garden. We also saw a ton of typical Sonoran desert birds there, butterflies such as the majestic Monarch and lots of different cacti. It made me completely forget the fact that the airline had misplaced my tripod (I got it back a few hours later).

Our next and last stop of the first day was Zanjero Park, where we were able to spend time with a triplet of Burrowing Owls. When we arrived, we didn't see any and we thought, if we did, they would be a little flighty. But toward the end of the trail we saw one, then another. And then one flew in and perched nearby, providing me with spectacular shots. There were a bunch of man-made burrows on the right side, which the owls shared with the occasional jackrabbit. This splendid sight provided us with a much-needed boost for our evening drive south to Tucson.

We woke up at the crack of dawn the next day for our next new spot. So nice to be able to rely on the weather for a change – clear skies every day! We stopped at a gas station to stock up on bottled water and then we were off to Madera Canyon, one of the world's best hotspots. We birded the nine miles of grassland, the Santa Rita Experimental Range, just before entering Madera. The highlight of this region was an abundance of Black-throated Sparrows, which was a bird I wasn't expecting to see much of.

Our first stop was Santa Rita Lodge — there were birds everywhere! At various hummingbird feeders I saw Magnificent, Broad-Billed, Black-Chinned and Rufous Hummingbirds. A few small flocks of Mexican Jays were roaming the area. Other species there were Lesser Goldfinch, Black-Headed Grosbeak, Acorn and Arizona Wood-

peckers, and lots of Wild Turkeys. Afterwards, we went down to the Amphitheatre Trail, where we first thought we couldn't see anything, until a flash of red and grey flew over me and landed in a nearby tree. I got a record shot and it flew away: it was a female Elegant Trogon! We tried to re-locate it, but we sadly couldn't, but we did pick up a Dusky-Capped Flycatcher in the process.

We drove to our next stop, which was Paton's Center for Hummingbirds, southeast of Madera, in the town of Patagonia. While looking for it we got slightly lost, but at least we were able to see the border and the original beginnings of what perhaps will be a long wall separating Mexico and the U.S.

Once we arrived at Paton's, birds were everywhere. My apologies for repeating myself, but it seemed like birds were everywhere, everywhere! At the Oriole feeders, there was two Ladder-backed Woodpeckers. In the trees, a Gila Woodpecker. At seed feeders, an Abert's Towhee, a Green-tailed Towhee, Lazuli Buntings, a Summer Tanager and an Inca Dove. We got a quick glimpse of a Violet-crowned Hummingbird, and good looks at a pair of Gambel's Quail. Far away, on the tops of trees, I spotted a Black Vulture and a Cassin's Kingbird. It was funny to see Gila Woodpeckers at the hummingbird feeders.

We left when the sun was going down and got back to the hotel by nightfall, finishing the night off with some awesome and cheap Mexican food: burritos and quesadillas – muy delicioso.

The next day, we woke up super early (again — but that's par for the course for birders) to head over to Reid Park, only a couple minutes' drive from our hotel. Our target was a Vermilion Flycatcher. We were drowsy and tired when we were walking in the parking lot to get to our car, but even though my eyes were a bit glassy, I was still able to easily spot a small blob of the brightest red I've ever seen sitting in a tree in our parking lot. Yes, we actually found a Vermilion Flycatcher in our hotel parking lot. It was hard to photograph, since it was in a dark place, so we headed over to Reid Park. As soon as we got out of the car to start birding, there was another Vermilion Flycatcher just sitting on the monkey bars in the playground. It was much easier to get photos now with the sun coming up and with it being a more "tame" bird.

We headed back to Phoenix, to hopefully see some Rosy-Faced Lovebirds at Encanto Park, which we did! There was a large group nesting in the top of a palm tree, which was conveniently right next to the parking lot. Birding was so easy, compared to B.C. They were a lot tinier than I expected.

We drove back to fabulous Madera Canyon, with a very, very small bird in mind: the smallest owl — Elf Owl. By the time we got there, it was 5:00 pm and the owl would, according to other birders, poke out of its hiding place at 7:00 pm so we had time to bird again at Santa Rita. Even though it was the same spot, I got a few more lifers: Hepatic Tanager, Red-naped Sapsucker, Zone-tailed Hawk, and Bridled Titmouse. I may have seen the latter last time, but I had no photo, so I wasn't sure. This time, they were very tame. We then followed a group of people to the nest site, which has been used for five years: an electricity pole, which has become locally famous. For 15 minutes we waited, and right as it turned to 7:00 pm, on cue, the tiny owl poked her head out. It was still light enough to take photos, so that was what everyone did. Once it got dark we listened to it call to its mate. What a wonderful experience!

On our fourth and final day, we could only go to one spot before we had to catch our plane back to still wintery Vancouver – and that was Tohono Chul Park. We had to pick up some last desert specialties we had missed, so hopefully we would be able to find them here. We went on an 8:30 am bird walk and got our first lifer, a Costa's Hummingbird, which we saw many more of later. At the end of the bird walk we got two desert birds that we missed, the Verdin and Black-Tailed Gnatcatcher, which we were very happy to see. A total of 45 lifers for the trip! We ended our birding in this beautiful state with a Cactus Wren pair, their state bird, feeding their chicks in their nest in the crook of a Saguaro cactus, something truly Arizonian.

*Photo left: Gambel's Quail. Above: Vermilion Flycatcher. Both are by Adam Dhalla. Adam is a recent recipient of the BC Young Birders Award.*

# Birding Volcan Tacana

*Adrian Leather*

**March 2–13, 2017, Chiapas**

I pondered Mexico for exciting birding, and Eric Antonio Martinez suggested a tour of Southern Chiapas, featuring El Triunfo, a place covered in *Fifty Places To Go Birding Before You Die*. The trip filled almost instantly, the crew being Mark Yunker (Brentwood Bay), Clive Keen (Prince George), Ed Jordan & Dawn Seeley-Ross (Quadra Island), John Hodges (Roberts Creek), Jerry & Lynne McFetridge, Nora McMuldroch, and Adrian Leather (Quesnel).

Planning ran smoothly until officials at El Triunfo changed our birding dates. Eric suggested an alternative, Volcan Tacana, a biosphere reserve bordering Guatemala, with similar birding and a monitoring group to protect habitat and survey species. We would be the first international birding group to visit! Eric had birded Tacana well, as had the monitors, but could they succeed as hosts?

Aeromexico cancelled our morning flight to Tuxtla Gutierrez, so we missed a trip to San Cristobal de Las Casas. With diminishing daylight, on March 2, we enjoyed watching Green Parakeets in downtown Tuxtla.

We visited Restaurante Las Pichanchas, and ordered a refreshing blend of vodka and pineapple juice over crushed ice. A waiter, carrying a gourd on a tray, announced the drink in a macho voice, "Pumpo!" then others joined in "Igual, Pumpo!" and rang bells to create more drama. When opportunity presented during the tour, you'd hear "Pumpo!"

*Orange-breasted Bunting by Jerry McFetridge.*

March 3 saw us greeted by joggers and surrounded by Ridgway's Rough-winged Swallows at Sumidero Canyon. Canivet's Emerald showed well and a Cabanis's Wren crept in and out of sight. Other species included Northern Bentbill, Slender Sheartail, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Belted Flycatcher, and a dazzling Blue Seedeater. We departed well satisfied.

On March 4, Slaty-breasted Tinamou haunted the rainforest. A Barred Antshrike surfaced for a few holas. A vocal Green-backed Sparrow set us scanning. We heard a Royal Flycatcher, and watched a Plain Xenops. We enjoyed a fun time with four Green Shrike-Vireos. Any sensible birder would have given up on Nava's Wren. The tricky customer vocally tormented us. Ed joked, "We need it to come out on that stick." We laughed, ironically. The wren sang a few more times, then astonishingly, hopped out along the stick to a cacophony of clicking cameras. Absolute elation! It even performed an encore, emerging on to a second stick – surreal!

March 5 illustrated the quality of Eric's itinerary: a new adventure daily; visiting various habitats and elevations; new species presenting; the tour always fresh. We birded Arriaga, and it was hopping. Star species included Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, White-bellied Chachalaca, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Giant Wren, and two Yellow-naped Parrots. A massive adrenaline rush continued into the evening with terrific looks at Northern Potoo and Pacific Screech-Owl.

March 6 found us at Mapastepec and La Sepultura. We relished the kaleidoscopic beauty of Orange-breasted, Rosita's, Indigo, Lazuli, Varied, and Painted Buntings. We had a great look at a Squirrel Cuckoo. We adored the comical flight of a Highland Guan, air venting through the wings. We'd tried for Long-tailed Manakin, and seen a few females. Now we watched two males, somewhat back in a hole, but classy blue and black showing nicely. An ant swarm attracted birds, a favourite being a well-scoped Tody Motmot. We watched a White Hawk, then a Black Hawk-Eagle flew directly over us – fantastic!

*Blue-crowned Motmot by Mark Yunker.*

March 7 saw us at Benito Juarez El Plan. We enjoyed awesome scope views of a Blue-crowned Chlorophonia. We searched for Horned Guan, but to no avail. Cabanis's Tanager proved similarly elusive. Scanning from a ridge, affording very close looks at Paltry Tyrannulet, we heard that Nelson, a monitor, had spotted a Cabanis's Tanager, and we savoured this beauty, decked out in shimmering shades of blue, until it flew across the valley with five others.

We appreciated the local coffee and ordered some via the monitors. We witnessed an intriguing way of life: impressive self-sufficiency, everything organic. Villagers walked precipitous trails carrying firewood. Guys with machetes worked patches of flowers and fruits.

We engaged in rooftop birding at an arty hotel in Union Juarez, a scenic mountain getaway. We watched Common Tody-Flycatcher, Rufous-collared Sparrow, and White-collared Seedeater. Feeling sufficiently ornithologically entertained, we visited an excellent restaurant. The hotel rooms were named after famous volcanoes, Tacana included. A cool staircase adjoined a living wall of ferns and plants, water streaming to a pool. Birders are used to rough-

ing it, but this was the height of elegance.

On March 8 we traveled to the serene mountain refuge of Agua Caliente, stopping for Pacific Parakeets at their nest holes. A Thicket Tinamou was heard. We were pleasantly shocked to see another two Yellow-naped Parrots, and added White-fronted and Mealy Parrot. Other birds included five Red-legged Honeycreepers, three Blue-tailed Hummingbirds, two Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, and a Lesser Greenlet.

At Agua Caliente, mules were fitted with our luggage. We faced a steep hike, and focused on our footing. A Ruddy Foliage-Gleaner was seen. A building atop a narrow ridge was Don.Benjamin's private paradise. We were greeted by Black-headed Siskins. The monitors had set up brand new tents, a shower, and a toilet with a view. We were directed to a female Highland Guan, which roosts with the resident chickens, ducks, and turkeys. We were treated to a feast, and formal address by Don.Benjamin. I felt really humbled and truly privileged. Each monitor introduced themselves, then we greeted each other casually. There was an overwhelming sense of anticipation. It was more than a birding trip. It was sheer joy, profound human contact, and we felt the connection. If life is about anything, apart from birding, it is surely about creating social memories, and this ranks with the ultimate experiences in my life. We relished the fresh fruits and juices, the jamon y queso, omelettes, quesadillas y tortillas, and salsas. It was a wonderful welcome.

We watched Melodious Blackbird, Golden Grosbeak, Chiapas and Guatemalan Junco, Eastern Bluebird, and Yellow-throated Brush-Finch. A Blue-and-White Mockingbird crept among a tangle. At night, Mexican Whip-poor-wills took over, and a Mottled Owl was heard. A Fulvous Owl wound up, and eventually we listened to five, one allowing jaw-dropping looks, lit up in all its finery.

March 9 featured a grand search for Horned Guan and Resplendent Quetzal. Prior to the trip, Eric stated a need for exercise, and he wasn't joking! We ventured high into cloud forest. Five Hooded Grosbeaks and two Green-throated Mountain-Gem were noted. A Barred Forest-Falcon attempted to avoid our gaze. Black-throated Jays remained distant. Movement in the trees betrayed a female Resplendent Quetzal, then a canopy window revealed a male, shimmering in green, red and white, the intricate tail curling up in phases. We gasped in awe at a Fulvous Owl – intimidating talons, and piercing eyes investigating us. I should have felt euphoric seeing Resplendent Quetzal, but couldn't help feeling gutted we'd missed Horned Guan. It was important to the monitors, as a foray into birding tourism wouldn't be complete without one.

We returned to camp, snoring competing with night birds, overseen by stars and the distant lights of mountain villages. Mexicans don't worry about high altitude, nor roosters announcing the morning. You'd hear a distant one, and think, no, please don't get a closer one started, then two would crow right by your tent.

*Collared Trogon by Mark Yunker.*

*Female Highland Guan by Clive Keen.*

March 10 saw us depart Don.Benjamin's place in the sky, and its serenading solitaires. Singing Quail vocalized. Ed photographed a Wine-throated Hummingbird, and we watched two Black-capped Swallows. Slate-throated Redstarts and Crescent-chested Warblers added dashes of colour. We admired the aqueduct gushing down to Agua Caliente.

An evening walk near Union Juarez added Emerald-chinned Hummingbird, Rufous Sabrewing, Greater Pewee, and Blue-throated Motmot.

On March 11 we drove to Chiquihuites, then hiked from 6,500 feet to 10,300 feet. Tacana peaks at 13,484 feet, with Goldman's Yellow-rumped Warbler near the top, but nobody contemplated that. In a corn field at 8,500 feet a truly memorable moment was sighting locals around a table full of refreshments; a luxury pitstop, where Pink-headed Warbler and Elegant Euphonia joined the party.

We marveled at sunlit Volcan Tajumulco in Guatemala. Our quest for Horned Guan continued, with three teams in radio contact, but the crucial

call never came. We'd proudly completed a marathon hike, but no Horned Guan. It felt devastating.

We saw a small soccer field. Who knew Mexico play Guatemala at Linda Vista? A huge boulder doesn't stop the games. As cloud enveloped a ridge, sheltering magical forest, we enjoyed a close encounter of the Black-throated Jay kind. We reached camp. There was a shower, a loo with a view, and tents set up in a shed. It got cold at night. I was glad of my sweater and jacket. We hoped to hear Unspotted Saw-whet Owl, but no luck – unspotted you might say. Mexican Whip-poor-wills dominated, with owls and Highland Guan prominent in the mix.

As daylight broke on March 12, Black-capped Siskins entertained, and a Guatemalan Flicker called. We reveled in another scrumptious breakfast. Suddenly, we heard that Rene, aka Volcano Man, had found a Horned Guan! Some monitors were part way down a precipitous slope. We threw caution to the wind, dodging trees and bushes, and propelling ourselves left and right, from one slippery patch of mud to another, so as not to tumble straight down. My heart was pounding, as monitors tried to direct us to the guan, using a combo of Spanish, English, and pointing. We struggled for composure. Near the valley bottom was a bending tree, with a hole in the trees above. The guan was apparently above that. Eric set up his scope in record time, and we shuffled around on a tiny ledge to view the glittering prize, the legend revealed, a Horned Guan! We observed a broad black tail, the bill, eyes, red legs, and the horn. Our last full day in Chiapas, and we were ecstatic, not just for ourselves, but for the monitors too. We punched the air, smiled Cheshire Cat smiles, and thanked Rene for spotting this endangered cloud-forest icon.

We relaxed, enjoying Amethyst-throated Hummingbird, Garnet-throated Hummingbird, and sumptuous looks at an Emerald Toucanet.

Between Chiquihuites and Union Juarez we watched a Violet Sabrewing. White-faced Quail-Dove provided background bass. A Yellowish Flycatcher perched, silent and composed. Ed said, "Hey, you know, I've got a funny blue bird here." Would you believe it? Cabanis's Tanager! And then there were three. What a way to finish our tour.

We stopped at a restaurant, where the food kept coming, a celebratory evening, but with emotional goodbyes to the monitors, who presented our coffee, gagged and bound for BC.

On March 13, Eric arranged a light breakfast before driving to Tapachula airport, where Grey-breasted Martins saluted us. It was a very fond farewell to Chiapas.

The monitors were superb hosts, and greatly enhanced a magnificent tour. Overseen by Patricia Hernandez, I recall their happiness, friendliness, and exemplary service. Organization behind the scenes must have been immense, and special thanks go to our guide and friend, Eric Antonio Martinez.

I'm so happy I lived this dream, and shared it with a great group. We are the first international birding group to visit Volcan Tacana, and I know many will follow.

*Most of the group taking a breather at 10,131 feet. Three monitors are in the background.*

# An Australian Birding Odyssey

*Peter Candido*

In October—November of 2016 my wife Gloria and I returned to Australia for our third time, to explore parts of the country we had not yet visited, in particular the "Red Centre," Kakadu National Park, Darwin, Western Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. In 2008 we had travelled, over the course of seven weeks, from far northern Queensland to Eden in New South Wales, mainly near the coast, with two excursions inland to the outback along the way. On another occasion we had visited the Adelaide area and the mouth of the Murray River in South Australia. With my Australia bird list standing at 362 species, there was still plenty of potential for some fabulous new birds. Furthermore, as I am interested in seeing as many of the world's bird families as possible, I was very keen to try and find the five remaining Australian endemic bird families, all of which were possible on this trip (more about this later).

After an overnight flight from Vancouver, we picked up a rental car in Sydney on October 1, 2016. We spent four days in the Sydney area, mainly in and around Royal National Park, and immediately began to get reacquainted with many of the local birds such as Magpie-Lark, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Olive-tailed Thrush, Spotted Pardalote, New Holland Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Little Wattlebird, Superb Fairy-wren, Azure Kingfisher, Green Catbird, Golden Whistler, Eastern Yellow Robin, Leaden Flycatcher, Australian King-Parrot, Superb Lyrebird and many others. Channel-billed Cuckoos had returned from their wintering grounds in New Guinea, and I was surprised to see a couple of these (at 60 cm the world's largest brood parasite) in flight in the Sydney suburbs. On the rocky cliffs at Providential Head in the park, I found one of my target birds, the enigmatic Rockwarbler. This species is confined to sandstone and limestone formations, and is the only bird species endemic to New South Wales. Also here were White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Eastern Whipbird and Pied Currawong, among others.

Finally it was time to get started on the main part of the trip and we flew to Alice Springs ("Alice," to the locals) on October 5. A walk into town from our motel took us to Olive Pink Botanical Garden, where the highlights were several Western Bowerbirds, one of which was actively displaying and putting finishing touches on its bower.

*Western Bowerbird. All photos by Peter Candido.*

The next day we picked up our campervan from Britz Campervan Rentals, bought supplies and headed out. The plan was to drive south on the Stuart Highway looking for key outback birds, then west on the Lasseter Highway to Uluru (a.k.a. Ayers' Rock) National Park. We would later head north, ultimately touring Kakadu National Park and Darwin, the drop-off point for our vehicle. Along the Stuart Highway we recorded Crested Bellbird, Chiming Wedgebill, Black-faced Woodswallow, White-browed Babbler, Red-browed Pardalote, Australian Ringneck, Mulga Parrot, Cinnamon Quail-thrush, Brown Songlark, Budgerigar, Crimson Chat, Australasian Pipit, White-winged Triller and others.

Reaching Uluru in the afternoon of October 7, we were able to get to a popular viewing point in time to see the setting sun illuminating the great red monolith.

I had always visualized this part of the country as relatively barren, with sparse vegetation; however, there had been frequent rain prior to our arrival, and the desert was now green and lush looking, with many flowers in bloom. At one roadside stop we found Black Honeyeaters singing and displaying in their aerial flight over an expanse of flowering shrubs. On the east side of Uluru, soaring near the rock, Gloria spotted a rare Square-tailed Kite, a curious raptor that specializes in feeding on small birds, particularly their eggs and nestlings. Other birds included a flock of 100 or so Zebra Finches near a waterhole, and a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo.

Returning to Alice, we turned west to bird Simpson's Gap, Ormiston Gorge and Glenn Helen Gorge, very picturesque areas with rugged cliffs bordering water courses. Ormiston Gorge was noisy with hundreds of Budgerigars chattering in the beautiful ghost gums along the river, as well as many Australian Ringnecks of the nominate race, the "Port Lincoln Parrot." Spinifexbird was found on a grassy slope below a cliff. Glenn Helen Gorge is cut through by the Finke River, often described as the world's oldest river — it has been following the same general course for about 100 million

years! A large patch of reeds on the river bed was occupied by a number of Australasian Reed-Warblers, all singing away, and Little Woodswallows flew overhead.

Backtracking to Alice, we turned north along the Stuart Highway, passing through Tennant Creek (Gray-fronted Honeyeater), Renner Springs (Black-chinned Honeyeater) and Newcastle Waters. The vegetation changed from mallee to tropical woodland and we began to pick up birds such as Pacific Koel, Rainbow Bee-eater, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Dollarbird, Pied Imperial-Pigeon and Blue-winged Kookaburra, among others. Silver-crowned Friarbird was seen at Nitmiluk National Park near Katherine, and at a tiny stream off the entrance road I found a small flock of six finches coming in to drink: two immature Gouldian Finches and a Long-tailed Finch (both lifers) as well as two Crimson Finches and a Double-barred Finch! Other birds included Great Bowerbird (very common here), Australian King-Parrot and Blue-faced Honeyeater. A Tawny Frogmouth and a pair of Bush Thick-knees with a chick were neighbours at our campsite in the park.

En route to Kakadu National Park we passed through Pine Creek, the most reliable site for Hooded Parrot, and found a flock of about 30 feeding around the large park in town. In Kakadu, we had signed up for the popular Yellow Water Boat Cruise, which runs several times per day; for birders, it's advisable to take the earliest one, leaving at 6:30 am. The two-hour cruise on quiet waterways yielded a host of waterbirds and other species (most seen previously in Queensland) as well as close encounters with four-metre Estuarine Crocodiles or "salties". Birds seen included the enigmatic Magpie-Goose, Green Pygmy-Goose, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Paperbark Flycatcher, Whiskered Tern, Rufous Night-Heron, Royal Spoonbill, Australasian Darter, Brolga, Comb-crested Jacana, Black-necked Stork and Black-tailed Whistler. Later at the Jabiru Visitor Centre we found Partridge Pigeon, and along the highway near the Mary River we spotted a rare Red Goshawk near a known nest with chicks. At Burrungui (formerly Nourlangie Rock) we marvelled at the amazing aboriginal rock paintings.

Moving on to Darwin, we birded most of the well-known sites listed in bird-finding guides. Among the birds new for me here were Little Curlew, Oriental Plover, Barking Owl, Rainbow Pitta, Silver-backed Butcherbird (split from Gray Butcherbird), Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, Varied Lorikeet, Northern Rosella and Red-headed Myzomela.

Having driven 4,200 kilometres to date, on October 22 we flew from Darwin to Perth. The next day we set off for the south coast of Western Australia, stopping at Cheynes Beach Caravan Park where we had booked a cabin for two nights. New birds around the park were Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo and White-breasted Robin, both endemic to WA. A short walk from our cabin was a well-known site for Noisy Scrub-bird, also endemic and one of the most notorious skulkers in the country. Watching patiently down a narrow track through coastal scrub, we waited for a resident bird to cross from one section of his territory to another, and were eventually rewarded with a quick view of the running bird on two different occasions. Western Bristlebird was another difficult skulker, but I managed to see three birds crossing a sandy track in Waychinnicup National Park, a short walk from our cabin. I even got photographs of one. The Scrub-bird and Bristlebird added two new families to my list. The Park also harboured Western Whipbird (frequently heard but not seen), Brush and Common Bronzewing, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Inland Thornbill, Red-winged Fairy-wren, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Western Gerygone, Purple-crowned Lorikeet and others.

Heading back inland, at Porongorup National Park near Mt. Barker we recorded a pair of Rufous Treecreepers feeding young in a tree hollow, Western Rosella, Gilbert's Honeyeater and a stunning Red-eared Firetail. In Stirling Range National Park we found Western Yellow Robin, Elegant Parrot, Regent Parrot, Western Spinebill and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo. Lake Muir Observatory yielded a flock of 100 Western Corellas, another WA endemic. It is rather localized and becoming uncommon, the nominate race being listed as endangered. Dozens of Australian Shelducks and over 200 Black Swans dotted the shallow lake.

Dryandra Woodland SE of Perth gave us good looks at Western Wattlebird and Western Thornbill as well as

*Right: Brolga at Kakadu NP.*

an obliging Echidna. Returning to Perth to visit friends for a few days, we birded various parks and small lakes, getting good views of a pair of Blue-billed Ducks with young as well as a large variety of other waterbirds and woodland birds.

On November 5 we flew to Melbourne and immediately headed to the Werribee Sewage Farm, a wastewater treatment plant about 30 km west of city. This large facility covers about 110 square kilometres, and is subdivided into many sewage lagoons and ponds separated by fields and dikes. It is considered one of the top birding sites in Australia, and a permit system allows birders to access the area. We first stopped at the Werribee Open Range Zoo where one now obtains permits and a key to the sewage plant gates. Unfortunately, for us this site was rather disappointing. Water levels were very high, leaving no shoreline for waders or rails, and the weather was overcast, cold and windy. Where we had expected thousands of ducks, there were only a few Black Swans, Chestnut Teal and Australian Shelducks. A flock of eight Cape Barren Geese flew by and did not linger. The only shorebirds we saw were outside the plant area, roosting on the seashore: a small flock of Red-necked Stints and 18 Pied Oystercatchers. Among the land birds here were Little Grassbird, White-fronted Chat, Zebra Finch, Inland Thornbill, Little Raven, Fairy Martin, Silvereye, Swamp Harrier and Brown Falcon.

*Crested Shrike-Tit. Above right: Plains-Wanderer.*

Leaving the Melbourne area we then drove southwest, reaching the coast at Torquay. We continued along the Great Ocean Road, one of the most scenic drives I have experienced anywhere. This area harbours the range-restricted Rufous Bristlebird, which proved to be much easier to see than its Western relative; at Split Point Lighthouse we had at least two pairs and I managed a few photographs. At Maits Rest Rainforest Walk near Apollo, we walked a beautiful rainforest loop trail past large trees and giant tree ferns, the highlight being a singing male Pink Robin. At the Twelve Apostles lookout, after a beautiful sunset we watched as groups of Little Penguins, about 40 in all, swam in from the sea and walked up the beach to their burrows below us as darkness fell. Loch Ard, an area of rugged sea cliffs and arches nearby, yielded our first Long-billed Corellas, perching on the sandstone cliff formations.

It was now time to return to Melbourne and drive north to Deniliquin in New South Wales, where we had booked a tour with Philip Maher to find the rare and localized Plains-Wanderer. Most birders in the world who have seen this species have likely done so on one of Phil's trips, which he has been guiding for over 30 years. Because of the popularity of these trips and because they are available on only a few weekends each year, I had booked ours almost a year in advance — indeed, I had basically built the rest of our itinerary around this 1½ day excursion.

The first day of birding, Saturday November 12, started at 7:00 am and ran until almost midnight, as Plains-Wanderer is usually found by spotlighting them on their breeding grounds after dark. During the day we birded various habitats around Deniliquin, racking up a long list of birds including Little Eagle, Superb Parrot, Emu, Brolga, Varied Sittella, Brown Treecreeper, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Red-capped Robin, Southern Whiteface, Crested Shrike-Tit, Australian Owlet-Nightjar, a Tawny Frogmouth on a nest, Bluebonnet and Striped Honeyeater. For me, highlights were the Varied Sitella and Crested Shrike-Tit, both new families for me. Crested Shrike-Tit was only

recently reclassified into its own monotypic family. Another major highlight was a pair of Ground Cuckooshrikes, a species I had long been hoping to see; this Australian endemic has become rare and rather difficult to find.

After dark on a calm, clear night we proceeded to the Plains-Wanderer habitat (sparse, flat native grassland), and drove around for about an hour before our quarry was spotted by Phil: a female (males are less colourfully marked in this species and care for the chicks). I managed to get some photos with the illumination from the spotlights, and we later saw a male as well. Tick off another new family, and the last potential one for this trip! We also came upon several Banded Lapwings and a Little Buttonquail in the same area. The next day overcast skies and very strong winds made birding difficult, but we added Black-tailed Native-Hen and White-backed Swallow to the trip list before finishing at noon.

On our drive back to Melbourne, a stop at Fryers Ridge State Forest yielded Fuscous and Painted Honeyeaters, and I photographed a Dusky Woodswallow on the nest.

On Tuesday November 15 we flew to Hobart, Tasmania where we were met and hosted by our friend Els Wakefield. Els is a prominent birder and conservationist in Tasmania and also a keen photographer. She had guided two international birders doing world big years: Noah Strycker in 2015 and Arjan

Dwarshuis in 2016, helping them find the twelve endemic birds of the island, so we knew we were in good hands. We did indeed find the birds, all within a short distance from Hobart. The most range-restricted of the passerines here is Forty-Spotted Pardalote, which can be found on Bruny Island, a short drive and ferry ride from Hobart. Here we also found a pair of lovely Hooded Plovers.

Near Dover we eventually connected with Swift Parrot, a species which breeds only in Tasmania but winters on the Australian mainland. This species is undergoing a steep population decline due to predation by introduced Sugar Gliders, and its status was revised from endangered to critically endangered in 2015.

An added bonus of our Tasmanian experience was a pelagic trip out of Eaglehawk Neck east of Hobart, organized by Els to coincide with our visit. For information on the timing of regular trips from this location, see the following link:

http://birding-aus.org/pelagic-trips-off-eaglehawk-neck-tas-in-2017/

We set out on November 19, a sunny day with generally light but cool winds, and headed for the continental shelf break. On the second stop to release chum ("berley" in down-under speak), a Pterodroma zoomed by and a few of us got quick photos which allowed us to identify it as a Soft-plumaged Petrel, a lifer for me. We soon had visits from and very close views of the largest albatrosses in the world: adults of Northern Royal and Southern Royal, and an immature Wandering Albatross (gibsoni). Also well represented were the smaller Black-browed (Campbell's), Shy (cauta/steadi) and Buller's albatrosses. At times we witnessed mad scrambles near the boat as Royal Albatrosses tried to steal fish scraps from the Shy Albatrosses. The trip also produced Northern Giant Petrel, Fairy Prion, Grey-faced Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, hundreds of Short-tailed Shearwaters, and Wilson's Storm-Petrel among others.

On November 22 we left Hobart and drove north, completing a circular route around the island. At a roadside stop in forest near St. Mary's we found a beautiful Flame Robin singing on territory. The town of Strahan on the west coast was the one of the most interesting stops on this circuit. I hoped to find Ground Parrot here, so one evening at dusk and again the following morning at dawn I drove to a buttongrass plain near the airport. Here one of the memorable experiences of the trip was hearing multiple Ground Parrots calling — a strange high-pitched, morse-code like ringing.

After completing our circumnavigation of Tasmania and checking out a few more birding sites around Hobart (Freckled Duck added to the trip list) we flew back to Sydney, where we visited friends there and in Newcastle. A walk along Lake Macquarie near Newcastle yielded excellent looks at three White-throated Needletails flying low overhead and a skulking Eastern Whipbird. After five internal flights and 10,094 km of driving in six rental vehicles, on November 28, 2016 we returned to Vancouver. Our bird list for the trip stood at 364 (95 of them being lifers for me), my Australia list reached 481, and we had garnered a host of wonderful memories and photographs from the marvelous continent down under.

*Below: Black-browed (Campbell) Albatross, Tasmania.*

# Short Notes 3

At least three BCFO members have been speaking about birds and birding on CBC of late. You can still catch the interviews via the web:

BCFO Young Birder Liam Singh speaks about raising awareness for declining bird populations by sharing photographs and leading bird-watching tours at:

www.cbc.ca/beta/news/canada/british-columbia/programs/northbynorthwest/13-year-old-bird-watcher-and-photographer-looks-out-for-his-feathery-friends-1.4041788

Richard Cannings and Melissa Hafting talk about birding — start listening at the 30-minute mark — at:

www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/programs/bcalmanac/march-24-2017-youth-and-sexual-extortion-bird-watching-1.4042943

# Avian Encounters

## Sharp-shinned Impact

*Gordon F. Brown*

Just as had been the case with the Northern Pygmy-owl story in the March issue of *BC Birding*, my dear wife was responsible for this story too. From the kitchen, Jeannie heard the tell-tale impact of a bird hitting the dining room window and rushed out onto the deck to see who had been involved and whether it had survived. What she found was a Sharp-shinned Hawk, on its back and pitifully still. I was out shoveling snow, being far less motionless than I might have wished, when she came out and rescued me.

As luck would have it, I'd left a camera mounted with a 60mm macro lens on the dining room table (sometimes it's good not to have put your toys away) and was able to grab it on my way to the deck. On first seeing the bird, I was in awe at just how small and beautiful it was, but a second and more careful look found the little chest to be gently rising and falling; the bird was alive, at least for the moment. After making a quick record shot I set the camera on the picnic table, luckily just an arm's-length away, and went to get a jacket, thinking I might be able to make a nest to help the bird retain body heat while trying to recover.

At this juncture, my most remarkable birding experience quickly began to unfold: the moment I lifted the otherwise motionless creature it immediately sat up, facing me while perched on the back of my gloved left hand. Grateful for right-handedness, I reached for the camera and made a couple of quick close-ups, all the while

praising the gods of technology for having invented auto focus. I don't remember how I encouraged the bird onto the jacket but it complied, allowing me to make a few last shots. We then went inside leaving it to revive, if it was going to. Ten minutes later, when we peeked out the window to check, the Sharp-shinned was gone. Of course there's no way to know if the little hawk hit the window while chasing its own reflection, or something else that managed to escape. Nor do we have any idea whether it ultimately survived, but we have seen one in the neighborhood a few times since this early February event.

## An Avian Q-tip

*Gerry Polman*

In the hills above Oliver, BC, a yearling Mule Deer and an adult doe, presumably the yearling's mother, graze sedately along the side of a rural road. Nearby, a pair of Black-billed Magpies forage on the shore of a small pond. A typical nature tableau… but then something quite unexpected happens. The yearling trots over to one of the magpies. Perhaps it is the approach, or possibly some other unseen communication passes between the two, as directly the magpie flies up to land on the deer's hindquarters and then hops forward to where it perches on the ungulate's shoulders. Meanwhile, the yearling turns its head sharply to the side and at the same time swivels a large ear back to bring the open side of it within reaching distance of the magpie. The bird stretches its neck, obligingly sticks its bill inside the proffered ear, and appears to remove and eat an insect or tick from it. Mission accomplished, the magpie hops back down to the ground and the yearling returns to grazing with its mother.

From my vantage point inside my vehicle parked on the opposite side of the road, I am completely amazed by this little spectacle, the likes of which I had no idea existed. I did know that in Africa certain birds, especially the Red-billed and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers, groom ticks and insects from large African mammals such as rhinos, hippos, cape buffalo, zebras, eland, impala, and even giraffes. However, until this moment along a rural BC road, I had no inkling that our side of the Atlantic might harbour its own version of "oxpeckers". Several more experienced birders I shared this story and photo with had also never witnessed such an event. However, from the casual, almost practiced, nature of the encounter I had seen, it was evident that this had not been the first rodeo for either of these critters and it therefore seemed unlikely that this could have been a unique or isolated event. Some further research revealed that in fact this phenomenon is not at all uncommon in

North America and is quite well documented.

The main difference between the two continental versions of this interspecies behaviour, is that while the African oxpeckers feed almost exclusively on the parasites they find on their hosts and rarely leave them, our black-billed magpies are opportunistic generalists for whom mammalian pest control is very much a part-time occupation. This likely explains why it has been more rarely observed by birders. Historically though, when the uncountable Bison herds roamed the American Great Plains and the Canadian Prairies, many thousands of magpies followed their migrations and it is likely that at least some of those fed almost exclusively on the abundance of parasites provided by these herds. Today, in many places on these plains, domestic cattle have replaced the vanished bison and while some magpies have adapted and are known to incidentally feed on cattle ticks, the plentitude that formerly existed is no more and neither are the large prairie flocks of magpies.

In Western Canada there are two main species of ticks that feed on grazing mammals: Rocky Mountain wood ticks and winter ticks. They attach themselves primarily to moose, elk, woodland caribou, mule deer and white-tailed deer, and less frequently to other hoofed grazers such as black-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, wood bison, and pronghorns. Even bears, coyotes, and wolves can acquire ticks after feeding on the carcass of an infested herbivore. In addition to the already mentioned cattle, other potential tick hosts are domestic and feral horses, and occasionally human hikers and their pet dogs.

Although tick feeding on North American mammals is most often associated with magpies, this same behaviour, but to a lesser extent, is also engaged in by other members of the corvid family such as Gray Jays and Clark's Nutcrackers. Ravens too, although elk in particular have been observed rejecting their advances, apparently because in addition to plucking ticks, the rascally Ravens also have a tendency to painfully pluck large clumps of hair from their elk hosts, presumably to line their nests. Although the only reference to North American Crows and tick removal that I could find was in regard to wild boars in the American Southwest (along with Scrub Jays), it would be surprising if these opportunists did not also from time to time partake of this moveable feast with other mammals. Certainly, European and Asian crow species are known to groom ticks from red deer and sambars respectively.

Returning to the roadside mule deer near Oliver, I had driven that same rural road on dozens of previous occasions and almost invariably, especially in the mornings, members of the resident deer herd would be encountered grazing there. Sometimes I had stopped to watch or photograph them, but more often I had just driven by and only fleetingly noted such a common sight. Had I driven by and not stopped on this particular occasion described above, I would have completely missed an unexpected inter-species interaction that opened up what for me at least was a whole new area of knowledge about both North American birds and mammals. Perhaps, therefore, the most valuable lesson learned was to never assume that there isn't something more to be gained from taking the time to observe even the most mundane and commonplace natural scenes. Nature is full of surprises.

*By coincidence, Chris Siddle's* Gone Pishing *article on page 25 also discusses this issue—Editor.*

# Identifications & Misidentifications

David Stirling

**Identification 1**

It is the peak of the hare and the vole cycle and every owl species has arrived for the banquet. In late March the boreal forest is animated by singing owls. I want to tie the singing to the species; Hawk Owl? Boreal Owl? I ask an old trapper for a bit his wisdom.

He said, "The indians say these are spirits of the forest calling, and you will get into a deep heap of bad luck if you try to investigate."

As the near waist-deep snow was packing down, thawing by day and refreezing overnight it was close to being life threatening for a person staggering about in the darkness, trying to zero in on songs that always appeared to come from the another direction. I persisted and after several nights of wallowing about and much cursing, I got both Hawk Owl and the Boreal Owl songs. No bad luck, not at that time anyway.

**Identification 2**

It is quiet summer's evening on the shores of Calling Lake in northern Alberta. I am talking to a mink farmer. The high-pitched "kreek kreek" of Western Grebes seemed to hang in the air as no birds are visible in the sun's glare off the water.

"The calling of the grebes adds to the ambiance of the evening," I say.

The mink man looks at me and smiles.

"Them's not birds, them's fish calling," he said. "Come with me. I am going to lift a net I have set for mink food."

We have a full net of suckers, common sucker, *Catostomus commersonii*. As their air bladders deflate they vent a squeaky "kreek kreek" similar to the call of the Western Grebe but only audible at less than a metre.

"Well", the man says, "are these birds?" "You city (Athabasca pop. 700) fellows think you know everything but admit it, in the bush, you don't know your ass from your elbow."

**Identification 3**

In my part of Alberta in the 1930s many of the settlers, immigrants from central Europe, believed that the Devil was real, you would be scared if you

saw him but not at all surprised. A neighbour had been splitting firewood all summer and throwing it up in a huge pyramid. One September night under a brilliant harvest moon the lady of the house came out to visit the outhouse. There, sitting on top of the wood pile, was old Satan, large as life, round face, side whiskers, horns and all. I am not sure what happened next except that she got a frightful scare. The remainder of the month saw several more sightings, mostly by school kids who were forced to make long detours through the muskeg to avoid the beast, and then got a telling off from the teacher for being late.

Saturday evening, at twilight, I am walking the three-mile journey home from the rural post office, where every Saturday night the farm kids gathered, some carrying .22 rifles, to pick up letters from the Old Country, handed out one at a time from a worn mail bag by a formidable lady postmaster. Turning a corner on the trail I am face to face with Satan. We regarded each other for what seemed to be several minutes. I will admit that I, a twelve year-old, had a damn good scare but I soon realized that the Devil was a Lynx, *Lynx canadensis,* round face, side whiskers, and prominent ear tufts like horns. It appeared to be almost white with greyish spots, a beautiful animal, looking quite calm and dignified. The tall cat retreated into the dense trail verge. I carried on for home at a faster pace, turning often to check my back. It was the last sighting. I told people that the strange beast was a lynx but I was informed by the old timers that Satan could manifest himself in many guises and what did a twelve year-old know about these things?

**Identification 4**

I am shepherding a group of birders around the mud flats of the Fraser delta, in a year of the Blue Jay incursions into southern BC, even as far west as Victoria. While ear bashing the group regarding the possibilities of Blue Jays becoming permanent residents of the lower mainland, I caught a glimpse of a blue-and-white bird flying through the distant trees.

"Look, there's one" I shouted.

I get a quizzical look from one or two of the group, but the guru had spoken. Later, pondering this sighting and my instant identification, I began to wonder: On the West Coast, if it flies like a Blue Jay, looks like a distant Blue Jay and your brain is in a Blue Jay mode, the bird is most likely a Belted Kingfisher?

# Book Review

*Best Places to Bird in British Columbia*, by Russell Cannings and Richard Cannings, Greystone Books, softcover, $22.95

At first blush this might seem to be a reference guidebook like the authors' previous *Birdfinding in British Columbia*, with a focus on specific, particularly good, areas. The back cover of the book, stating that the volume covers the authors' thirty favourite birding sites, reinforces that impression, bringing to mind the superb *Birder's Guide to Vancouver and the Lower Mainland*, which also originally described thirty great birding spots. But whereas the latter book is a very substantial compendium that one would certainly want to take along on birding trips, I suggest that *Best Places* is not really a birder's travelling companion.

The first location described – Triangle Island – immediately indicates that the book is more suited to an armchair read. Very few BCFO members are ever likely to visit Triangle Island, particularly since we hear it involves chartering a vessel for $6,000, and probably not being allowed to land anyway. But it is certainly good to read about the place. We hear, for instance, that this spot, 46 kilometres west of the northern tip of Vancouver Island, is home to 80,000 Rhinoceros Auklets, 60,000 Tufted Puffins, 8,000 Common Murres and a *million* Cassin's Auklets. Most BC birders will be delighted to be told about the place, never dreaming of actually going there.

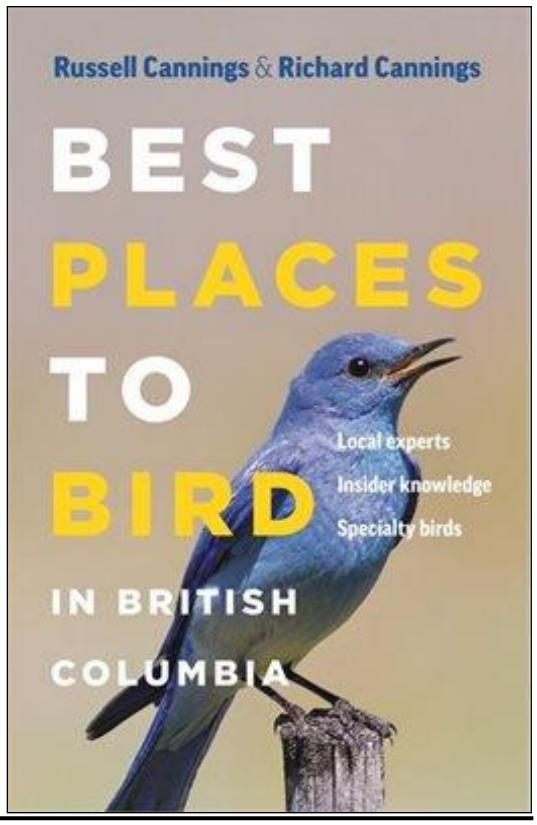
The discussion of Triangle Island is brief and interesting, and chapter two follows very quickly with another brief and interesting discussion, this time covering Port McNeil. The text follows the pattern of all thirty chapters – an introduction to the location, an indication of how to get there, a discussion of some of the birds likely to be seen, and tips on where exactly to head for the best birding.

It doesn't actually take very long to keep reading, covering all thirty chapters. Though the book extends to more than 200 pages, the abundant photographs, wide margins and double-spaced text ensure that the book could be read from beginning to end in an evening. While some people might indeed take the book with them to specific spots and follow the tips, I suspect that most would use it more as a general gazetteer, to gain an overview of the birdier places in the province that they might, one day, want to visit. The book does cover places serious BC birders tend already to know – Iona Island, Reifel, White Lake, Road 22, Scout Island, etc – but it also opens our eyes to places we've never thought of, and no doubt many travel plans will be devised as a result.

BCFO's Young Birders are remarkably well represented in the book, as they and their mentors contributed large numbers of photographs.

Richard Cannings will be present at this year's AGM and Conference, and his publisher has been asked to make sure he brings plenty of copies with him. Fortunately, Chapter 26 of the book is devoted to Tumbler Ridge.

– CNK



# Gone Pishing

*Chris Siddle*

## Magpie!

I saw my first Black-billed Magpie on a long May weekend in 1966 when, having lied to my parents that I was camping around Chilliwack well within a safe drive of my home town of Mission, I accompanied two older birder friends, Ron and Jim, into the Cascades where we spent the first night camped on the banks of the Similkameen at Hedley. It was my first trip past Hope and I was agog with the possibilities of "new" birds. Early Saturday morning, as we drove farther east towards Osoyoos, we passed under a powerline upon which perched a long-tailed black and white bird. From my obsessive nightly study of the few bird books I had access to at the time, I recognized it instantly as a lifer, a Black-billed Magpie.

At the time, rolling along in Ron's old Ford, excited by all the new sights, I treated it as just another bird on my growing life list, certainly not as memorable as the male Calliope Hummingbird I had watched earlier that morning as it visited its trapline of purple penstemons around a rocky hill near Hedley, or the male White-winged Crossbill glowing pink-red that we had stumbled over the day before hopping around in a corral in Manning Park.

It wasn't until after my wife and I had moved to Fort St. John in 1975 that I began to appreciate what a complex and fascinating bird the magpie is. It's a bird of pleasing design. C.H. Trost, who wrote the 1999 BNA account (#389), described it as "strikingly marked and conspicuous." Florence Merriam Bailey (1908) in a wonderfully dated simile introduced the magpie as "a black airship with white side-wheelers and long black rudder." J.A. Munro (1950) focuses more closely on the magpie's plumage. "Actually, only the head, neck, and part of the back are black: the closed wings are iridescent blue; the great wedge-shaped tail, as long as the body, is iridescent green."

As to the bird's personality, it has been described as "interesting," "knowing," "resourceful," "audacious," "unscrupulous," "perfectly confident," and "a bird amply able to take of itself." Clearly the Black-billed Magpie is a bird that leaves strong impressions upon its viewers. At Fort St. John, it certainly left an impression upon me, as I saw magpies flying around in the snowy fields and bare shelter belts at the beginning of my first northern winter. Here was one of the few birds that did not leave the area. It was tough, hardy, irrepressible. It could handle minus 35–40 Celsius with aplomb.

A magpie was proof that life existed in spite of the harsh climate. Southerners don't know what it's like to walk through a northern landscape where your steaming breath and squeaky footsteps on the dry snow seem your only company, when the intense cold, the skeletal bare aspens and the dark green of spruce along the gullies are a backdrop apparently empty of all other higher life forms. Suddenly with an upward inflected "yerk," a magpie flies up the ravine and over your head, black and white against the big empty cold blue of space and suddenly you're a little warmer, knowing you're not alone.

Only relatively recently have the Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) of North America and the Common Magpie (*Pica pica*) of Eurasian been separated by taxonomists into two species. The two species have different vocalizations, social behaviour, and spacing (Trost 1999), but look so similar that it's not surprising that following its discovery on the plains and mountains of western North America, the Black-billed Magpie was saddled with the reputation of its Eurasian relative. Early in its relationship with Europeans and Britons, the Black-billed Magpie was regarded like the Eurasian Magpie as a friendly consumer of insects and rodents and fairly harmless mischief-maker that Lewis and Clark noted sometimes even hopped into the tents of the Plains Indians in search of meat. Some were tame enough to take food from the hand.

This rather affectionate attitude towards Black-billed Magpies changed for two reasons. First as Tim Birkhead explains, "with the increase in game preservation in the 18th and 19th centuries the [Eurasian Magpie] ceased to be popular in Europe because of its habit of taking game bird eggs and chicks." (215-216). Once gamekeepers set their minds against the magpie, they and their Victorian overlords emphasized his darker habits such as nest robbing and added him to the long list of undesirable wildlife that they insisted responsible managers of land should eliminate. Thus began campaigns against magpies in the great estates of the Old World.

In the New World, extermination of food sources like the American Bison and the introduction of livestock in the West likely caused a profound series of changes in the foraging of the Black-billed Magpie. The planting of shelterbelts and treed gardens enabled edge-species like Baltimore Orioles and American Robins to spread across the formerly tree-less plains. Quick to take advantage of this situation, the Black-billed Magpie, like its European relative, was soon seen by the bird-loving farmers as a ruthless, cruel and calculating villain, a destroyer of songbirds' eggs and a murderer of their chicks.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the second reason for the negative shift in the European attitude toward the magpie was developing. The magpie transferred its habit of picking and eating ticks from deer and wild sheep to tick-picking cattle, horses, and mules. These domesticated animals, often lacking basic vet care, sometimes bore saddle-sores and other unhealed wounds that magpies picked at and sometimes enlarged. Cattle bearing the fresh burns of

recent branding were prime targets for the magpie's not-so-benign ministrations. One source notes that sometimes the bird's picking would even obscure the brand on the flank of the cow. Every fan of Westerns knows what happens when you mess with a rancher's livestock – a range war, this one against magpies.

In 1927 E.R. Kalmbach published his research into the Black-billed Magpie's relationship with agriculture. On the whole he found the species beneficial, and helpful in controlling outbreaks of insect pests. Carnivorous by nature, it only consumes grain when there is nothing else to eat. However, in addition to his analysis of the contents of 547 magpie stomachs, he summarized some of the campaigns, either directly or indirectly being waged against magpies:

During campaigns against coyotes in the winter of 1921-22 along Butter Creek, in Umatilla County, Oregon, it was conservatively estimated that 5,000 magpies were killed. In Douglas County, Colorado, magpies were practically exterminated in the country covered by poison lines placed for coyotes in the winter of 1922-23. In the winter of 1921-22 a coyote campaign planned for Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation, Nevada, called for preliminary measures against magpies. On the first day after placing baits, three grain sacks full of dead magpies were picked up. In one poison station at Summit, Utah, 143 of these birds were accounted for within a few days.

The local poisoning of magpies described by Kalmbach also occurred closer to home. The British traveler J.K. Lord in his explorations of the interior of Gold Rush B.C. also visited Colville, Washington State, just south of the border where he claims to have witnessed the following incident:

"To the packer the magpies are dire enemies .... If a pack horse or mule has a gall … the [magpie] pecks away at the wound…. This repeated agony soon kills the animal, unless the packers rescue it … at our winter mule camp … [magpies] gradually accumulated … until they were in the hundreds….We had an old maimed suffering mule which was to be killed, so the packers gave it a ball containing a large dose of strychnine; death was immediate, and the carcass, ere ten minutes had lapsed, was covered with magpies working at the eyes, lips, sores and soft skin inside the thighs. It was the most singular spectacle I ever witnessed. One after the other birds rolled off the dead mule, and as they fell, others greedily took their vacant places; and so this terrible slaughter went on until heaps of dead magpies nearly buried the body of the mule."

"Heaps of magpies" sounds, well, a tad exaggerated, but the wholesale slaughter of wildlife whether it was buffalo, wolves, coyotes, or magpies, was common and not only tolerated but encouraged in the West at the time. A final example of magpie slaughter is mentioned in A. C. Bent's *Life Histories of North American Jays, Crows and Titmice*:

The hatred that many people hold for the magpie has found expression in the carrying on of contests in an attempt to "exterminate" the species. An item from a newspaper in British Columbia gives some results of one of the contests as it was conducted in 1931 in the Okanagan Lakes region. Two teams, of six persons each, killed a total of 1,033 magpies in one season. (p.148)

Even if much of the magpie slaughter was incidental, the birds being a kind of "by-catch" when the intended victims were coyotes, it is clear that no one seemed to object to the avian persecution. As J.A. Munro, Dominion Wildlife officer in B.C., observed in 1950 "public sentiment is definitely anti-magpie" and if anyone grieved the wholesale killing of magpies, he/she left no mention of it. Even today it's not hard to find people in B.C. who will tell you that magpies are solely responsible for the decrease in songbirds experienced throughout the magpie's range and beyond. Such ideas are often predicated upon a perceived local increase in magpie numbers, which, given our opening up of many areas that were formerly forested and therefore unsuitable for magpies may be real. Magpies, like Canada Geese, European Starlings, House Wrens, Bullock's Orioles, American Robins, Red-tailed Hawks and a host of other species, some of them labeled nuisance wildlife, find our treed yards, lawns, and our little parks, ponds and golf courses much to their liking and have within the last half century spread into areas like B.C. Peace River where they were unknown in the 1930s.

Given our history of shooting and poisoning magpies, is it any wonder that Black-billed Magpies are wary of us?

*End of Part One*

If you have a comment about this column or any true magpie stories that you would like to share with the author, write Chris Siddle at chris.siddle@gmail.com.

**References**

Angell, Tony. 1978, *Ravens, Crows, Magpies and Jays*. University of Washington Press (in Canada Douglas and McInTyre, North Vancouver).

Bailey, Forence Merriam. 1908. *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States*, third ed. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

Birkhead, Tim. *The Magpies: the ecology and behaviour of Black-billed and Yellow-billed Magpies*. 1991. T.D. Poyser, London.

Cannings, R.A., Cannings, R. J. and Cannings, S.G. 1987. *Birds of the Okanagan Valley, Canada*. Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria.

Cocker, Mark and Richard Mabey. 2005. *Birds Britannica*. Chatto & Windus, London.

Linsdale, J.M. "American Magpie" in A.C. Bent. 1946. *Life Histories of North American Jays, Crows and Titmice.* Smithsonian Institution United States Publishing Office, United States National Museum, Washington, D.C.

Munro, J.A. 1950. *Birds of Canada's Mountain Parks.* Dept. of Resources and Development, Ottawa.

Taverner, P.A. *Birds of Western Canada*, second ed. 1928. National Museum of Canada, Ottawa.

*Black-billed Magpie photos by Chris Siddle.*

# The Reflective Birder

*Clive Keen*

## Birding: All Sweetness and Light?

A collection of essays reflecting on birding would be incomplete if it failed to tackle one thorny subject: the downsides of the hobby. There are none, I hear you cry? But it's worth thinking through, because sometimes, dwelling on possible downsides brings not just enlightenment but a plan of action.

A week's thinking about the issue generated four Possible Downsides of birding. The first, significant for some of us, concerns the optimal time for birding. Cobwebs in the brains of people who aren't morning persons tend to clear just as birds slack off for the day. It's when the mist-nets are being taken down, not when they are being put up at dawn, that people like me start to function properly. Bummer.

Well, that's not too troublesome for most. So let's move on to Possible Downside Two, which should affect more people. This is the discovery, by nearly all birders, of humility. The novice quickly and easily becomes the bird expert in his circle, by simple virtue of being the only birder around. Birding, it seems, is easy. Filled with confidence, the novice goes on to join birding groups. Among the members of those groups, though, are people with superb eyes and ears, a steel-trap memory for all things avian, and knowledge that has been building since childhood. Once in their company, it becomes clear that for most of us, real birding is not easy at all. Trying to keep up with the true experts shows that birding can be positively hard, almost too hard for those with normal doses of talent

Fortunately, learning humility is good for you, even if it hurts a bit, so we might decide to shrug our shoulders at Possible Downside Two. Numbers Three and Four, though, can't be dismissed as lightly. Both concern perceptions, by the general public, of birders and birding.

One manifestation is the problem discovered by most birders when they wend their way slowly, looking all about them, through suburbs and country lanes (Downside 3). Suspicious eyes begin to follow. What can these strangers be up to? Surely it's to no good. Many a birder is challenged by people on neighbourhood watch. Occasionally, even police are called to check out us doubtful-looking characters.

And this is only half of it. For most of the past century, birders have had, to put it mildly, an image problem (Downside 4). Consider the character of Miss Jane Hathaway in *The Beverley Hillbillies*, one of the most-watched television programs of all time. A Plain Jane, pining for the handsome if clueless Jethro, her role as a figure of farce was confirmed by adding scenes of her in the woods staring through binoculars. Her exclamations of delight when birds appeared were guaranteed to generate laugh-track hilarity. To a fair extent, all birders were seen by the general public as Jane Hathaways – birding was the hobby of choice, in the public's mind, of dweebs.

Have things changed? Should we warn potential birders of this image problem, or is it a thing of the past? Over the last fifty years there have been two enormous shifts in western culture. One has concerned gender. The change in attitudes about the role of women and the status of non-heterosexuals has been profound, of a width and depth which would seem incredible to a Rip Van Winkle awakened from the 1950s. But the change in attitudes towards nature has been no less profound. We really have come a long way towards realizing that nature deserves our deep concern and respect. As I write that sentence, I imagine legions of people forcefully complaining that we still haven't learned, and are still despoiling nature. But those legions make my point. In the 1950s, nature was being despoiled constantly, unreported and unnoticed. Now, every new economic development is examined closely for its environmental impact, and businesses and politicians know that there'll be strident cries and determined opposition if their actions may be deemed harmful to the natural world.

Attitudes towards nature, beyond any doubt, have changed dramatically. Does this mean that youngsters thinking of taking up birding needn't worry about the dweeb factor? Would they instead share in the respect that is now felt appropriate to nature? I suspect that there'll always be reason for some ribbing of birders. Let's face it, some of the things we do understandably cause some smiles. Most people's favourite places are not sewage lagoons and cemeteries. Most people don't get wildly excited by reports of a Red-flanked Bluetail. Most people don't pause in the middle of a conversation to say that they can hear a Yellow-rumped Warbler in the trees. But we want the ribbing to be good natured. We want to be laughed *with*, not *at*. It was encouraging that the characters in *The Big Year* were mostly laughed with, not at. Have we, though, made the full transition from dweeb-dom? I'm not sure. I do, though, know how it can come about.

Twenty years ago, our culture had come to the point of accepting that, in theory, gay people should not be discriminated against or denigrated because of their orientation. The first people coming out of the closet, though, knew perfectly well that perceptions did not align with theory, and they'd have to grit their teeth in the face of unspoken disparagement. But twenty years on, with the closet doors wide open, homosexuality is just a different sort of normal, no longer even a cause for comment. Once gays became known openly to most people, as relatives, coworkers, friends, service-club acquaintances, etc, fingers ceased to be pointed, whispers stopped, and they were simply Bob, Fred, and Mary.

Birders' Lib is of course hardly in the same league as Gay Liberation, and it might seem frivolous to be making the comparison. But great changes in public perceptions hold lessons for lesser causes. In the past, birders mostly kept quiet about their hobby, except among themselves. The hesitation, I suspect, still lingers. And it is why the general public, seeing a binocular wielder in leafy suburbs, does not instantly realize that they are simply looking at a birder. When Doug, Peter and Margaret are all known as birders, and clearly aren't lesser mortals, birders, too can be seen as just a different sort of normal.

So, don't be boring about it, but show your pride in your hobby. Swap stories on Facebook. Offer to take people birding. Promote your naturalists club. Wear your binoculars on the street. Add a bumper sticker. Above all, make it clear that birding is normal and *fun*.