

BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

ISSN 1206-1611

BCFO.ca

Volume 26 Number 3 / September 2016



Cedar Waxwing in Russian Olive tree, by Peter Candido.

Publisher

BC Birding is published four times a year by the British Columbia Field Ornithologists, PO Box 45111, Dunbar, Vancouver BC, V6S 2M8.

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

About the BCFO

Membership in BCFO is open to anyone interested in the study and enjoyment of wild birds in British Columbia.

BCFO objectives include: fostering cooperation between amateur and professional ornithologists, promoting cooperative bird surveys and research projects, and supporting conservation organizations in their efforts to preserve birds and their habitats.

Membership

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

Annual Membership Dues

General Membership (Canada): \$30

Junior Membership (Canada): \$20

U.S. and International Membership: \$35

Newsmagazine Submissions

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

Front Cover

Cedar Waxwing photographed in Brooks, Alberta, on a trip following the BCFO AGM in May/June 2016.

Right

Tufted Puffin photographed by Melissa Hafting on July 30, 2016 during a pelagic trip to Smith Island, Washington.

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, qabis4@gmail.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 (NewsMagazine) Editor: Clive Keen, *Associate Editor:* Virginia Rasch

BC Breeding Bird Atlas: George Clulow

Cannings Award Committee: Wayne Weber

Young Birder Awards Committee: Carlo Giovanella

Young Birders Program: Melissa Hafting

Featured Photographer: Carlo Giovanella

Canadian International Joint Venture: Wayne Weber

Librarian: Andy Buhler

Membership Committee: Larry Cowan

Website: George Clulow, Neil Dawe





Contents

Notices

BCFO AGM 2017	4
Splits and Lumps	4
Welcome New Members	4

BCFO Two-day Trips

Vancouver Shorebirds, September 24-25, 2016	5
---	---

Young Birders Program

Field Trip to Pitt Lake	6
NANPA Award	6
Photo Exposure	7
Young Birder Awards	7

BCFO Trip Reports

Clinton & Ashcroft Two-day Trip, May 14-15, 2016	8
Pre- and Post-AGM Trips, Southern Alberta May 2016	8
Creston Valley Two-day Trip, May 26-27, 2016	9

Upcoming Meetings and Events

International Birding

Oaxaca 2016	12
Birding in Iceland	15

Book Reviews

The Birder's Guide to Vancouver and the Lower Mainland	17
Birds of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest	17

Briefings

A Knotty Climate	19
The Most Amazing Bird in the World?	19
Avian Pointer	20
We All Think Like Ducks	21

Miscellany

Weird Bird Names	21
Big Year	21
Erratum	21

The Reflective Birder #16

Going Over to the Offence	22
---------------------------------	----



Above

*Alice Sun with her BCFO Young Birder Award plaque.
Melissa Hafting photo.*

Back Cover

A post-AGM trip into southern Alberta led Peter Candido into the marvellous Frank Lake, where he spotted this Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Right

Another of Peter Candido's shots while at Frank Lake: a breeding-plumage male Ruddy Duck.



Notices

BCFO AGM 2017

Any BC birder seeking lifers or year-birds will surely want to be in the northeast of the province in June. Birding east of the Rockies gives a mouth-watering range of possibilities. That's one of the reasons the BCFO board has decided to hold its 2017 AGM in Tumbler Ridge.

Take a look through the Cannings' *Birdfinding* book, and you'll be told where around Tumbler Ridge you are likely to find:

- Connecticut Warbler
- Blue-headed Vireo
- Blackpoll Warbler
- Philadelphia Vireo

Extension or wider-ranging trips might also bring:

- Upland Sandpiper
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- Black-throated Green Warbler
- Black-and-white Warbler
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Yellow Rail (at least the sound)
- Common Grackle
- Nelson's Sparrow
- Le Conte's Sparrow

And where else in BC is the default hawk the Prairie Falcon, or you can see the McGillivray's/Connecticut/ Mourning Warbler trio.

Tumbler is also a place where east and west meet: research leading to the splitting of Winter and Pacific Wrens was conducted here. On a single trip you can see both Townsend's and Black-throated Green Warblers. And Tumbler has a lot more to offer. The Dinosaur museum has become even more interesting to birders now it is known that birds are the last remaining

dinosaurs. In fact the oldest birds in BC can be found in the Dinosaur Discovery Centre.

Splits and Lumps

For the next edition, Larry Cowan plans an article on the extensive splitting and lumping in the August issue of *Clements*. Meanwhile, he notes two changes potentially affecting BC listings:

- Western Scrub-Jay, split into California Scrub Jay and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay
- Two sub-species of Leach's Storm-Petrel have been elevated to full species: Townsend's Storm-Petrel and Ainsley's Storm-Petrel. Leach's remains the default in BC waters.

Below: Eared Grebes by James Cosgrove, taken with a Nikon P900.



Welcome New Members

Gail Kenner - Vancouver

Else Mikkelsen - Vancouver

Bobby Dailey - Cranbrook

Suann Hosie - West Vancouver

John Morgan - Abbotsford

BCFO Two-day Trips

Vancouver Shorebirds

September 24-25, 2016

Organization

Leader

Brian Self, Delta, 604-943-9378, bri-
anself@eastlink.ca

Registration/Admin

Adrian Leather, Quesnel, 250-249-
5561, qabis4@gmail.com

Itinerary

Saturday

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

Sunday

- Morning: Tsawwassen Jetty
- Afternoon: Boundary Bay

Accommodation

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

How the Trips Work

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

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

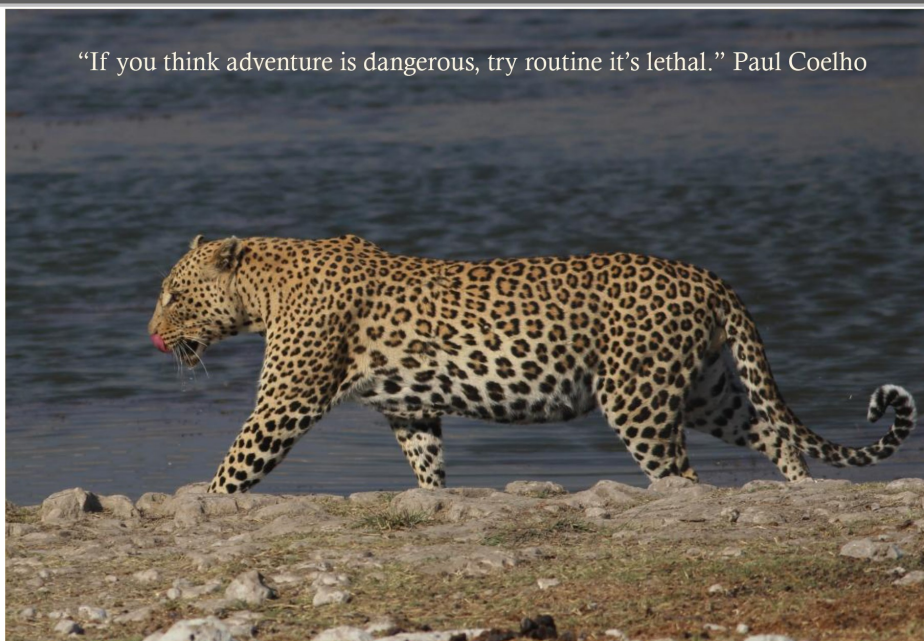
Carpooling is encouraged, and will be arranged on the morning of Day 1.

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

Cost

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

"If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine it's lethal." Paul Coelho



SATIPO TOURS

For your next birding adventure, try www.SatipoTours.com We offer fun birding, enjoying the best nature-viewing areas of a region, while supporting eco-friendly initiatives! Small groups combined with comfortable bird-friendly accommodation and personal service ensures a great trip.

Best of Namibia September 18 – October 9, 2017 (21 days)

Leaders: Thomas Plath and Dylan Whyte (Cost: approx. \$7000 CDN)

Argentina – Complete Northwest (November 5 –20, 2017) (16 days)

Leaders: Thomas Plath and Pablo Jost (Cost: approx. \$4900 CDN)

"Our 2013 tour with Satipo Tours to central Peru was beyond our expectations... the guides pleasant and congenial, attentive and helpful. Their knowledge of the birds of Peru was amazing and they were able to find all the targeted species for us. We thoroughly enjoyed the tour and would go again with Satipo in a heartbeat!"

Dorothy Copp

www.satipotours.com

#330 9411 Glendower Drive, Richmond BC
Canada, V7A 2Y6
Tel: 604 272-9206 or cell 778 928 9206

Young Birders Program

Field Trip to Pitt Lake

Melissa Hafting

We had a great field trip to Grant Narrows on July 16th with seven kids present. We started out first by finding a rare bird for the area: a House Wren. He was on the east side of the dyke adjacent to the end of the Pitt Lake parking lot as you head south towards Catbird Slough. This was a lifer for many of the kids.

We then got a beautiful male singing American Redstart further south down the dyke which was another lifer for many of the kids. He provided great views and came down low which was a thrill.

Gray Catbirds serenaded us as we walked along and Black and Vaux's Swifts flew overhead. A Virginia Rail was chastising two river otters that were swimming too close. We were happy to see a Bald Eagle nest with two begging Eaglets. There were lots of young out there as we saw Yellow Warblers carrying food and Common Yel-

lowthroats and American Robins and even saw a Black-headed Grosbeak feeding its fledgling. We had a nice Hairy and Downy Woodpecker down low which was a good comparison for the kids. Sandhill Cranes flew alongside us by the dyke and Eastern Kingbirds were chasing some Osprey.

While we were eating lunch by the river a Peregrine Falcon flew over us. On the nature dyke trail we had Swainson's Thrushes hopping along the middle of the path which was neat to see.

Later, we watched Osprey on the nest feeding young. We were pleasantly surprised to see two Purple Martins resting on an Osprey nest platform as well.

Here are some of the birds we saw:

Gray Catbirds (lifer for many), Male American Redstart (lifer for many), Marsh Wren, Common Raven, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bewick's Wrens, Mute Swan on nest, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Wood Duck, Mallard, Brown-headed Cowbird, Bushtits, Black Swifts, House Wren (rare for the area and lifer for many), Pine Siskin, Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Downy Woodpecker, Sandhill Crane, Osprey, Bald Eagle nest with eaglets, Rufous Hummingbird, Swainson's Thrush, Cedar Waxwings, Common Yellowthroat, Willow Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Virginia Rail, Turkey

Vulture, Band-tailed Pigeon, Tree Swallow, Vaux's Swifts, Peregrine Falcon, Warbling Vireo, Violet-Green Swallows, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-winged Blackbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Purple Martin, American Goldfinches, Ring-billed Gull, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northwestern Crow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow.

All in all a great day with very pleasant weather and a great bunch of kids.

NANPA Award

It was the last field trip for Alice Sun from West Vancouver (17 years old), as she is moving to Montreal to start University at McGill. We are all going to miss her but proud of her amazing achievements, including her recent award for the NANPA high school scholarship program. See below:

Alice Sun writes:

From July 4 to July 9, I joined nine talented young photographers from all over the continent at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee for the 2016 North American Nature Photography Association (NANPA)

Below: The group at Pitt Lake, July 16, 2016.

Phot by Melissa Hafting.



high school scholarship program. The “Smokies” was such a magical place and a perfect place to hold a nature photography workshop. We were surrounded by beautiful rolling mountains and abundant wildlife. A whole week just about photography meant a whole week full of excitement.

We got up bright and early in the morning in hopes of catching the sunrise. Days were spent exploring, whether it was searching for bears in the infamous Cades Cove, looking for salamanders in the stream (the national park is known as the salamander capital of the world!) or just simply capturing the beautiful landscapes. We also had the privilege of having several guest speakers, including Bill Lea, a bear expert, Todd Amacker, a fish biologist, as well as our workshop leaders Gabby, Karen, and Don, to give us further insight into the world of photography.

By the end of the week, we, too, had to give a presentation using the images that we shot throughout the week. Our leaders also invited several parents and local photographers to the event, so the pressure was on. The task was difficult, as we not only had to choose ten images that flowed together and told a story, but also had to do it under a short amount of time. The topics we chose varied from water to wildlife to personal experiences, where my personal topic dealt with the interaction between people and nature. Despite some last minute scrambling, the presentations went smoothly and I think everyone had grown from the experience.



This experience, though nerve-racking, opened my eyes to what photography can do. I learned that photography was not just about getting “the shot”, but to convey a message of greater importance. Because of this, my entire outlook on photography has changed, opening up a whole new world of possibilities. It’s safe to say that this program has made a huge impact on my life by teaching me lessons that I will carry far into the future.

Some of Alice’s photographs can be seen at:

<http://alicesun.wix.com/alicesunphotography>

each of the recipients, as well as the new BCFO caps. Some photos of recipients are on this page and page 3.

It was also pleasing to see Cole Gaerber wearing his BCFO cap in the latest *Bird Studies Canada* online magazine, and in an article in the *Simcoe Reformer*.

Photos

Top: Virginia and Bridget Spencer; right: Cole Gaerber; left: Ian Harland. Photos by Melissa Hafting.



Photo Exposure

Alice is not the only young BC birder whose photographs are drawing attention. An article appeared in *Kelowna Now* about another young BCFO birder – Ian Harland, under the heading *This teen is taking some stunning pictures of BC wildlife*. And he is indeed. A number of his terrific shots can be seen on Instagram at:

https://www.instagram.com/ian_harlan/

Young Birder Awards

Plaques commemorating the BCFO Young Birder Awards were given to



BCFO Trips

Two-day Trip, Clinton & Ashcroft, May 14-15, 2016

Adrian Leather

BCFO made a debut visit to the Village of Clinton, a self-proclaimed "Gateway to The Cariboo", situated on Highway 97, and numbering 650 inhabitants, with a trading area population of 1200.

BCFO members Brian & Sheila Murland scouted extensively for this trip between the Fall of 2015 and Spring 2016, as the Clinton area was largely unknown to us. eBird reports of some locations in the area suggested that a small number of birders make occasional forays here.

Clinton has a lot of interesting history, both social, and geological, and the area we birded boasts at least half-a-dozen provincial parks.

We were aware this was mid-May, so there was still a good number of species yet to arrive in the area.

An approach to Clinton from the north is greeted by the impressive Marble Range, with its beautiful snow-capped peaks. The weather we encountered was a typical May mix of everything, but for the most part we enjoyed fine conditions, as we explored a variety of habitats and a range of elevations. Areas we visited included Big Bar, Kelly Lake, Echo Valley, Jesmond, and Pavilion.

We got off to an excellent start at Clinton Sewage Ponds, tallying 32 species, including a Wilson's Phalarope which vanished almost instantly.

It seemed Clinton had no House Sparrows, but after lots of listening we finally heard two on Sunday morning, near our accommodation, Cariboo Lodge.

Brian spotted a lone Bonaparte's Gull flying over a lake as we were leaving Clinton and heading for the hills. The high country sojourn provided Pacific Wren, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and some splendid photo ops for Three-toed Woodpeckers. A late Trumpeter Swan on a small pond was a surprise, as was a Surf Scoter, and four White-winged Scoters. A slightly flooded field edge by the road

provided us with great looks at five Pectoral Sandpipers!

We searched high and low for a Clark's Nutcracker, and just as we thought we might dip out, Nancy Krueger spotted one, but even better, there was a juvenile nutcracker perched below the adult, a beautiful bird mostly adorned with snow-white plumage, and a real treat to see.

The Kelly Lake-Pavilion Road offered some spectacular scenery, with breathtaking views of the Marble Range, and the Coast Range. Below us were what appeared to be perfect Curlew fields, and we drove through what Brian and Nancy named a "sage forest", with acres of delightfully aromatic sage filling our nostrils. Nashville Warbler and Lazuli Bunting were good finds.

Horsting's Farm provided six new species for the trip list, including Lewis's Woodpecker, Turkey Vulture, Peregrine Falcon, and at least six Say's Phoebes.

In the Ashcroft area, on the Venables Valley Road, we located a singing Cassin's Finch, and relished watching a Golden Eagle tangling with a Red-tailed Hawk, a memorable slice of avian action.

We concluded the trip with a visit to The Slough, a section of the Thompson River near Ashcroft. This enabled us to add White-throated Swifts to our list. A tussle between an American Kestrel and a Cooper's Hawk drew raptorous applause.

Something which really stood out was the unusually high density of Marsh Wrens throughout the Clinton-Ashcroft area.

Sincere thanks go to Brian & Sheila Murland for their enthusiastic and thorough scouting of the area. We recorded 115 species for the weekend. This was a wonderful trip, both scenically, and birdwise. Nora McMuldach, enjoying her second BCFO trip, summed it up nicely by saying, "Thanks for another great trip, more than satisfying."

Pre- and Post-AGM Trips, Southern Alberta

May 2016

Daniel Arndt

The pre-AGM total was 145 species at 21 locations. We covered a whopping

1,130 kilometres by car, and somewhere in the region of 7-8 kilometres walking at our various stops. The prairies are a big place, and in order to see the diversity we have, it really does take time! I could have easily spent another full day with each group and spent a bit more time looking for some of the target species that each group missed.

The Post-AGM Trip managed to see 150 species at 17 locations. Our Post-AGM trip covered 1,638 kilometres(!) by car, and closer to five kilometres walking, a good 900 metres of which was sloppy, slippery, precarious, and maybe should have been avoided altogether. We did cover a good amount of the area up near Tide Lake on the well-maintained roads, which is where we found huge numbers of Ferruginous Hawks and Lark Buntings, but managed to avoid the majority of the slippery back roads that I've been trapped on a few times before. The main reason we covered so much more ground on the Post-AGM Trip was due to the screaming winds and rain on our second day between Lethbridge and Brooks.

The Pre-AGM Trip managed to see a few species which we missed out on the Post-AGM trip, including: Greater Scaup (Barrier Lake), Common Loon (Barrier Lake), Western Grebe (Kinbrook Island Provincial Park), Black-bellied Plover (Tilley "O" Marsh, Kininvie Marsh), Greater Yellowlegs (Sibbald Ponds), Upland Sandpiper (Rolling Hills/Scandia area), Least Sandpiper (Inverlake Slough), Pectoral Sandpiper (Stirling Lake), Long-billed Dowitcher (Irricana Sloughs), Red-necked Phalarope (Inverlake Slough), Bonaparte's Gull (Inverlake Slough), Burrowing Owl (Rolling Hills area), Prairie Falcon (between Lethbridge and Pincher Creek), Dusky Flycatcher (Barrier Lake), Pacific-slope Flycatcher (Sibbald Ponds), Blue Jay (Winchell Lake area), Mountain Chickadee (Barrier Lake), White-breasted Nuthatch (Winchell Lake area), Veery (Kinbrook Island Provincial Park), Northern Mockingbird(!) (Kinbrook Island Provincial Park), Cedar Waxwing (Kinbrook Island Provincial Park), American Redstart (Kinbrook Island Provincial Park).

Total unique species for Pre-AGM Trip: 22

The Post-AGM Trip managed to see

a few species that were missed on the Pre-AGM trip, including: Common Goldeneye (Sibbald Ponds), Sharp-tailed Grouse (Tide Lake), Black-crowned Night Heron (Tilley "O" Marsh), Turkey Vulture (Dinosaur Provincial Park), Cooper's Hawk (Irricana Sloughs, NE of Calgary), Caspian Tern (Stirling Lake), Eurasian Collared Dove (between Brooks and Dinosaur Provincial Park), Short-eared Owl (Tyrrell Lake), Great Gray Owl (Grand Valley Road), Belted Kingfisher (Dinosaur Provincial Park), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (Dinosaur Provincial Park), Downy Woodpecker (Dinosaur Provincial Park), Olive-sided Flycatcher (Sibbald Ponds), Alder Flycatcher (numerous locations in foothills), Willow Flycatcher (Sibbald Ponds), Red-eyed Vireo (Grand Valley Road), Bank Swallow (Dinosaur Provincial Park, Tyrrell Lake), Boreal Chickadee (Grand Valley Road), Red-breasted Nuthatch (Grand Valley Road), Golden-crowned Kinglet (Sibbald Ponds), Townsend's Solitaire (Winchell Lake area), McCown's Longspur(!) (south of Lomond), Ovenbird (Grand Valley Road), Blackpoll Warbler (Dinosaur Provincial Park), Baird's Sparrow (highway north of Rolling Hills area, south of Lomond, not seen/heard by all), Nelson's Sparrow (Horse Creek Road marshes), Lark Bunting (Tide Lake area), Spotted Towhee (Dinosaur Provincial Park).

Total unique species for Post-AGM trip: 28

By my estimations then, between both trips we saw 172 species over an eight-day period in the prairies and foothills of Alberta.

Thanks again everyone, and I look forward to seeing you all again!

BCFO Two-day Field Trip, Creston Valley

May 26-27, 2016

Gary Davidson

With the BCFO AGM scheduled for Cranbrook this year, a two-day field trip to Creston was a natural! Scheduled immediately prior to the AGM, it allowed members to participate in both events while minimizing travel. But even without the AGM, the decision to visit Creston would have been a good

one; the Creston Valley is a remarkable place to go birding. The following excerpt was taken from Linda Van Damme's excellent 2012 publication, *Creston Valley Birds: When and Where to Find Them*.

"In 1968, an insightful land conservation initiative was undertaken when 7,000 hectares of lowland coniferous forest, cattail marshes, cottonwood forests and lakes were set aside as the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area. Today, it is one of only 500 wetlands in more than 60 countries that have been recognized as a Ramsar site, which is part of an intergovernmental treaty providing a framework for international cooperation for the conservation of wetlands."

When I was first asked to lead this trip, I jumped at the chance. Creston is about four hours from my home; close enough to visit, but too far for day trips. As a result I don't bird this area nearly as much as it deserves. We discovered that there were many like-minded birders around the province and registrations poured in. It soon became apparent that we would need to split the group and find a second leader. I asked Paul Prappas to help out, and he too, was only too happy to be given the chance to visit Creston again.

At 06:00 on the morning of May 26, 25 birders, and two leaders met at the Downtowner Motor Inn in Creston. We completed our waiver forms, split into two groups, organised carpools and set off for Leach Lake. The eight-km track through riparian and wetland to Leach Lake is normally off limits to motor vehicles. But for this special occasion the staff at the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (CVWMA), had given us a key to the gate.

It immediately became apparent that this place was somewhat different than other locations in southern BC. To begin with we were amazed at the number of Least Flycatchers! The first 2-3 kilometres of the track were through riparian woodlands featuring large cottonwoods interspersed with small wetlands. In this section it was impossible to accurately count the

flycatchers, but estimates vary from 15 to 25 singing males. Yellow Warblers were equally numerous. We drove slowly through the riparian wetlands making frequent stops. Several other warbler and flycatcher species were observed as well as Western Tanager, Bullock's Oriole, and Lazuli Bunting. Near the beginning of the track, Leach Lake appeared in the distance; from this vantage point we could see American White Pelicans on the lake, but it wasn't until we got closer that we were able to determine that there were at least 100 of them lounging on a small island. They took to the air in small groups providing excellent views of these impressive birds.

Once at the lake a good variety of waterfowl were noted, including a lone Tundra Swan. One of the better sightings was a group of 15 or 16 Black Terns foraging over the marshes. Several Double-crested Cormorants were also seen flying over, while a few more were fishing in the lake.

We reached the end of the track at about noon. One car was fortunate enough to see male Calliope and Black-chinned Hummingbirds perched in the same bush, while other vehicles were struggling to turn around on the narrow track.

Despite threatening weather all morning, it had remained dry until now. With light rain falling, we ate our lunches in the car before reluctantly leaving Leach Lake. But the area held one more surprise for us; just as we were driving out from the lake, a female Wild Turkey with 6-8 young wandered onto the road. She remained long enough for photographs before retreating into the woods with her brood. We left Leach Lake with a list of 90 species.

The rain was short-lived and by the time we reached our next destination, Duck Lake, the rain had stopped. Whereas the Leach Lake track was mostly marsh with some water, Duck Lake was mostly water with some marsh and edge habitat. We added a few more waterfowl, including Red-necked and Western Grebes. The highlight at Duck Lake was Forster's Terns. Several were seen flying back and forth and a couple posed for pictures on a small branch in the water.

By now, our day was almost over. We had just enough time to drive a couple of local roads looking for



*Wild Turkey with one of the chicks.
Photo by Melissa Hafting.*

possible Bobolinks or Wild Turkeys since Goup 2 had missed the earlier ones. We found neither. Day 1 ended with a species list of 110.

Day 2 began once again at 06:00 at the Downtowner Motor Inn. Group 1 headed for Balancing Rock Trail, while Group 2 walked some of the boardwalks around the CVWMA Nature Centre. Balancing Rock Trail climbs up out of the valley passing through drier, shrubby habitat before entering mixed woodlands. Yellow Warblers and Least Flycatchers were again amongst the most numerous birds of the day but we also encountered a few species not common in the riparian lowlands visited yesterday. Nashville Warblers, normally quite common here, were playing hard-to-get on this day, but we did eventually see one. Spotted Towhees, Western Wood-Pewees, Gray Catbirds, Black-headed Grosbeak, Hammond's and Dusky Flycatchers were all present at Balancing Rock.

The walk from the Nature Centre produced a good variety of species, about 60 in 90 minutes, but only Black Swift was new for the tour. At this point we added a previously unscheduled stop to the itinerary. In the previous two days, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and a Yellow-breasted Chat

had been observed along the Wood Duck Trail. As we arrived at the head of the trail, our second rain shower began. Undeterred, we donned appropriate gear and headed down the track. We emerged 45 minutes later having found neither of our target species. We did, however, get an American Redstart which was new for the tour.

With just a couple of hours left, we drove along West Creston Road toward Reclamation Road. As we drove along, with windows open, a couple of our sharper-hearing group members (Nancy and Adrian), heard a Tennessee Warbler singing. We bailed out of the cars

and soon had a very active singing male in our binoculars and camera viewfinders. While this species is on the Creston Valley checklist, it is listed as, "Rare; lucky to see".

With just a couple of hours remaining, we drove south along Reclamation Road in the hopes of finding Bobolinks. Again we were denied. (This species does appear on the complete list below, on the basis of a single bird seen by one member of our group who made an extra "after-hours" drive on Day 1.) Reclamation Road did, however, add one last species, No 119, to our list: two Sandhill Cranes standing in a freshly plowed field. Standing in the same field were two Ospreys. We were left wondering what had attracted Ospreys to a freshly plowed field of dirt!

I want to give a special thank-you to Paul Prappas who jumped in to take the second group when our numbers became too large, and to Adrian Leather for essentially organising the whole thing.

Full List of Species

Canada Goose, Tundra Swan, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged

Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, California Quail, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Western Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, Swainson's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Virginia Rail, Sora, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, Ring-billed Gull, Black Tern, Forster's Tern, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared Dove, Mourning Dove, Black Swift, Vaux's Swift, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Calliope Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-naped Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood Pewee, Least Flycatcher, Hammond's Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Eastern Kingbird, Cassin's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-billed Magpie, American Crow, Common Raven, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Bank Swallow, Barn Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pacific Wren, Marsh Wren, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, American Robin, Grey Catbird, European Starling, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Northern Waterthrush, Tennessee Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, MacGillivray's Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Clay-coloured Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Bullock's Oriole, American Goldfinch.

Upcoming Meetings & Events

Compiled by Wayne Weber

The following meetings and other events are those that take place in BC and immediately adjacent areas or that potentially include information on birds that occur in BC. Information on additional meetings is listed in the bimonthly Ornithological Newsletter at www.birdmeetings.org and on the BIRDNET website at <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/ornith/birdmeet.html>.

For most meetings, festivals and other events, the website is the main source of information, and registration can often be accomplished online as well. Wherever information can be obtained through a phone number or 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.

2016 EVENTS

Sept. 4. First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the fall season from Westport, WA. This is the first of eight trips scheduled in September and October 2016. For information and to sign up for a trip, visit the Westport Seabirds webpage at <http://www.westportseabirds.com>.

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

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

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

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

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

Sept. 22-25. FALL GENERAL MEETING, BC NATURE, at Prince George, BC. Registration details can be found at

<http://www.pgfgm2016.ca>.

Sept. 28-Oct. 2. WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL MEETING, Fortuna, CA (Humboldt County). For details, check the WFO webpage at <http://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php>.

Oct. 1-2. RIDGEFIELD BIRDS & BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL, Ridgefield, WA (near Vancouver, WA). For information, see http://ridgefieldfriends.org/?page_id=47, or contact the Friends of Ridgefield NWR at 360-609-0658, or ridgefieldfriends@gmail.com, or at PO Box 1022, Ridgefield, WA 98642.

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

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

Oct. 16-20. RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Cape May, New Jersey. For details, go to <http://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org/conferences/current-conference>.

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

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

2017 EVENTS

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

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

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

Apr. 7-9. OLYMPIC BIRD FESTIVAL, Sequim, WA. For information, visit the festival website at <http://www.olympicbirdfest.org>, or contact the Dungeness River Audubon Center by phone (360-681-4076) or by e-mail (info@olympicbirdfest.org). Registration begins in October 2016.

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

International Birding

Oaxaca 2016

Adrian Leather

Mar 20 – Apr 02, 2016

I enjoyed a wonderful birding trip in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, with fellow birders, John Hodges of Roberts Creek, Jerry McFetridge of Quesnel, and Ed Jordan from Quadra Island.

I was in contact with a Oaxacan guide, Eric Antonio Martinez, of Mexico Birding Tours. Eric was very helpful but unfortunately could only provide us with six days guiding, March being the busiest time for birding in Oaxaca. The result was that we were facing an initial week with a lot of exciting new species to go at, especially up north, and no guide - gulp! This was going to be a tall order indeed, but we were up for the challenge. I put together an itinerary which would take us north to Valle Nacional and Tuxtepec for Atlantic slope birding, then cover the Central Valleys, before heading south to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and finishing along the Pacific slope near Huatulco.

We flew via Aeromexico from Vancouver to Mexico City, then on to Oaxaca City/Oaxaca de Juarez. Ed was already in Mexico so joined us in Mexico City. With time to spare on day one we took a cab to the famous ruins of Monte Alban, and quite the spectacular setting it is!

After a night in Oaxaca City, we ventured up to La Cumbre at around 9,000 ft elevation. Our taxi driver slept in his vehicle while we walked along the east route. Clouds were crossing the continental divide around us, but visibility was good. The wind was an issue at times but we came out with some good birds such as Collared Towhee, and Russet Nightingale-Thrush. On returning to the main road, we discovered our taxi and driver were AWOL, but on walking a short distance along MX175 we noted a tire being changed on the car. We went to a nice restaurant and enjoyed a fine meal of trout, then continued on to the airport at Oaxaca City to collect a rental car, a VW Jetta 2.4 from Alamo, very comfortable, but

with the weight of the four of us, it made the topes/speed bumps quite the obstacle.

We travelled north along MX175, being very careful to avoid driving in the city centre, with its reportedly crazy driving, one-way systems, lack of parking, etc. We were heading for Ixtlan de Juarez. We drove up an incredibly steep road, which had us wondering if the vehicle might start rolling backwards at some point. After touring the labyrinth of streets in Ixtlan we finally located our accommodation. The friendly owner sketched a street map so we could search for a good restaurant. The motel rooms were adequate, though the layer of dust on the television suggested no cleaning regime. No toilet seat, of course, and the "shower" had no cubicle, just a showerhead and taps sticking out of the bathroom wall. We looked forward to a restful evening, but endured the opposite. A car alarm seemed to go off hourly, the local dogs were engaged in some sort of canine war, and guests were arriving at all times of the night. Before you knew it, the roosters were adding their ten pesos worth and it was time to awake, to see we were blocked-in by a truck. The manager kindly woke the truck owner up.

So, time to go birding. We started off at Gueletao de Juarez, then pointed the car north towards our next destination, San Juan Bautista, Valle Nacional. This was a great day, where we made

random stops at various elevations and habitats, each one invariably providing new species. A huge challenge was not knowing most of what we were hearing. One stop, which was a sheltered draw, provided Jerry with five lifer warblers!

We arrived at San Juan Bautista to a three-day festival. The vehicle was tucked-in to a private parking area, and we walked around the stalls and festival rides, seeking items to eat and drink for the following day. We were stared at quite a lot here so I'm guessing they don't have many visitors. The Hotel Valle Real had excellent air conditioning, and friendly owners who spoke some English. The guys noticed the Gallo Coffee for sale at reception and bagged some for the homeward journey.

An excursion from San Juan had us heading north to the grim industrial city of Tuxtepec, then turning west towards Camelia Roja, a rural area that skirts a river, an opportunity for four species of kingfisher, and numerous other species. It was one of those spots where you rarely put the bins down, and we stayed a while. One of the lads who worked at the hotel had been asking me why we were going to Camelia Roja? "It's so boring! There's nothing", he said. I took the opportunity to educate him on how attractive it is to birders, and he nodded affirmatively with a smile.

Perhaps our greatest challenge of the tour was in actually seeing a Sumi-

Selfie by Eric Antonio Martinez, with Jerry McFetridge, Ed Jordan, Adrian Leather, and John Hodges in the background.



Rose-bellied Bunting.
Photo by Eric Antonio
Martinez.



chra's Wren, a range-restricted species not normally known to be visually confiding. We had some sites to try. The first near Miguel Aleman Reservoir didn't even yield a wren heard. A fish stew later, we headed to Vega del Sol, stopping en-route to try another Sumichrast's site, this time hearing a few wrens very well, but with no sightings. There were always other compensations, such as a Gartered Trogon which perched obligingly for photos. On arrival at Vega del Sol, we enjoyed good birding in general, and Jerry caught a quick glimpse of a Black-crested Coquette, but we were now running out of time, and luck, with the wren. We worked our way along the lane, trying different stops, until we suddenly heard the tell-tale sound of a Sumichrast's Wren singing, quite similar to Canyon Wren. We heard another wren, then a third, and then a fourth! We began to think this species to be invisible as there was no trace of movement, and there were other birds around, so it would be difficult to be certain you were seeing a wren and not something else. Eventually we had to concede defeat, and returned to the vehicle. As we started to depart the area, we rounded a corner and had our ears well and truly bashed by a very loud Sumichrast's Wren, which had to be in a roadside bush. We piled out of the vehicle and positioned ourselves carefully around a large bush. Clearly, the wren was right in front of us, but again, could anyone catch a glimpse of it? We caught the odd bit of movement here and there. Ed had crouched down low to see if he could get an angle on it. After a while singing, the wren suddenly went quiet, then darted right past Ed's head! We all saw it, and that was our look at Sumichrast's Wren. What a tricky customer!

I had viewed an article on-line by Mary Gustafson, which pictured a restaurant named Desgarennnes. The owner of Hotel Valle Real recommended this place, and called to ask if they would

stay open later to accommodate us, which they kindly did. The food and service were excellent, and we returned for further imbibing.

Tuk-tuks (three-wheel taxis) were everywhere in town, the originals, imported from India. San Juan Bautista is a rugged sort of place, where the aroma of roasting pig mingles with the nauseating odours of metal extraction. We noted a roost of Grey-breasted Martins would fly from the plaza each morning around 06:10, and a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl would serenade us to sleep. A nearby pub played loud music late, but we were so pleasantly exhausted it made little difference. Jerry shared a few items he bagged at the market, a huge chunk of sweetbread, and a nice dessert made from pineapple.

Our night of owling was wiped out by a fierce storm which came from nowhere. Shutters were banging violently, loud voices could be heard in various stages of panic, and at times it felt as if the windows were going to come through.

Following our forays around San Juan Bautista, we headed south along MX175, for more freestyle birding at various stops. Peering into the incredibly lush jungle-like vegetation, we listened to motmots and solitaires among the dreamy avian cacophony, and immersed ourselves in the awesome birding. John yelled that there was a big dark shape over the road ahead. We could scarcely believe our luck, a spectacular Crested Guan feeding right above the road! Fortunately, there is often little traffic along this part of MX175 so we were able to edge for-

ward, and really appreciate this superb bird. The guys taking photos could barely contain their excitement!

We stopped at La Esperanza. We'd birded there heading north and really enjoyed it! The embankment had been crammed full of Bronzed Cowbirds, and among them, various welcome surprises such as Blue-black Grassquit and Yellow-faced Grassquit, and we particularly appreciated the Common Chlorospingus, though were unanimous in feeling the word common should never be attached to such a beautiful bird. A few locals were interested in what we were up to, so we showed them a guide book, and chatted with them. Ed and myself watched a Unicoloured Jay as we were talking with a villager. La Esperanza attracts birders from all over the world. There is a large chart featuring local bird pictures draped over the fence of a chapel. The gate into the village remains closed much of the time, but it's a very pleasant birdy walk.

A really cool side trip we did was along the road down to San Martin Soyolapam, and Santiago Progreso. Just a little ways down the road we had a flock of White-collared Swifts all around us. A Bat Falcon was perched nearby. I noticed a guy walking down the road wiping his brow. It was baking heat, and he had miles to walk until he would reach San Martin. It turned out he'd been to a seminary. We dropped him off at the church in San Martin, then he kindly showed us where the local store was, and directed us to a beautiful riverside spot. Another guy offered to show us the store in the next village, suggesting that it offered more

choice. To get to the other village, you have to cross the bridge, which had a heavy chain across, and a 'guard' sleeping in a hammock. Apparently there had been some "problemas". We never did find out what these were. As we arrived at the bridge, I said, in Spanish, "Welcome to the bridge of the gringos!". Having allowed us to pass, a few seconds later, we could hear this loud raucous laughter, as the joke sank in, and the guard's voice repeated my words while laughing out loud. It lightened the mood. Our companion, Armando, confirmed that very few folks ever go to these villages, except the occasional visitors to the riverside spot, and we could certainly appreciate that. Neither village had any transport service. It felt like a land that time forgot, a lost paradise, and we loved it! As we entered the store, we were announced as "clientes", and I wondered if a little commission might be involved?

On the way back to the bridge, Ed yelled out, and the next thing, we were feasting our eyes on a superb White-tailed Kite which spread its wings and tail before landing in a treetop. It was definitely not amused when a Roadside Hawk started vocalizing nearby, and the kite went straight for the hawk. Wonderful avian entertainment, and a side trip I doubt we'll ever forget.

We headed for the airport near Oaxaca City. Eric showed up in a large van, perfect for the next six days. We were staying at Eric's place in Teotitlan del Valle, famed for its rugmaking. Eric has done a sensational job bringing an old house back to life, on a narrow street on the outskirts. We were always welcomed by the dogs, and we relished great meals and awesome breakfasts provided by Eric, and his delightful partner, Jilly. We enjoyed the great conversations and hospitality.

The first morning in Teotitlan had us wandering in arid thorn scrub seeking out Central Valley specialties such as Slaty Vireo. The small reservoir held 30+ Least Grebe. We headed up toward Benito Juarez, a tiny hamlet way up in the mountains, and part of Los Pueblos Mancomunados, a network of mountain villages which promote ecotourism in an effort to minimize deforestation. En-route we encountered a road accident. A car had plunged off the edge of the road, and had wedged against three small trees. The six occupants had somehow scrambled up the steep bank.

One or two people looked like their time was up, the others looked in shock, and likely had some broken limbs. Jerry went into doc mode, and we assisted by holding sunshades over the unconscious and semi-conscious, and by distributing water. Ambulance sirens could be heard as medics raced to the scene. After that, it took us some time to get back into the birding groove.

An evening stop by a reservoir had a rough-looking Reddish Egret flapping around, doing its best to avoid the locals out for a stroll. A Crested Caracara crested a nearby hill, and we heard a Buff-collared Nightjar. We then watched a Great Horned Owl flying around, which meant a premature end to nightbird proceedings, for the second time on the tour. Nobody cared too much though, because there was just so much good birding!

We searched for some specialties of the Central Valleys. We managed to see a few Oaxaca Sparrows, though these guys seemed very wary, and we heard an Ocellated Thrasher close to us, but sadly it would not show itself. We enjoyed some terrific looks at Boucard's Wrens.

Eric pointed the van southeast along MX190. We were going to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec - try saying that after a few cervezas!? A roadside stop had a Lesser Roadrunner flap awkwardly across the road, then down the bank, where it promptly vanished. We checked into a hotel in Juchitan de Zaragoza, then Eric had us keeping up the pace by driving straight out to look for Double-striped Thick-knees. We were delighted to see three, and enjoyed watching them, including in flight. What a bird!

The next morning was sublime! We had a great look at Sumichrast's Sparrow, numerous close-up sightings of Lesser Roadrunner, and heard a Lesser Ground-Cuckoo. The cuckoo didn't want to play, but we consoled ourselves

watching four species of bunting in one small tree, including the incredibly range-restricted Rose-bellied/Rosita's, and in viewing White-tailed Hawks. Ed spotted a Limpkin along a channel but it quickly disappeared.

We went to Xadani, a birding paradise! There was a terrific variety of shorebirds present, the pick being a flock of 25 Red Knots, and an absolute gem of a Collared Plover. A large flock of Black Skimmers, and a variety of terns helped the ambience. We were buzzing!

Next on the menu was Huatulco, a package holiday destination on the Pacific coast. Alas, no buckets and spades for us, but rather, periods of blissful mountain birding around Ploma Hidalgo, a picturesque village high in the mountains. We watched a guy grind local coffee, and a few samples were enjoyed, but not as much as our views of Golden-crowned Warblers! I alerted Eric to a tremelo sound I'd heard. I knew it was something good, and it was, a Vermiculated Screech-owl. It purred away for a while but would not

Emerald Toucanet by Eric Antonio Martinez.





Red Warbler by Eric Antonio Martinez.

come into view.

The birding around the edges of Huatulco is very good! A large national park preserves some pristine birding country. We enjoyed amazing close looks at singing Red-breasted Chats, and after considerable searching, we were stunned by breathtaking close-up scope views of a Lesser Ground Cuckoo, which perched for a while in a low roadside tree. Not sure how you top that?

Eric threw in a pelagic, where we had Galapagos Shearwater, Black, and Least Storm-Petrels, and many Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. A most enjoyable trip, until the skipper announced there was an imminent change in the weather, and he asked us to be prepared for a shower, and he wasn't joking! He headed to shore, seeking calmer waters. A swell began, and after some rocking and rolling, and becoming seriously drenched in cold water, we finally got safely back to Huatulco. Even though it was seriously hot, we weren't feeling that at all. Eric seemed a little embarrassed and was very apologetic, but we just took it in our stride, though John was concerned about his bins, which had steamed up badly, and his passport, which looked like it might need replacing. All dried-out okay eventually.

Our last day in Huatulco saw us team up with Cornelio Ramos Gabriel, Huatulco Bird Guide. Cornelio wasn't too sure what we had seen, or not, so it

was a bit of a random drive initially, until he said, "What, you haven't seen Pale-billed Woodpecker yet.? There were three Pale-billed Woodpeckers back there on a tree", all this stated while simultaneously spinning the car around for a good look. Cornelio did his best to find a Pheasant Cuckoo – mission impossible, and we realized this was a challenge too far, though we had heard a few during the tour.

Cornelio took us birding around his local patch in Copalita – all great birding, and including mesmerizing looks at singing Red-breasted Chats, simply unforgettable! We enjoyed breakfast at a roadside comedor, a tinguiche omelette. Tinguiche is a tiny fish which tastes like a salty sardine. Cornelio drove a backroad up toward Ploma Hidalgo. We had enjoyed great looks at Wagler's Toucanet here, and numerous other great species. Ed spotted a Flamulated Flycatcher.

We searched for three species of hummingbird, but only came out with Golden-crowned Emerald. However, during our search, we encountered numerous other goodies, such as a stooping Zone-tailed Hawk, and a Grey-crowned Woodpecker. The woodpecker led us on quite the wild-woodpecker chase, before we got back to the car to realize the woodpecker was in the tree right above us!

This final day felt way more than satisfying, but it got even better when

Cornelio called a local market cafe at Santa Maria Huatulco (where the locals live – in the hills) to ask them to remain open. We were treated to an exquisite Mole Negro (a girl at the cafe had won a local mole-making contest) with chicken, a sumptuous dessert, and some local cheese. Another girl took our photos for Facebook, as apparently we were only the second group of non-local visitors at the cafe. They kindly presented us with small pots as a little souvenir of our trip. Cornelio gave us cloths decorated with his Red-breasted Chat logo.

Next morning, it was time to head for Huatulco airport, where Grey-breasted Martins were nesting in the thatched walkways. With a potent mix of melancholy, and all the birds we'd seen and heard still spinning around in our heads, we took off for the return flight, leaving an amazing adventure behind.

Oaxaca 2016 – what a blast!

Birding in Iceland

Clive Keen

June 9–19, 2016

I'd been told that birds were abundant in Iceland, but on this brief trip "abundant" seemed far too weak a descriptor. "Omnipresent" serves better, and "In Your Face" is even more appropriate for some Iceland species. Red-shanks, Eurasian Oystercatchers, Arctic Terns and Whimbrels seemed to be everywhere, never letting anyone forget about them as they constantly scolded in defence of their nests and young. At the water's edge, there seemed a never-ending supply of Common Eiders and their ducklings. Wherever there were cliffs, Northern Fulmar, Black-legged Kittiwake, Black Guillemot, and Common Murre were very much in evidence.

A bit less evident, but so common that after a while they ceased to be noticed, were European Golden-plover, Greylag Geese, Common Snipe, Redwings, Meadow Pipits, and White Wagtails.

Some of the long-anticipated charismatic birds were also easily found: these included Black-tailed Godwit, Whooper Swan, and Rock Ptarmigan.

Great birds less easily found, but still yielding fairly quickly to a determined search, were Thick-billed Murre, Pink-footed Goose, King Eider, White-tailed Eagle and Red Knot. A particularly impressive sight was a huge resting flock of Glaucous Gulls, readily told from the more petite Iceland Gulls, which are not supposed to be in Iceland in the summer, but in fact turned up fairly often as individuals.

Being a remote island, the total number of Icelandic species is not large – the excellent *Icelandic Bird Guide* by Johann Oli Hilmarsson lists just 160 species, many of them accidentals – but the concentration of birds certainly makes up for it.

A few pointers might be helpful for anyone thinking of visiting Iceland:

1. It is easier to get to Iceland than might be thought, with regular, reasonably priced flights from Vancouver offered by Icelandair. The recommended time for a birding trip is late May to early June, when it never gets dark, birds are noisily breeding, and weather is fairly agreeable. Winter, with just a few hours of daylight, is no doubt a great time to see aurora borealis, but would be a lot less rewarding for birders.

2. While guided bird tours will travel widely throughout the country, most of Iceland's birds can be found in and around the capital and only large town, Reykjavik. *Birding in Reykjavik* by



Beware the hovering Arctic Tern – it is armed and dangerous. CNK photos.

Christophe Pampoulie can be downloaded as a pdf from the web for a small sum, and gives enough material for four or five days of birding. Car hire, like everything else in Iceland, is expensive, so days spent walking around Reykjavik and using local buses can keep costs to a reasonable level.

3. Particularly recommended locations for day trips are the beautiful Stykkisholmur, a two-hour drive from Reykjavik, and the Gardur lighthouse, less than an hour away. A tourist boat trip from Stykkisholmur yielded marvellous views of seabirds, including nesting

Atlantic Puffins, plus the only view we had of a White-tailed Eagle. The Gardur lighthouse is a gem for anyone with a 'scope. There must have been 500 Manx Shearwater, and even the occasional European Storm-Petrel, along with a constant flow of the more common offshore birds.

4. Iceland is rather under-eBirded, and “accidentals” are probably a lot less accidental than currently assumed. My son Ben, who spent a little longer in Iceland than me, easily got into the top ten Iceland eBirders for the year. This means that birds considered rare locally are, by North American birding standards, not too hard to find. Even woodland species like Goldcrest are found quite easily, since they are concentrated in the few treed areas of the island. Really serious searches by visiting birders would quite probably give the locals many surprises. My son did so first by spotting a House Martin, and then by finding three members of a species considered accidental locally: the rare and elusive Canada Goose.



A common sight around Reykjavik, even in the town centre, but welcome nevertheless: a Greylag Goose family.

Book Reviews

Birder's Guide to Vancouver

The Birder's Guide to Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, by Nature Vancouver, edited by Colin Clasen, published by Harbour Publishing, paperback, 272 pp.

Six months ago, the 2001 edition of this book was fetching \$112 on Amazon. Fortunately the replacement 2016 edition is not just revised, updated and more detailed (272 pages against 240) but far more affordable at \$26.95. It is hard to imagine any reader of this newsmagazine not wanting to get one. Many readers will have been involved in its creation, since there were 73 contributors, on top of all those who created the earlier version on which it is based. Reading through the credits is rather like reading a Who's Who of BC Birding. There is even a foreword by BCFO's Immediate Past President.

The book's central focus is describing 33 of the best birding areas in and around Vancouver, an increase from the 31 described in the 2001 edition. Typically, each of the descriptions is the work of a small group of the people most familiar with the location. Travel information is first given, along with excellent full-colour maps, then we are given an account of the habitat, told what we are likely to see, and the optimal times to go. It is all very detailed and thorough, and many birder-to-birder tips are thrown in along the way. If you are sailing from Tsawwassen to Nanaimo, for instance, watch the high cliffs on the port side as the ferry approaches Duke Point, since a pair of Peregrine Falcons have often been seen there. Locals might know that. Visiting birders wouldn't, until now.

In addition to the location descriptions, the book adds checklists of regularly occurring and casual/accidental species, plus short accounts of 88 species that may be of particular interest. If you want to see a Red Knot, for instance, you are told to scan the Black-bellied Plover flocks on Boundary Bay and the Roberts Bank coal terminal. For

Eared Grebes, you find that your best bet is the White Rock pier in winter.

New sections since the last edition include online resources, birding and photography etiquette, and leg-band reporting. An extensive list of nature-related organizations, and information on tides, remain good to have, though a section on dealing with bear and cougar attacks seems a bit odd in a book of this kind.

Since a gripe has come up, it is worth mentioning a couple more. The index covers only bird names,

but would have been usefully expanded, for example, by adding locations: particularly helpful for people unfamiliar with the area and the names of the regions. The high glaze on the pages also makes reading tiresome in some light. But these are the sort of minor quibbles that book reviewers have to include, to demonstrate their impartiality.

In truth, the book is not just a must-buy for any serious birder living in, or visiting, the lower mainland. Certainly, no birder living in the region should ever again be short of ideas for day trips, and visitors could ask no more about the birding opportunities. But perhaps more importantly, the book will play an integral role in developing a new generation of birders. Beginners have two essential questions: "What are the names of the birds I might see?" and "Where am I likely to find them?" The first question has been well answered for decades by the field guides, but the second has been given far too little attention. Many potential birders will have given up because they have no idea where to look. If only books like *The Birder's Guide to Vancouver and the Lower Mainland* had been available when I was young, there'd now be many more active birders, and far more habitat would have been conserved. This publication will surely have that effect for future generations.

CNK

THE BIRDER'S GUIDE TO VANCOUVER AND THE LOWER MAINLAND

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION



BY NATURE VANCOUVER

It is highly appropriate that an Anna's Hummingbird should appear on the front cover of the 2016 edition. Now seen daily throughout Metro Vancouver, the bird was hardly known locally when the 2001 edition was prepared.

Birds of BC & Pacific Northwest

Birds of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest, by Richard Cannings, Tom Aversa, and Hal Opperman, Heritage House, paperback, 460 pp, \$29.95.

Birders today are fortunate to have access to a remarkably wide range of field guides. Once upon a time, there were just Peterson and The Golden Guide, and splendid though they were for their time, a far more crowded marketplace has been great news for the birding community. My bookshelves groan, and I'm happy about it. But it gives me a minor problem when I give talks on birding: which guides should I recommend?

For some years, I have kept things simple by recommending the Lone Pine

Birds of British Columbia as a first guide, and The Sibley Guide, in its various formulations, for people at the point of needing to identify morphs, subspecies, immatures, etc. The Lone Pine *Birds of British Columbia* (Campbell and Kennedy), was one of the recommendations since it is so delightfully engaging for beginning birders. One species per page, with beautifully drawn illustrations, some elegant prose to introduce each bird, and an attractive page layout. But it is now, most regrettably, out of print. Would the new book be a successful replacement?

Once *Birds of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest* (BBCPN) appeared through the mail, it was immediately obvious that the authors did not have beginners in mind. Though the book promised some simplification by devoting itself just to the birds of the region, and there is just one species per page, simplicity was certainly not its watchword. The first pages, giving the contents, read *Family Anatidae ... Family Odontophoridae ... Family Phasianidae*, down through to *Family Passeridae*, reminding me of my days taking notes in lecture halls. Then, the main text in the species accounts is written in telegraphese, to get as much information as possible into a limited space. The tentative beginner would not be drawn in, perhaps seeing the book as written by and for ornithologists rather than hobbyists.

Is the book, then, instead a potential replacement for Sibley? No, because each species description is accompanied by a few photographs, rather than illustrations. The problem with photographs is that they show a particular bird in a particular molt in a particular posture in a particular light, inevitably missing some of the important field-marks that illustrators can accentuate with ease. Anyone looking at the book's two photographs of a Short-eared Owl, for instance, might wonder why it was given the name, since the "ears" don't appear at all. Important features often don't appear in particular photographs, however excellent they are, which

is why the various Crossley books use large numbers of photographs, thereby getting round the problem of individual birds or shots not being emblematic. It is simply not possible to nail the look of a species with just two or three photographs, particularly when it is necessary to cover different genders or ages, or flight as well as perching.

It's not entirely fair, though, to judge the book as simply an ID guide. Sibley and the multi-photograph guides excel as ID tools largely because they are completely devoted to that purpose. BBCPN, though, is labelled as "A Complete Guide," meaning that it goes beyond the ID role to give further information not needed for ID purposes. We can find in the book, for instance – this is just one factoid among large numbers – that while polyandry is common among Wilson's Phalaropes, it is not among the Red-necked variety. When it is realized that the book is not just another ID guide, it becomes a stronger candidate for a place on birders' book-

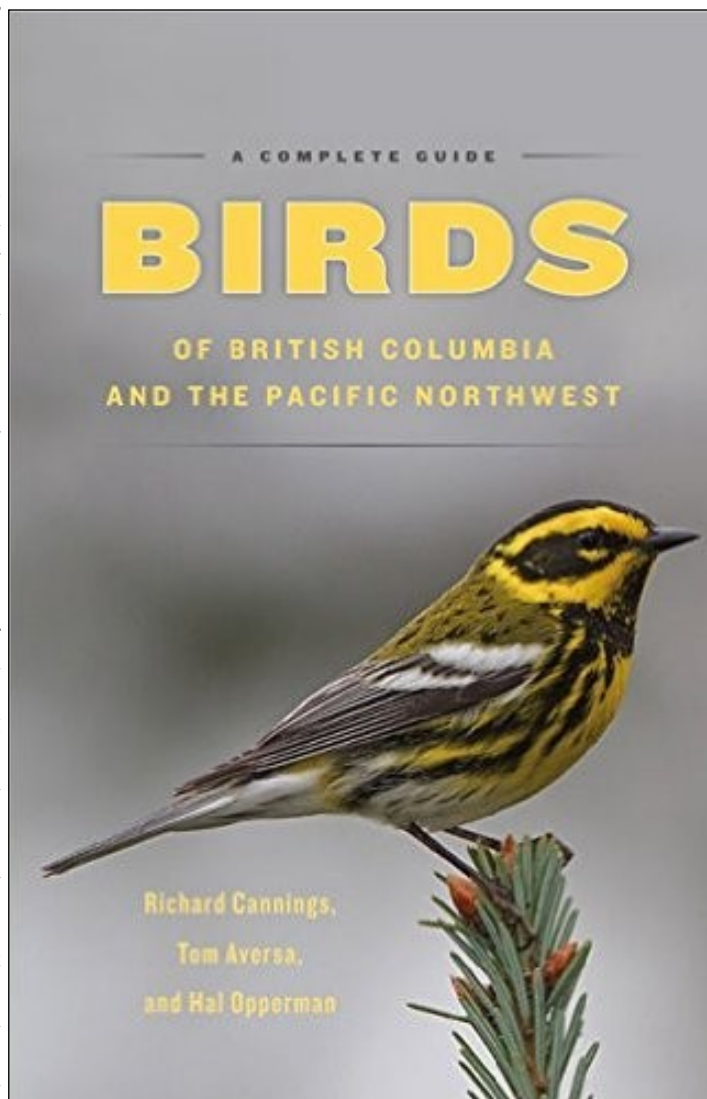
shelves. The book is a different sort of animal; something of a cross between a traditional field guide, Pete Dunne's *Essential Field Guide Companion* and *The Birder's Handbook*.

Each species account has six sections: Description; Similar Species; Status and Distribution; Habitat Associations; Behaviour and Feeding; and Vocalizations. No words are wasted, and since the plan is to cram in as much information as possible, elegant prose is not to be expected.

One of the most useful features of the book – at least for people in southern BC – is the range maps, which are far more detailed than is possible in a whole-continent guide. The book doesn't include the "Best Places to See" feature of the Campbell and Kennedy book, but the "Distribution" section goes some way in that direction with admirably current regional information. I'd be warmer still in my praise for this, but the range maps stop at 54° 40' north: just beyond Prince George. This is by far the most serious weakness of this book.

Had the book been labelled "Birds of the Pacific Northwest," there'd be no reason at all to complain, and this review could end on a positive note, with acknowledgement of the breadth of regional information and the great photographs contributed by BC birders. But describing a book as a complete guide to the birds of British Columbia, when it excludes nearly 50% of the province, is like a red rag to a bull for those of us from the north. You'll find Connecticut, Canada, Cape May and Black-throated Green Warblers, Grey-cheeked Thrushes, Nelson's Sparrows, Le Conte's Sparrows and more in our part of the province, but you won't find them in this alleged Complete Guide to the Birds of BC. The Tumbler Ridge hosts of our 2017 AGM, along with the trip guides from Dawson Creek and Fort St. John, would be perfectly entitled to express some outrage.

CNK



Briefings

Summaries by M. Church

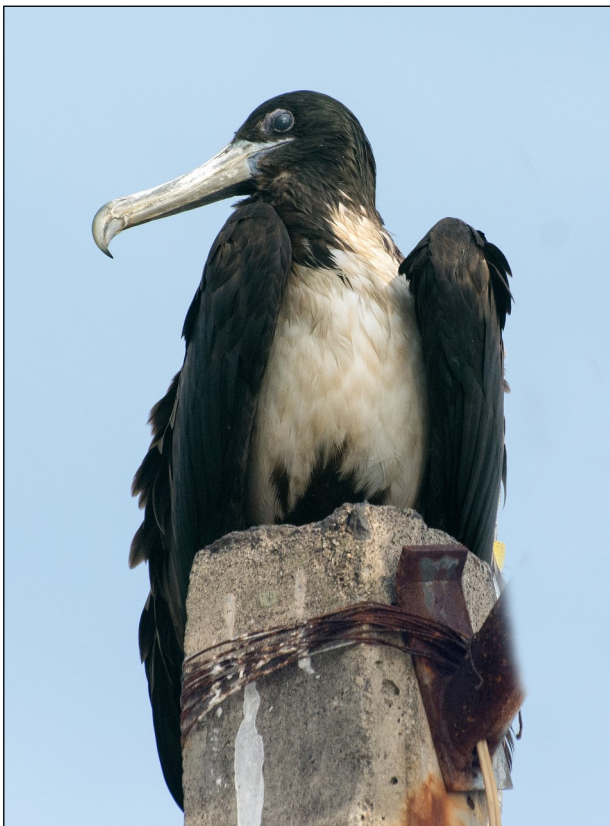
A Knotty Climate

The Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) is a large sandpiper – the largest so-called ‘peep’ – that spends its summer in the high Arctic. North American populations breed on the Canadian Arctic islands and the north coast of Alaska, while European populations breed in Greenland, Svalbard and on the north coast of Russia. The European birds winter as far south as the west coast of Africa (e.g., coast of Mauretania at 20° N Lat.). North American birds mostly winter around the coasts of Central and South America – some traveling as far as Tierra del Fuego! Thus they breed in that part of the world (the Arctic) that is experiencing the most rapidly warming climate of anywhere on the planet while most winter in the tropics, where warming is least felt. What effect might this have on their survival?

A population of Knots that summers on the Russian Taimyr Peninsula (76°-78°N) must cope with spring snowmelt occurring half a day earlier, on average, in each year over the last 30 years. The birds’ migration has advanced, too, but only by about a quarter of a day per year, so they have lost a full week of potential breeding time in that period. The consequence seems to be serious. On the breeding grounds, where the birds largely depend for feeding on arthropods that emerge from the frozen soil immediately upon the spring melt, they now miss the emergence event. In any case, it appears that the earlier melt is also depressing the abundance of the arthropods. So, in years of early melt, the chicks are less well-nourished and so smaller than in years of late melt, by about 15 percent (by weight). More critically, their bill length may be 25 percent shorter – 30 mm versus 40 mm (measurements made on juvenile birds during an autumn migration stopover at Gdansk, Poland, on the Baltic Sea coast).

Bill length becomes critical on the west African wintering ground where “full size” adults prefer to feed on a relatively large mollusk that is mainly found between 30 and 40 mm below mudflat surfaces. The small juveniles of early snowmelt years can access and consume less of this prey and have to depend on more of a rarer, smaller mollusk and less nutritious seagrass rhizomes. These juveniles remain relatively small and have reduced overwinter and subsequent survival.

The Red Knot population in Europe is declining and this complex climate-related circumstance is at least part of the reason. Investigators speculate that the effect may even become an evolutionary factor promoting a reduced characteristic size for European Red Knots.



Magnificent Frigatebird spotted in San Blas. CNK photos.

An interesting comparison might be possible with North American birds, some of which winter on the US Gulf coast where food resources may remain more generally accessible. In all events, the history demonstrates how the ecological effects of climate change may be subtle and indirect, therefore difficult to foresee, but no less serious for that.

References

van Gils, J.A. + 9 others. 2016. Body shrinkage due to Arctic warming reduces red knot fitness in tropical wintering range. *Science* 352: 819-21.

Commentary by M. Wikelski and G. Tertitski, Living sentinels for climate change effects. *Ibid.* 775-6.

The Most Amazing Bird in the World?

Frigate birds! In particular, the Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*). Starting with that proper name; surely it should be *F. major*? Well, the bird was originally classified (in the late 18th century) as a small pelican, hence the odd specific name.

Frigate birds are seagoing hunters (hence the analogy with the class of warships, a mainstay of most navies) of the tropical oceans. Great Frigates, characteristically about a kilogram in weight and with a wingspan of more than two metres, have the lowest specific wing loading (weight per unit wing area) of all birds; they are superb soaring birds. Curiously for a seagoing bird, they have no oil in their feathers, so they cannot actually land on the sea (and survive). They catch prey (mainly squid and flying fish) by skimming the surface or intercepting the fish in flight. They particularly like to hang around schools of tuna or dolphin, which put up the flying fish (definitely a bad scene for the fish – eaten in the water; eaten in the air). Formerly suspected of traveling hundreds of kilometres at sea, and aggregating travels of thousands of kilometres, scientists have now definitively tracked a sample of the birds by attaching solar-powered GPS units and tiny radios to 24 adult and 25 juvenile birds from a colony on an islet near

Mozambique. They also collected data of acceleration and altitude, heart beat rate, and wingbeat frequency. What they found out is astounding.

After breeding (or before), the birds make journeys around the Indian Ocean, remaining continuously on the wing for up to two months and averaging up to 400+ km per day. Total dis-



tance travelled might be 20,000 km. One juvenile travelled 55,000 km in 81 days with only four brief island rest stops. Mostly the birds travel at between 300 and 600 m altitude – a good height to spot feeding opportunities. But they soar as high as 4,000 m, after which they might glide for 60 km. How do they do it?

Anyone who has flown across the tropics and looked out the aircraft window knows that the tropical seas are infested with towering cumulus clouds, signifying air currents rising off the sea. The birds seek the cumulus clouds in order to be able to spiral upward in the rising air. Once aloft, they glide toward the next cumulus opportunity (vultures travel similarly during migration). Mostly they stay below cloud base at about 600 m, but sometimes they enter the clouds where rising currents may lift them at 3 to 4 m/sec to their highest altitudes. All of this is accomplished at little energy cost: heart and wingbeat data reveal that they need to flap less than 10% of the time, almost entirely while in active pursuit of food. But they must endure drastic changes in air pressure and temperature (at 4,000 m, the temperature is below freezing, even in the tropics), and they must somehow be able to nap on the wing.

To accomplish their journeys the birds must also be excellent climatologists. They travel a roughly circular path around the Indian Ocean in the trade winds and derivative winds, heading north off the east African coast, then southeast of India (favouring the excellent fishing off the Maldivé Islands), south through the Indonesian archipelago, then west across the southern Indian Ocean in the southern hemi-

sphere trades, all the while avoiding the largely windless equatorial doldrums that lurk in the centre of their circuit.

The ability of the juveniles is perhaps most astonishing of all. After a period of up to two years during which a monogamous pair looks after their sole chick, the young bird takes to the sea and accomplishes the circum-ocean navigation with no guidance. The instinct to do this must somehow be genetically imprinted. Whether this apparently imprinted behaviour will put the birds at a disadvantage with ongoing climate change depends on whether they are following geography (non-adaptive; bad) or meteorology (adaptive; better). The birds do not breed until they are about ten years old and may live for up to 40+ years. So the present generations will face the climate conundrum. With all their flight and navigation skills, let us hope they have the flexibility to solve it.

References

Weimerskirch, H., Bishop, C., Jeanniard-du-Dot, T., Prudor, A. and Sachs, G. 2016. Frigate birds track atmospheric conditions over months-long trans-oceanic flights. *Science* 353: 74-48.

Huey, R.B. and Deutsch, C. 2016. Perspective: How frigate birds soar around the doldrums. *Science* 353: 26-27.

Avian Pointer

Pointers are lanky, hound-like dogs with the inborn talent to search out and “point” toward upland game, especially grouse. They thereby do the hard part of

the work for their hunter-master. The bird world has a similar act. The Greater Honeyguide (*Indicator indicator*) (both the common and proper names turn out to be remarkably descriptive) is a smallish African bird that is related to the woodpeckers. Being one of the few animals that can digest waxes, honeyguides particularly favour bees’ wax. They first came to European attention in the late 16th century when a Portuguese missionary in Mozambique caught them sneaking into his chapel to steal candle wax.

Because of their liking for bees’ wax, the birds know the location of the bees’ nests in their territory. So they have traditionally been followed by local people to guide them to the nests, where they take the honey and leave the bees’ wax for the birds. Now research shows that this mutualism is deliberately agreed between the birds and the honey-hunters. When setting out, the hunters give a distinctive whistle or other sound that the birds recognize. A honeyguide responds and flies in the direction of a bees’ nest. Perching in a tree, it calls the hunters in. When the nest is reached the spoils are shared – the hunters employing smoke to disperse the bees, just as in commercial beekeeping.

Many domesticated or trained animals, of course, provide services to humankind in exchange for livelihood. What is remarkable about honeyguides is that they are not trained at all. Even more amazing, honeyguides are nest parasites (like cuckoos and cowbirds), so the juveniles do not learn this mutualistic behaviour directly from their parents. Though the propensity to seek bees’ nests may be innate, response to the human calls must derive from lateral social learning from the activities of adult birds. Furthermore, the calls used by the hunters to initiate a cooperative hunt vary from community to community across East Africa and Mozambique where this activity occurs – it is a locally variable cultural artifact that the birds must learn.

In monitored activity in a Mozambican community, employment of the established signal to summon a bird increased the participation of the birds from 33% (when calls other than the established summons were employed) to 66% of hunts, and it increased the chances of finding a bees’ nest from 17% to 54%, while shortening the hunt

from possibly hours to about 15 minutes. There are few examples of such deliberately choreographed mutualisms between humans and completely wild (i.e., entirely untrained) animals. Here is one remarkable example.

References

Spottiswoode, C.N., Begg, K.S. and Begg, C.M. 2016. Reciprocal signaling in honeyguide-human mutualism. *Science* 353: 387-389.

Commentary by Pennisi, E. Wild birds come when honey hunters call for help. *Ibid.* 335.

We All Think Like Ducks

Some time ago (*BC Birding*, March, 2014) we discovered that Rock Pigeons are art critics – specifically, they can discriminate classical from modern art (and definitely prefer Manet over Picasso; Mozart over Hindemith). This involves some level of conceptual learning, an ability to abstract some general properties of an object or event from the specifics of a particular example, so that new examples can be correctly classified. The ability to classify “Similar” and “different” has been demonstrated by primates – perhaps not surprisingly – but also by crows, parrots and, definitely a surprise, by bees. Astonishingly, it now emerges that pigeons can become highly proficient at identifying cancer tumors in mammograms (CBC news item; 31 July, 2016). But these abilities have been demonstrated only in the context of reinforced

learning; the animal is trained using a system of rewards and punishments.

Now a group of researchers has convincingly shown that animals innately – without training – can abstract concepts and classify diverse items as “same” or “different”? The subjects were newly hatched Mallard ducklings. The ducklings were hatched in the dark, held for an hour in a social group, then individually exposed to specific objects. A group of 36 ducklings was exposed to two identical geometrical shapes and 36 to two different shapes, all of one colour. Forty ducklings were exposed to further identical shapes of one colour, and 40 to the same shapes but of different colours. After a further 30 minutes of darkness, the ducklings were placed in a chamber where identical and different pairs of shapes (or colours), *all different than the original ones* were slowly moving about the chamber. The ducklings overwhelmingly chose to approach and follow the pair that was analogous to the pair to which they had originally been exposed (in 77 of 113 successful tests; the remaining 39 ducklings evinced no interest in the objects). The researchers concluded that, without reinforcement, the ducklings had demonstrated, by mostly choosing to follow the objects most similar to those they had previously seen, the ability to comprehend abstract categories.

Of course the researchers were taking advantage of a well-known ability essential for the survival of the birds in the wild – imprinting on the first object perceived after birth, normally parent and siblings. Birds can even be made to

imprint on humans. Nonetheless, demonstration of the ability of naïve ducklings to abstract the concepts of “same” (shape/colour) or “different”, as they must have done to make the selection they did, is important. It was for a long time believed that only humans possess the ability for abstract conceptualization. Of course, we do it far better than any other animal (so far as we know) but the ability must have evolutionary roots in the deep past, so it perhaps should not be surprising that animals demonstrate, to some degree, similar abilities.

References

Martino III, A. and Kacelnik, A. 2016. Ducklings imprint on the relational concept of “same or different”. *Science* 353: 286-288.

Commentary by Wasserman, E.A. Thinking abstractly like a duck(ling). *Ibid.* 222-223.

Miscellany

Weird Bird Names

What is the most enchanting, peculiar, or just plain weird bird name you’ve ever added to your life list? A few that come to mind to Mexico-bound members are:

- Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser
- Buff-breasted Wood Partridge
- Rufous-browed Peppershrike

Can you better these? Entries, please, for the next edition of *BC Birding*.

Big Year

Daniele Mitchell’s Big Year blog can be seen at:

danielemitchell.wordpress.com

At publishing time, Daniele had spotted 354 BC species in the year. What price Russell Canning’s record?

Erratum

Apologies for the misspelling in the June 2016 edition of the name of new member Mark Ward.



A Baird's Sparrow photographed by Peter Candido at Brooks after the BCFO AGM.

The Reflective Birder # 16

Clive Keen

Going Over to the Offence

Economists invented the rather revealing notion of the “positional good”. A positional good is one that is bought primarily because it distinguishes the owner from lesser mortals. The BMW shows to others that we've succeeded; the Burberry shows that we have exquisite taste, and so forth. Rather unexpectedly, an economist in a sombre moment extended the notion to environmental ethics. For some, he argued, assertions of environmental ethics have value because they demonstrate one's moral superiority to the Great Unwashed. But, he argued, environmental ethics thus used will suffer from all the problems that positional goods are heir to. If everyone bought BMWs and Burberrys, they'd lose their positional status, and thus their value would drop. Similarly, if everyone conformed to the latest environmental ethical standards, those people who wanted to prove their moral superiority would be stymied. So they up the ante. They'll urge conformity to even more rigorous standards. And if everyone accepted those standards, they'd then be obliged to urge standards that are more rigorous still.

Now, as a recipe for gradual ethical improvement, this has a lot of merit. Think of the gradual evolution of standards regarding birdlife:

1. Not good to torture anything sapient for pleasure. *Agreed.*
2. Not good to make bird species extinct so fashionable women can wear fancy hats. *Agreed.*
3. Not good to rob nests of their eggs for fun. *Agreed.*
4. Not good to allow extinctions through wilful destruction of their habitat. *Agreed.*
5. Not good to harass birds so that their lives or ability to reproduce could be put into peril. *Agreed.*

So far, all is going splendidly. But if environmental ethics is positional, the ante will always be raised, even when the bar is getting pretty high. And thus we are now getting:

- n. Don't ever make birds jumpy by deliberately getting closer to them. *Dunno about that.*
- n+1. Never use flash photography, which might hurt birds' eyes. *Dunno about that either.*
- n+2. Never use recorded bird sounds in the field as it distracts birds from their vital concerns. *As above.*

Yes, there might be a point in all of those, but surely some situational judgement is called for rather than blanket exhortations.

Of course, to most people, environmental ethics is not positional, any more than the BMW is a positional good for all the owners. Some people buy BMWs simply because they are good cars, and couldn't give a damn what other people think. Similarly, most people, we hope, come to adopt well-tuned environmental ethics not for virtue signalling purposes but because it's the right thing to do. But the “positional good” label certainly seems to apply to some of the people that send exhortations in my general direction.

Let's consider next another factor that raises its head in twenty-first century naturalists' circles: New Puritanism. HL Mencken tells us that Puritanism is “The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, might be happy”, and it strikes this author as being as good a definition as any. I've frankly always been puzzled about why Puritans are so averse to having some fun. Perhaps they need to keep their emotions tightly bottled or they'd lose control. But I raise the issue because it seems to me that some New Puritans are forming an alliance with the virtue-signallers of environmental ethics.

How else can I explain the latest diatribe from a member of the birding community? Apparent-

ly, I absolutely must not interfere with nature by filling my bird feeders. This abomination, I'm told, must be decried through all communication channels. *There's lots of natural food out there! We're interfering, yet again, with natural processes and must desist forthwith!*

When the ranting stops, it's possible to find something sensible in an anti-feeding stance. Sure, birds must not be lured into salmonella traps, nor into collisions with windows. But, can't we solve those by cleaning our feeders often, and positioning feeders carefully to avoid collisions? Not for some. For them, the real issues are:

- a) Superior ethical standards need to be displayed.
- b) People are *enjoying* birds, God forbid, rather than being earnest about them.

Some readers will be uncomfortable about raising the topic, but this Reflective Birder thinks it is important to do so. Unchecked holier-than-thou hectoring can bring enlightened environmental ethics into disrepute and disenchant people whose widespread support is essential if habitat is to be preserved, bird-strike issues are to be addressed, and the outdoor-cat problem is to be resolved. We must not let that happen by cowering in the face of those who comport themselves as our moral superiors.

Is it acceptable to get closer to an Arctic Tern, which might be nesting? Careful judgement calls are surely needed rather than blanket exhortations. CNK photo from Garðabær-Vífilsstaðavatn, Iceland, June 2016.



