

# BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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*Blue Jay photographed at Old Summit Lake Road, Prince George, by Jeff Dyck.*

**Publisher**

*BC Birding* is published four times a year by the British Columbia Field Ornithologists, P.O. Box 61670, RPO Brookwood, Langley, BC V3A 1K0.

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 ([bcfo.ca](http://bcfo.ca)) for details, or write to the BCFO address given above under "Publisher."

**Annual Membership Dues**

General Membership (Canada): \$30

Junior Membership (Canada): \$20

U.S. and International Membership: \$35

**Newsmagazine Submissions**

To submit material to this publication, contact the Editor by email ([clive\\_keen@hotmail.com](mailto:clive_keen@hotmail.com)) or by mail at 10790 Grassland Road, Prince George, BC V2K 5E8.

Submissions may include articles about birding experiences, casual observations about bird behaviour, site guides, photographs, and other topics of broad interest to birders, preferably, but not necessarily, in British Columbia. Overseas trip reports are welcome but should be kept to a maximum of 2,000 words. Deadlines are:

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- December edition: November 15

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

*Right: a dream sighting for many of us: a Laysan Albatross photographed by Mark Yunker on a pelagic trip out of Tofino. This was one of four, and possibly five, Laysan Albatross seen on the trip.*

# BCFO Officers & Directors

**Officers**

*President:* Mike McGrenere, Victoria, 250-658-8624,

[mi8624@telus.net](mailto:mi8624@telus.net)

*Vice President:* Art Martell, Courtenay, 250-334-2979,

[amartell@shaw.ca](mailto:amartell@shaw.ca)

*Secretary:* Marian Porter, Salt Spring Island, 250-653-2043,

[quetzal2@telus.net](mailto:quetzal2@telus.net)

*Treasurer:* Josh Inman, Langley, 604-532-0455,

[joshbirder@gmail.co](mailto:joshbirder@gmail.co)

**Other Directors**

Jude Grass, Surrey, 604-538-8774, [judegrass@shaw.ca](mailto:judegrass@shaw.ca)

Clive Keen, Prince George, 250-963-9520,

[clive\\_keen@hotmail.com](mailto:clive_keen@hotmail.com)

Adrian Leather, Quesnel, 250-249-5561,

[q-birds@xplornet.com](mailto:q-birds@xplornet.com)

Monica Nugent, New Westminster, 604-220-8816,

[monica\\_nugent@telus.net](mailto:monica_nugent@telus.net)

Gary Davidson, Nakusp, 250-265-4456, [gsd37@yahoo.ca](mailto:gsd37@yahoo.ca)

**Ex Officio**

*Immediate Past President:* George Clulow, Burnaby,

604-438-7639, [gclulow@shaw.ca](mailto:gclulow@shaw.ca)

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### Christmas Bird Counts 2017 – 2018

The 118th CBC takes place this year between December 14, 2017 and January 5, 2018. Information on dates and contacts for the 106 BC counts, as well as the Bird Counts4Kids, are available at [bcfo.ca](http://bcfo.ca).

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### Not Just an LBJ

On November 3, 2017, Langley birder Cos van Vermerskerken had found a Clay-coloured Sparrow at Brydon Lagoon, close to photographer John Gordon's house. Clay-coloured are common enough in the interior, but much less so in the Lower Mainland.

John went looking, and waited at the expected spot for two hours, apparently in vain. But then he heard a rustling behind him. He very slowly turned around and there, perched on a stem of grass about two metres away, was the bird.

If only all such hunts could be so satisfying.





## President's Message

Mike McGrenere, President

In early November I joined Jude and Al Grass on a trip to Hope to look at possible venues for the 2018 conference and AGM. Jude had made enquiries with the Hope community centre about use of their banquet room. She also arranged to meet with Scott Denkers and Kelly Pearce from the Hope Mountain Centre who have agreed to assist with the organization of the conference.

Scott and Kelly suggested that we look at the Hope Golf and Country Club which has a banquet room that is popular for weddings. The golf club is in a gorgeous location and looks very suitable for our event so we have secured the facility for the weekend of June 1, 2 and 3. While

looking at the banquet room we observed Varied Thrushes, Robins, a Hairy Woodpecker, Steller's Jays and four other species just outside the building. A detailed outline of the events and field trips will be in the March issue of *BC Birding* as well as on the website.

There will be a two-day pre-conference field trip and post-conference extension trip. Adrian Leather is organizing these two activities with the pre-conference trip planned to take place in the Princeton area and the post-conference extension heading to the Williams Lake area for some great birding. Details of these two birding events will also be available in the March issue of *BC Birding* and on the website.

An e-mail message to all members was sent in late September regarding revisions to the BCFO Constitution and Bylaws required by the new BC Societies Act. A draft of the revised Constitution and Bylaws was placed in the Members Section of the website for members to view and

comment. The Board will be reviewing all comments received by the end of November and a new draft will be placed in the Members Section of the website in the new year for your consideration. A vote on the new draft will take place at the Hope AGM.

Shorter daylight hours and colder temperatures mean that winter is approaching and it will be time to participate in your local Christmas Bird Count. Whether you will be counting in snow or more balmy conditions on the West Coast, the Christmas Counts are a great way to wind up the birding year. A list of the Christmas Bird Counts in British Columbia is available on the website. This is the 118th year that Christmas Bird Counts have been held in North America. The website also has information about Christmas Bird Counts for Kids.

On behalf of the Board, I wish you all the best for an enjoyable holiday season and a happy new year.

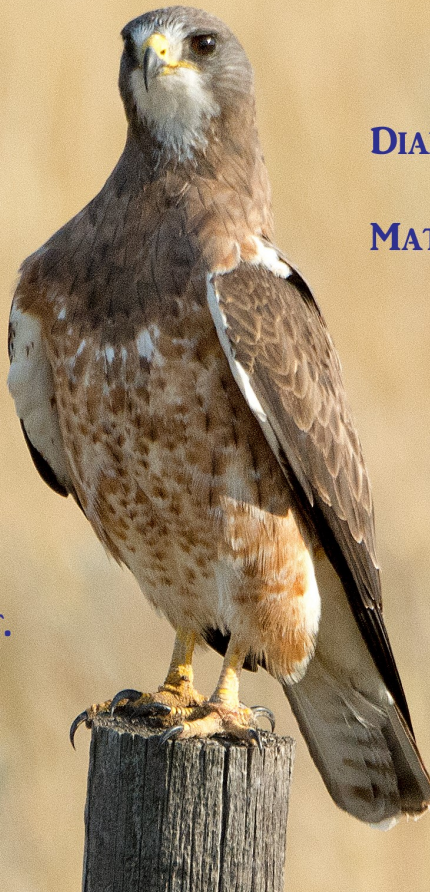
## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

CHRIS SHEPHERD - BIG  
LAKE RANCH

FREDA KAM YEE SUNG - ST.  
ALBERT AB

DIANE KEHOE - DELTA

MATTHEW KOCH - VICTORIA





## Notes

### Tumbler Ridge Follow-up

The BCFO board meeting in September reviewed the financial situation from the Tumbler Ridge AGM as well as the overall finances of the BCFO, and decided to send an additional \$1,000 donation to the Tumbler Ridge Museum Foundation for assisting with the AGM. Board members agreed that the meeting had been an outstanding success in all respects.

### STEVE CANNINGS AWARD FOR 2017: DR. ART MARTELL

Wayne C. Weber

The Steve Cannings Award, presented each year by BC Field Ornithologists, is named for the late Steve Cannings of Penticton, BC, who was an outstanding naturalist, nature photographer, and conservationist. The Cannings Award recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions over a long period of time to ornithology in BC in any one or more of the following three areas: (1) research on bird biology or ecology, or detailed documentation of the avifauna of a portion of BC; (2) conservation of birds or of bird habitats in BC; and (3) public education about birds in BC. The award recipient is selected by a three-person Award Committee, chaired by myself, and approved by the BCFO Board.

This year's winner of the Cannings Award is Dr. Art Martell of Courtenay, BC. A plaque commemorating the award was presented to Dr. Martell at the BCFO Annual Meeting in Tumbler Ridge on June 10, 2017.

Art is from Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, and earned his B.Sc. degree in 1967 at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. In 1969, he received his M.Sc. in Wildlife Management from Acadia, with his M.Sc. thesis on the wintering waterfowl of Nova Scotia.

For his PhD, Art moved to the Uni-

versity of Alberta, where he completed his Ph.D. dissertation on the demography of tundra and taiga populations of red-backed voles. He acknowledges being mentored by Dr. Bill Fuller, renowned biologist and conservationist at the University of Alberta.

After working for a year at the Boreal Institute of Northern Studies in Edmonton, Art joined the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) in 1975, working first out of the Great Lakes Forest Research Centre in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. From 1978 to 1983, he carried on research from the Whitehorse office of CWS. In 1983, he moved to Ottawa, where for two years he was a Senior Scientist with CWS in charge of wildlife research. In 1985, he moved to BC, and has been here ever since. From 1985 to 1995, he was Regional Director of the CWS for the Pacific and Yukon Region, and from 1995 until 2000, he was the Regional Director-General for Environment Canada in Vancouver.

In his administrative roles with CWS and Environment Canada, Art helped to establish and supervise several partnerships and programs which have been extremely important for bird research and conservation. In 1998, he helped to establish the Pacific Coast Joint Venture, one of several partnerships between government agencies and non-government conservation organizations which is focused on securing key habitats for waterfowl and waterbirds, in this case along the Pacific Coast in the United States and BC. He was heavily involved in the Fraser River Action Plan in the 1990s. He was involved in the establishment of NABCI (the North American Bird Conservation Initiative), and from 2000 until his retirement in 2003, he was the first Canadian national coordinator for that plan. He was also involved in the establishment of the Centre for Wildlife Ecology at Simon Fraser University. Art was on the board of Bird Studies Canada for an impressive 13 years, 7 of those as the board chairperson.

In addition to all the above, Art has provided a major service to BCFO, first of all as a board member for many years, and second and of major importance, as the editor of our journal, *British Columbia Birds*, since 2008.

Art served as the Regional Coordinator for the BC Breeding Bird Atlas Project between 2008 and 2012 for the Comox Valley-Campbell River and

North Island regions, and put in over 300 hours in the field as an atlaser. He has also contributed almost 2,000 checklists to eBird over the last several years. In addition, he has been active in the Comox Valley Naturalists Society, including a six-year stint as the chair of their Birders Group.

BC Field Ornithologists are delighted to recognize Art Martell as the winner of the Cannings Award for 2017.

### Nature Vancouver 100th Anniversary

2018 will be the 100th anniversary of Nature Vancouver (originally Vancouver Natural History Society), and as part of its celebrations, it will be hosting BC Nature's 2018 AGM, from May 10 to 13.

The theme is *Promoting Health in Nature: Past, Present and Future*, and the venue for the conference is UBC's Forest Sciences Centre. Field trips are being arranged to highlight nearby areas including Pacific Spirit Regional Park and Jericho Beach.

#### Celebrating 100 Years



#### NATURE VANCOUVER

Details on activities and registration will be available on the BC Nature and Nature Vancouver websites:

[www.bcnature.ca](http://www.bcnature.ca)

[www.event.naturevancouver.ca](http://www.event.naturevancouver.ca)

### Featured Photographer

The Featured Photographer Series is back on line after an extended absence, but it was well worth the wait. The fifteenth presenter in the series is Michelle

Lamberson of Kelowna. Twelve of her stunning photographs can be seen at:

[bcfo.ca/michelle-lamberson-october-2017](http://bcfo.ca/michelle-lamberson-october-2017)

## Recording Bird Songs

Richard Johnson has been recording bird song with a Song Meter SM4 and has two ready to go for spring 2018. If any members have any interest in this method of archiving bird presence and experience of what timing protocols to use, Richard would like to hear from you at [richard.slr@gmail.com](mailto:richard.slr@gmail.com).

## House Sparrows – Decided Nuisances?

*Andy Buhler*

While indexing some old newspapers for the Vernon Museum and Archives I came across the following little item. I was amused to note that even back in 1906 the local populace was worried about an invasion of introduced feathered friends.

**June 12, 1906. Vernon News:** page 5, column 4 [Part of the regular 'Town and District' column]

*"Two years ago a couple of English Sparrows were observed for the first time on our streets. Last summer the brood had increased to a dozen or two, and this season a large colony of them makes its home on Barnard Avenue. It is only a matter of a short time until these feathered pests will become a decided nuisance."*

The Vernon CBC in 1986 tallied 1,416 House Sparrows. Maybe they were right to worry! Still, by 2016, only 566 House Sparrows were tallied in the Vernon CBC. In fact, in 29 CBCs after 1986 only two counts had tallied over 1,000 House Sparrows and many counts were down in the 200-800 range. Maybe those "feathered pests" have not

really become such "a decided nuisance." since their arrival.

## Southerly Red-throated Loon

Red-throated Loons are not seen all that often in southern BC, but four years in a row the one below has appeared in a



lake where Heather Baines lives near Daisy Lake, south of Whistler. It has been cooperative for photographs, coming up to the beach in the evening and morning.

## Correction

John Gordon points out that while the photograph of George Clulow that appeared in the September edition was indeed by him, the picture of the Siberian Accentor, shown in the photograph, was by Raymond Ng.

Apologies for the erroneous attribution (*editor*).

## BCFO Research Grants

British Columbia Field Ornithologists wish to promote the study and enjoyment of wild birds in British Columbia, foster cooperation between amateur and professional ornithologists, support ornithological research programs, and support natural history and conservation efforts to preserve birds and their habitats. To those ends, BCFO encourages submission of proposals for financial assistance for bird surveys and other ornithological research.

Over the past 20 years BCFO has granted over \$20,000 for bird research and conservation in British Columbia. Projects funded by regular grants include studies on cavity-nesting birds on Becher's Prairie, Vancouver Island Sandhill Cranes, Barrow's Goldeneye wintering on the Columbia River, Western Bluebird reintroduction, bird surveys in the Nanaimo river estuary, and a Bird Atlas for the Peace River as well as for educational and conservation activities in the Creston Valley, Vaseux Lake Bird Observatory and an eBird Protocol Count for Kilpoola Lake IBA. Major grants have also been given for the B.C. Breeding Bird Atlas and the International Ornithological Congress 2018.

BCFO regularly offers Research Grants up to \$2,000, but may offer larger grants if approved at an AGM. Much of the money for grants comes from a surcharge included in the fees for the Annual Conference Extension trips. Deadlines for submissions are January 1 and July 1.

Much more can be done for birds in British Columbia by individual citizen science projects or student research projects. We welcome proposals to help increase the knowledge, conservation and public awareness of birds in British Columbia. For more information visit the BCFO website ([bcfo.ca/bcfo-research-grants/](http://bcfo.ca/bcfo-research-grants/)).



# Bird Listers' Corner

The March 2018 edition of this news-magazine will once again include listing tables. To take part, please report your life list totals as of December 31, 2017 for any or all the areas listed below. You may wish to submit specialized lists such as birds seen above 1,500 metres in BC etc. or areas not previously listed. If the list for a new area is covered by a checklist, please provide the total number of species on the current list. Most areas listed are those with published checklists. The number after each area is the threshold level, which in most cases represents 50% of the species included on the most recent checklist for that area. You may report levels below the threshold. Space permitted they will be included. The size of the geographic areas listed varies considerably.

- The ABA list has been altered to include Hawaii, so it now encompasses all species seen north of the Mexican/US border plus Hawaii. The prior ABA listing area north of the Mexican/US border will also be retained and listed as ABA Continental.
- North Pacific Pelagic Waters include all species seen more than 3.2 km (2 miles) from shore off Alaska, BC, Washington, Oregon and California.
- Non-motorized Transportation (NMT) consists of species seen/heard using self-powered locomotion (walk, run, bicycle, canoe etc.) from your home location.
- ATPT comprises the totalling of all your Canadian Province & Territory lists to create a "total ticks" list.

Areas listed are those having three or more members providing totals for 2016. If more than one family member is submitting a list, individual forms need to be submitted.

Email your list to [lawrencecowan@shaw.ca](mailto:lawrencecowan@shaw.ca) or mail the form below to: Larry Cowan #45, 12268 – 189A Street, Pitt Meadows, BC V3Y 2M7.

## Deadline

Deadline for submitting listing totals is February 1, 2018.

## Acknowledgement

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

## BCFO LISTING REPORT FORM DECEMBER 2017

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

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

# BCFO Two-day Trips

## Mini-Pelagic Report

*Kathryn Clouston*

**October 28–29, 2017**

Around a dozen people, mostly from the Comox Valley and Langley, joined Mike McGrenere for a mini-pelagic trip on the Coho ferry to Washington and an introduction to Victoria birding. I am fairly new to birding and the BCFO so this was my first time on a two-day field trip and provided a great introduction to a new area for me.

We met at the Coho ferry terminal in downtown Victoria on a gorgeous sunny Saturday, not something you can rely on down here on the wet coast. Customs clearance was much easier than the equivalent at an airport and we were off to see what the glorious weather had brought us. It started a little slow with only a handful of Mew Gulls close to the terminal but then picked up as we approached Ogden Point, a good omen since that is where we would be going the following day. We were ushered out of the harbour by a group of Rhinoceros Auklets and the real pelagic part began.

We quickly began seeing what ended up being dozens of Common Murres, a few Pigeon Guillemots (below) and a variety of gulls, including a few Heermann's. On the US side we



found a couple of Marbled Murrelet but alas, no jaegers or shearwaters. No complaints were heard, however, as the exciting birds would have blown in on nausea-inducing weather which most were happy to avoid. We had lunch in the little park beside the ferry terminal and then headed back.

The return trip started well when

## 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.

some Black Turnstones flew onto the wharf beside us, then some Red-breasted Mergansers flew by. There were a number of other water birds around the Port Angeles harbour. Once outside the harbour we were treated to lines of Heermann's Gulls flying past the ferry and then we had at least one of most of the gulls found in this area, so we got to practice, or develop, our gull ID skills. On the Canadian side we were treated to the spectacle of some Humpback whales and a couple of Ancient Murrelets while a Black Oystercatcher welcomed us into Victoria Harbour.

The weather stayed good and we met at the end of Ogden Point at 8:30 the next morning, a very civilized start to a busy day. The sun was just starting to peek over the hill as we began walking out along the walkway so we didn't miss anything by starting at this hour. Some Black Oystercatchers entertained us on the rocks nearby while we were assembling and kept popping up as we moved along the breakwater. We had some tantalizing glimpses of murrelets through the scopes at the mid-point so decided to go all the way to the end where we were treated to great looks at Ancient and Marbled Murrelets side by side so you could see the differences. We had spotted some Black Turnstones picking between the barnacles while walking along and then saw a group of Turnstones with a couple of Surfbirds

fly past. An omen, although we didn't know it at the time, of the Surfbirds we would see throughout the day.

We then moved on to Clover Point where we saw most of the gulls that can be found in the Victoria area, sitting this time, along with more Turnstones and Surfbirds. Mike was telling us that the nearby unmowed grassy area is often a location to find unusual or rare birds when, on cue, a bird flew in with a bright yellow breast, so we added a Western Meadowlark to our list.

We moved on to Queen's Park near the Oak Bay Marina to grab some lunch and a quick look at the water/shore birds where we saw a couple of Short-billed Dowitchers and a couple of Greater Yellowlegs. Our last spot near the water was Cattle Point where we had more Turnstones and Surfbirds as well as some sparrows and then at the end a few American Pipits flew in for a quick visit.

After that we moved inland and met up at Michell's farm stand to grab something to eat before heading out to look over the farm fields. We went down to the Puckle and Lamont crossroads where we saw a vast quantity of Canada Geese with a significant proportion of Cackling Geese mixed in. There was also a very odd-looking domestic cross that looked like it had seen better days. We had heard there was a Rusty Blackbird in the area but never found it amid the flightiness caused by a Northern Shrike, a Merlin, and a Peregrine Falcon.

Mike then took us up to McIntyre Reservoir which we would have been unlikely to find on our own. There we found a male Hooded Merganser with a harem of nine females and a female Ring-necked Duck. For the finale we went over to the Vantreight Farm Bulb Field where we found another bunch of Hooded Mergansers, three males with one female, and some Killdeer. At that point it was time for the Mainlanders to head for their ferry and us to return to the Comox Valley.

It was a great introduction to some of the birdy areas of Victoria. My only beef with the trip was that Mike didn't tell us there was a Halloween extension for special birds where he saved a Snow Bunting and a couple of Lapland Longspurs at Cattle Point for those that participated. Next time I will have to ask about future highlights before we leave.



# Upcoming Meetings & Events

*Compiled by Wayne C. Weber*

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

For most meetings, festivals and other events, the website is the main source of information, and registration can often be accomplished online as well. Wherever information can be obtained through a phone number or e-mail address, we have included these as well; if no contact information is listed, it can be assumed that none was provided by the organization, at least not on the date when this listing was compiled. It is usually not necessary to contact a particular individual, except for scientific meetings when one is interested in making a presentation. Names and contact information for individuals are listed whenever they are available.

## 2017 Events

Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 (2018)-- CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS. For information on dates of counts and contact information for count organizers, please check the BCFO website.

## 2018 Events

Feb. 13-16--SOCIETY FOR NORTHWESTERN VERTEBRATE BIOLOGY annual meeting at the Red Lion Hotel, Jantzen Beach, Portland, Oregon. This meeting is in conjunction with the Oregon and Washington chapters of The Wildlife Society. For information and to register, visit the SNVB website at [thesnvb.org/annual-meeting](http://thesnvb.org/annual-meeting).

Feb. 16-19--The GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and Bird Studies Canada. For information and to participate, check the GBBC website at [gbbc.birdcount.org](http://gbbc.birdcount.org).

Feb. 21-24--45th ANNUAL MEETING, PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP, La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico. For information and to register, visit the conference website at [pacificseabirdgroup.org/annual-meeting](http://pacificseabirdgroup.org/annual-meeting).

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

Mar. 16-18--15TH ANNUAL WINGS OVER WATER BIRDING FESTIVAL, Blaine, WA. For information, phone the Blaine Visitor Information Center at 1-800-624-3555, send an e-mail to [dharger@cityofblaine.com](mailto:dharger@cityofblaine.com), or check the website at [www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com](http://www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com).

Mar. 23-25--21st ANNUAL OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL, Othello, WA. For information, check the festival website at [www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org](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. 5-7--Joint Meeting of the ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL BIOLOGISTS (APBBC) and COLLEGE OF APPLIED BIOLOGY, Westin Wall Centre, Richmond, BC. For further information, please check the website at [professional-biology.com/professional-development-networking/annual-conference](http://professional-biology.com/professional-development-networking/annual-conference).

Apr. 5-8--HARNEY COUNTY MIGRATORY BIRD FESTIVAL, Burns, Oregon (near Malheur National Wildlife Refuge). For further information, check the festival website at [www.migratorybirdfestival.com/](http://www.migratorybirdfestival.com/).

Apr. 9-14--136th STATED MEETING, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, Tucson, Arizona. For further information, check the AOS website at [www.americanornithology.org/content/aos-2018-meeting](http://www.americanornithology.org/content/aos-2018-meeting).

Apr. 13-15--OLYMPIC BIRD FESTIVAL, Sequim, WA. For information, visit the festival website at [www.olympicbirdfest.org](http://www.olympicbirdfest.org), or contact the Dungeness River Audubon Center by phone (360-681-4076) or by e-mail ([info@olympicbirdfest.org](mailto:info@olympicbirdfest.org)).

Apr. 18-24--GODWIT DAYS, Arcata, California. It's a little way away, but Godwit Days is one of the premier birding festivals in North America. For information, check the festival website at [godwitdays.org](http://godwitdays.org). Registration opens in December.

Apr. 27-29--GRAYS HARBOR SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL, Aberdeen, WA. For information, contact the festival office at PO Box 470, Montesano, WA 98563 (phone 360-289-5048) or check the website at [www.shorebirdfestival.com](http://www.shorebirdfestival.com).

April (date not yet finalized)--First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the year from Westport, WA. Westport Seabirds operates about 20 trips per year from April through October. For the trip schedule and other information, please check the website ([westportseabirds.com](http://westportseabirds.com)) at a later date.

May 7-13--WINGS OVER THE ROCKIES FESTIVAL (22nd annual), Invermere, BC. For information, contact the Pynelogs Cultural Centre, PO Box 2633, Invermere, BC V0A 1K0, phone 1-855-342-2473, e-mail [info@wingsovertherockies.org](mailto:info@wingsovertherockies.org), or check the website at [www.wingsovertherockies.org](http://www.wingsovertherockies.org).

May 10-13--BC NATURE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Vancouver, BC, hosted by Nature Vancouver. For information and to register, check the BC Nature website at

[www.bcnature.ca](http://www.bcnature.ca) , or phone Betty Davison at the BC Nature office (phone 604-985-3057; email [manager@bcnature.ca](mailto:manager@bcnature.ca) .)

May 17-20--LEAVENWORTH SPRING BIRD FEST, Leavenworth, WA. For information, email [info@leavenworthspringbirdfest.com](mailto:info@leavenworthspringbirdfest.com) or check the festival website at [www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com](http://www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com) .

May 17-21--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 [meadowlarkfestival.ca/](http://meadowlarkfestival.ca/) .

June 1-3--BC FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Hope, BC. For further information, please check the BCFO website at a later date ([bcfo.ca](http://bcfo.ca) ).

June 7-9--WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY annual meeting at the Chattanooga Convention Centre, Chattanooga, Tennessee (advance notice). For further information, check the WOS website at [wilsonsociety.org/meetings/2018-meeting](http://wilsonsociety.org/meetings/2018-meeting) .

June 7-11-- ASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY annual conference, Hood River, Oregon. For information, visit the WOS website at [wos.org/annual-conference/current-year](http://wos.org/annual-conference/current-year) .

Aug. 19-26-- 27th INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS, Vancouver, BC. This gathering of ornithologists from all over the world is a "must" for anyone with a scientific interest in birds. For information and to register, please visit the IOC website at [www.iocongress2018.com](http://www.iocongress2018.com) .

Sept. 26-30--ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS at Ventura, California. For further details, check the WFO website at [www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php](http://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.php) .

Oct. 7-11--25TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY, Cleveland, Ohio. For information, check the TWS conference page at [wildlife.org/learn/conferences-2](http://wildlife.org/learn/conferences-2) .

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## Bluebird Bonanza

*John Gordon*

On the afternoon of November 5, and for a few hours on the morning of November 6, three Western Bluebirds were present at Crescent Beach's Blackie Spit in South Surrey. Once the news broke every Lower Mainland lister worth their salt made their way to the spit. The three birds, one male and two female, moved up and down the spit feeding on whatever insects they could find. They would often fly off into the distance frustrating those who had just arrived only to return to repeat their circular feeding pattern. Most of the week the Lower Mainland had been gripped in a cold front with temperatures dipping below zero at night but still there were enough insects to keep the trio busy. If the bluebirds weren't enough, a flock of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch flew over us, making it an extra-special day for all those gathered for the spectacle. (Photo by John Gordon.)





# Trip Reports

## A Likely Tale

Gareth Pugh

June 24 – 30, 2017

Six of us, Bob Puls, Pauline O'Toole, Wim Vesseur, Alice Steffensen, Liz Walker and myself left Aldergrove at 7:00 a.m. on June 24 for our annual birding trip. With light traffic most of the way we made good time, stopping in 100 Mile House for lunch at the Visitor Centre where we ate lunch and watched the birds including some young Virginia Rails in the reed bed alongside the picnic area. We had booked the Northern Lights Lodge on Quesnel Lake in Likely for six nights and had the whole of the Lodge to ourselves. It has eight bedrooms on three sides off a verandah with a good-sized commercial kitchen and a large lounge/dining room, so we quickly unpacked and settled in before taking a stroll around the area. Ian and Joan Taylor had travelled up earlier so were already settled in and soon had supper ready for us.

Birding in the extensive grounds of the property was very productive. On the first evening we recorded nineteen species including Tennessee Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Western Tanager plus a pair of Red-breasted Sapsuckers gathering food.

The Lodge is ideally suited as a base for a birding trip and from there we were able to visit a range of habitats during our five-day stay. At Cedar Point Provincial Park we found Tree, Barn and Violet-green Swallows, Western Tanagers, Swainson's Thrush, Common Loon etc. and a Northern Waterthrush busily gathering food near the dock. We checked out Little Lake Road where other than a Pileated Woodpecker we could only find the common birds that were everywhere, Swainson's Thrush, Song Sparrow, Northern Flicker etc. However the array of wildflowers along the roadsides everywhere was stunning and these attracted a number of butterflies, so plenty of photographs were taken which we have used to enter the sightings on e-Butterfly.

One day we drove the Little Lake/

Quesnel River Road which starts off winding through open grasslands where we made several stops hoping to hear a Long-billed Curlew but despite checking out this and several other suitable areas we failed to find one. Lots of other birds however – Robins, Savannah and Chipping Sparrows – were everywhere, while Swainson's Thrushes, Flickers and others could be heard.

As we drove on, the habitat changed to mixed deciduous/evergreen forest where we stopped periodically to look and listen. Red-eyed Vireos, Swainson's Thrushes and Western Tanagers were singing in most places while a soaring Broad-winged Hawk was a lifer for some. The road ends at the Quesnel River where we found an open area to eat lunch while listening to bird song in the cottonwoods and watching a Red-tailed Hawk harassing a Bald Eagle.

We visited Quesnel Forks, a major supply centre during the Cariboo Gold Rush in the mid-1800s, where local historians and the Likely Cemetery Society have tidied up the cemetery and restored a number of the buildings. We spent some time looking around the cemetery and the buildings but it was a hot afternoon so very few birds were singing.

This area of the province has many small lakes and wetlands, much of which is not readily accessible but often visible from the road, so although we planned our daily trips based on likely looking spots on the map, as we drove we were continually seeing, and stopping at, interesting-looking places. Prior Lake alongside the road from 150 Mile is a small but very productive lake where we found Blue-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Brewer's Blackbird and Brown-headed Cowbird to mention a few. At Dugan Lake Recreation Site we found Black-billed Magpie, American Kestrel and Bald Eagle in addition to the commoner birds.

We visited the Spanish Lake Recreation Site which was not very productive but we did see two Herring Gulls on the lake and several Ruffed Grouse and a Spruce Grouse along the road. All the Ruffed Grouse we saw here and elsewhere had recently hatched chicks feeding in the roadside vegetation. Were the parents "standing guard"?

We were told by the local tourist office that we should take the "tourist" loop gravel road from Likely to Wells

and stop at the Chocolate Moose café (Cameron Ridge Bungalows) where the Cameron Ridge trail begins. We decided to try it with the possibility of walking some of the trail in the sub-alpine. The road is not too bad, but as we drove, it became obvious that there was plenty of wildlife around and lots of bear scat on the road. We saw several small black bears and as we got higher up we saw lots of birds feeding along the roadside. Near the café we found a Northern Hawk Owl perched on top of a tall pine which was calling to another one nearby, probably the most exciting bird of the trip and a lifer for several of our group.

At the café we were welcomed with hot coffee and a freshly baked chocolate cake while we looked out over a wetland with a pair of Sandhill Cranes walking around. This was the one day of our trip with light rain that was starting to clear up but with low cloud cover we were unable to enjoy the views and decided not to attempt the Cameron Ridge Trail and drove on to Wells instead. We made several stops along the way including the Matthew River bridge where we saw a cow moose with two calves.

### Final Day

On our last day we took a trip to Horsefly. First stop was the Beaver River bridge on the Likely/150 Mile road where we found a total of 18 species in a short time. Along the Beaver Valley road we made a number of stops logging 43 species in all including American Redstart, Cliff Swallow, Lazuli Bunting and Gray Catbird which we had not found anywhere else.

Robert's Lake was another good spot. We found Virginia Rail, Ring-necked Duck, Cassin's Vireo and Hairy Woodpecker in addition to the usual common species.

In Horsefly we walked around the spawning channel trail and despite the hot afternoon sun we recorded 22 species there and in the town itself.

In all we found 103 species of birds in the Likely/Horsefly/150 Mile area. We also saw the following butterflies, all identified by Bob from his photos: White Admiral, Pale Crescent, Northern Blue, European Skipper, Grey Hairstreak and Compton Tortoiseshell.

## Birding Somerset, UK

*John Gordon*

### October 2017

The Avalon Marshes are internationally famous for the nature reserves and wildlife. The area has been lived in and worked for ten thousand years. Pre-historic paths and villages from the Bronze Age criss-cross the area and scores of Roman coin hoards have been found in the area. Towering over the marshes is Glastonbury Tor. During the Middle Ages Glastonbury Monastery became one of the most rich and powerful in England.

The area was excavated for the peat and the workings later filled with water, creating an intricate series of marshes rich in birdlife. These days the famous Glastonbury Festival attracts hundreds of thousands of music lovers. A visit to the marshes had been on my itinerary for the past three years, but timing is everything and time after time the opportunity fell through.

Fortunately, this time I finally had the chance to visit the area with the help of Birding Pal Paul Bowden. This was our second outing together in ten days, our previous visit being to the Newport Wetlands where Paul found me two lifers. His expertise and knowledge would prove invaluable a second time.

We left Chepstow and were soon on the motorway over the Severn Bridge and passing north of Bristol. Our first stop was Westhay Moor Nature Reserve in search of Bearded Tits (Reedlings), a bird I had seen briefly on my previous UK visits but was hoping to capture some decent action shots.

On our arrival there were more birders and photographers than there were birds. There also seemed a little tension between the two groups with the odd



quip exchanged: way too competitive a situation when most of us just wanted to watch the photogenic antics of the Bearded Tit.

The brief time I had with these birds was one of the most enjoyable experiences I have for a long time: they have such character. They bring a smile to everyone's face, even the grumpy ones.

(See back cover for another photograph.)

## Spotted Owls!

*Melissa Hafting*

### August 30, 2017

Ilya Povalyaev and I went hiking in the mountains of Washington where we were blessed to see three Northern Spotted Owls. These owls are endangered. In BC they are basically extirpated, with less than a dozen left in the wild. In Washington the species is not doing well and there are about 200 birds left in the state.

Every time I see one I feel truly blessed to be in their presence. I have never seen a more curious and beautiful creature. They climb up and down the tree branches like parrots. All three of them flew in to us sepa-

ately over the two days we were present. We found one baby the first day and no other owls.

Dead tired, we returned to the same spot and hiked up a tough incline where we found mom. The female flew within arm's length and stayed with us the whole time, while we sat beneath her. It was a magical experience in a most peaceful setting far away from any people and cell service.

On the way down the mountain we were greeted by not one baby but two baby Northern Spotted Owls bobbing their heads at us. We watched beautiful stars at night and had other owls during our hiking trip including Northern Saw-whets, Boreal and Barred Owls.

The Barred Owls are really taking over the territory of the endangered Northern Spotted Owl but we can't blame them. We are the ones who built the path from the East to the West to bring them here. One night we heard several Barred Owl males sparring.

This event was made even more special as I left the best owl for last. I never set out for this to happen but due to circumstances and my travels I was able to see all 19 North American owls in twelve months. I started in Sept 2016 and finished in August 2017.

*Bearded Reedling by John Gordon;  
Spotted Owl by Melissa Hafting.*





# Young Birders Program

## Hawk Watch at Sooke

*Melissa Hafting*

On Sunday, September 2, we had the final Young Birder trip of the year. Last year I asked the kids what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go and Liron Gertsman suggested a hawk watch for Broad-wingeds out of Sooke. As a result, eight kids and I were leaving Vancouver on the 7:00 a.m. ferry to Swartz Bay.

I asked my friend Guy Monty to help, as he is proficient in hawk watches, loves them and most importantly gets along with and treats the kids well. He answered all of their questions and provided some really interesting info on the hawks and vultures. Also helping was my friend Ren Ferguson from Salt Spring Island.

The weather was not ideal for a hawk watch since it was very foggy and windy. Hawks prefer warmer thermals and at times it was quite cold. We still did very well, though. On the 40-minute hike up to Beechy Head we carried up our chairs, lunches, bins, scopes and cameras. The walk in was beautiful and we had a Northern Flicker, Varied Thrush, Pacific Wren and Downy Woodpecker to name a few.

At the top of the hill we were greet-

ed with gorgeous views of the Pacific Ocean, moss covered trees, and a kettle of hundreds of Turkey Vultures. A Northern Pygmy-Owl was calling loudly; Guy already had another on the hike up. Soon after, the hawks started coming and the sky was full of Sharp-shinned Hawks. Guy, who does these hawk watches all the time, told us he has never seen such a high number of Sharpies: we had 65. Guy also spotted an adult Broad-winged Hawk, one of the major reasons we came, but it quickly disappeared beneath the ridge, and sadly not all the kids got on to it.

We heard a Barred Owl calling and



saw over 200 Band-tailed Pigeons flying by, and some even perched. A few Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks perched in front of us as well. Sharp-shinned Hawks and Turkey Vultures flew low right over our heads providing for great viewing and photo ops.

The kids scoped the water below and we had a Black Oystercatcher, Heermann's Gull and Belted Kingfisher as highlights. A Hutton's Vireo, many Golden-crowned Kinglets and Chestnut

-backed Chickadees were chatting loudly in the trees.

We spent five great hours at Beechy Head. The kids got to see a real spectacle of kettling; one said it was his favourite young birder trip.

After leaving Beechy Head, we hiked down to the meadow by the parking lot, where we saw hundreds more Turkey Vultures, 15 Vaux's Swifts, an Osprey, and more Red-tailed Hawks. We said goodbye to Guy and Ren and headed to Whiffin Spit. Apparently five minutes after we left, Guy found an immature Broad-winged Hawk but our cells had no service there so we had no clue.

A big thanks to Guy Monty for driving from Parksville to Sooke, for helping the kids and for hiking 40 minutes up with a foot injury.

Our highlights from the hawk watch were:

- 350 Turkey Vultures
- 65 Sharp-shinned Hawks
- 1 Osprey
- 2 Northern Harriers
- 4 Bald Eagles
- 3 Cooper's Hawks
- 70 Red-tailed Hawks
- 1 Northern Pygmy-Owl
- 1 Barred Owl
- 15 Vaux's Swifts
- 1 Hairy Woodpecker
- 1 Pileated Woodpecker
- 1 Downy Woodpecker
- 1 Northern Flicker

*Sharp-shinned Hawk by Melissa Hafting; group shot by Guy Monty.*



1 Merlin  
 20 Red Crossbills  
 200 Band-tailed Pigeons  
 20 Pine Siskins  
 11 Steller's Jays

At Whiffin Spit we were chasing a previously reported Lark Sparrow. He was sitting right at the parking lot and this was really reminiscent of a Black-throated Sparrow we had all chased there previously. We quickly got the Sparrow after Rebecca's mom, Cathy, spotted it. Here we also got a Heermann's Gull and Black Turnstones and then we headed on to Panama Flats.

At Panama Flats we entered off of Carey Road and began searching the fields. The fields were riddled with hundreds of sparrows, mostly Savannahs. Three black Merlins were flying low over the fields along with a female Northern Harrier.

We split up and began searching the quadrants and all of a sudden I spotted a female Bobolink and called it out as it flew over. Bridget got on it but some others didn't. Liron started searching the centre dike and flushed out another Bobolink that almost everyone got onto. We ended up with a total of two out of the four Bobolinks that were reported.

We headed next to Central Saanich Road to try for one of the Young Birder Group's nemesis birds. We have two of them: the Eurasian Skylark and White-tailed Ptarmigan. Finally, after three years of trying, we got our Skylarks! We ended up seeing four flush up and call several times from the bulb fields. This was a lifer for many.

By this time our trip had run out of time and it was time to head back to Vancouver on the 7:00 p.m. ferry.

If any youth aged 12-18 are interested in joining the Young Birder Program, please contact Melissa at [bcbirdergirl@gmail.com](mailto:bcbirdergirl@gmail.com).

## A Birding Mecca in Delta

Viktor Vandereyk

As I settle down on a bench during a balmy October Saturday afternoon, my eyes and ears soak in my surroundings. Two large, brackish man-made lagoons spread before me, bordered by cattails,

## BCFO Young Birder Award

### Call for Nominations for 2018

Since 2014 the BCFO has been sponsoring a Young Birder Award program in which talented young birders are welcomed into the birding community and recognized for their accomplishments, contributions, and engagement with birds and birding in the Province. We are now seeking additional nominations for the next round of awards. Each recipient receives a plaque, a spiffy BCFO ball cap, and free BCFO membership until age 18. Our twenty-one previous awardees (see *BC Birding* issues for March 2014 through 2017) are carrying on in impressive fashion, and we expect there are more like them out there to be discovered.

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

- Be no more than 18 years of age as of January 1st, 2018;
- Have demonstrated exceptional observational and birding skills well beyond the "novice" level;
- Have made significant contribution to activities in the birding community such as: posting to list-serves; entering data to eBird; participating in local surveys, counts, and field trips;
- Be sponsored and nominated by a BCFO member who has direct knowledge of the candidate.

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

rushes, and canary reed-grass. Birch, alder, and willow trees stand behind them as a backdrop and hawthorn bushes and crab-apple trees line the dikes around and between them. Northern Shovelers, American Wigeons, Gadwalls, and Green-winged Teal rest and feed in the lagoons. In the nearby shallows a small flock of Dowitchers stab their long bills into the mud in search of worms and crustaceans. Greater Yellowlegs fly back and forth low over the surface of the lagoons, calling loudly "keouw-keouw." Behind me a large tidal, mainly cattail, marsh stretches out to the sea. Snow Geese mill about at the edge of the water, feeding on cattail and bulrush tubers and filling the air with their haunting cries. Intermittently portions of the flock rise into the air with a cacophony of cries, then land again like a flurry of snow. Providing a backdrop to this fascinating scene, out of the haze, rise the low mountains of Vancouver Island.

Can you guess where I am? That's right, I am at Reifel! In my opinion,

there is no better place to spend a Saturday afternoon than Reifel. George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary is the full name, but most people know it as Reifel.

So why is this my favourite spot to bird? Well, first, I revel in the diversity and sheer quantity of birds the sanctuary provides! According to eBird, it currently boasts a list of 272 species. Birds fill every habitat.

### Waterfowl

I find waterfowl to be the most conspicuous, as well as my favourites. As you enter the parking area you will be greeted by swarms of fat Mallards, greedy of handouts. You will see more than just Mallards, though; 15 species of duck occur here regularly. The sanctuary also hosts breeding Northern Shovelers and Northern Pintails, a rare occurrence in the Vancouver area.

Out on the seashore, beyond the cattails, waterfowl are abundant. Winter is the best time to see waterfowl there. Snow Geese, of course, are the stars, as



they are the most noticeable, due to their large numbers and vociferousness, but Cackling Geese, and, less commonly, Greater White-fronted Geese are also present. Large flocks of American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, and other duck species can be identified with a scope from the viewing tower as they feed in the shallows. Trumpeter Swans are also common and can often be heard sounding off during their courtship rituals. During winter, Peregrines can be seen hunting Dunlin over the mudflats. The large flocks of Dunlin twisting and turning in flight as they try to elude the Peregrine are truly a breathtaking sight.

The tidal marsh itself is alive with birds. In spring, Red-winged Blackbirds announce their territories with their “konk-a-reee” songs, and Marsh Wrens fill the marsh with their peculiar mechanical-sounding songs. If you listen carefully you may even hear the scratchy calls of a Virginia Rail.

The lagoons, too, are great for birds, mainly waterfowl. During summer, Canada Geese, Mallards, Pintails, and Shovelers dominate, but during late summer and fall, Green-winged Teal and Blue-winged Teal also stop in decent numbers. November is likely the best time for viewing waterfowl in the lagoons, however. In addition to the species previously mentioned (excluding the Blue-winged Teal, which move south for the winter), Buffleheads, Mergansers, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked ducks, and Pied-billed Grebes are pretty much guaranteed. Also, in fall, flocks of Sandhill Cranes stop to rest in the lagoons. With much patience and careful observation, American Bitterns can sometimes be found hiding in the cattails that border the lagoons.

### Shorebirds

During spring and fall migration, shorebirds steal the limelight for most people. The sanctuary has been designated a site of hemispheric importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. Most of the shorebirds spend the duration of low tide out on the mudflats at the edge of the sea and are difficult to observe, but during high tide many come into the shallow lagoons to rest and feed. Western Sandpipers and Dunlin are the most common. Also, many shorebird species favouring brackish water, such as Long-billed Dowitchers and Greater Yellowlegs,

will use the lagoons as a place for rest and recuperation. The lagoons also give you a good chance of spotting rarities. Stilt Sandpipers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, and Red-necked Phalaropes are the most regular rarities, but bigger rarities can be spotted as well. On September 10, 2017, a Curlew Sandpiper was spotted in a flock of Western Sandpipers in the lagoons, only the 12th on record for BC.

### Raptors

Probably the most popular birds at Reifel are the raptors, especially the owls. Outside of breeding season, diminutive Saw-whet Owls spend the day roosting, tucked away in one of the old Douglas firs that line the path on the east side of the sanctuary. Sometimes they will roost in more exposed locations, giving us greater views of them, but often exposing them to human disturbances. One time I saw a Saw-whet Owl in a hawthorn bush right over the trail, clutching a vole it had just caught, only a foot above my head. Most people did not notice it, though, because it was sitting so still. Great Horned Owls are also frequent here but are even more reclusive and usually higher in the trees. On cloudy days and evenings, Short-eared Owls sail, Barn Owl style, over the tidal marsh in search of prey. Bald Eagles are common in the sanctu-

ary and occasionally even hunt Snow Geese despite their main prey being fish. A sight of Northern Harriers is almost guaranteed. They spend the daylight hours hunting over the tidal marsh, exhibiting their crazy rocking flight as they search for voles and other rodents. Beautiful Rough-legged Hawks perch on the tops of short trees or on driftwood, though they are not nearly as common a sight as the other raptors.

### Passerines

Spring is a great time to observe Passerines. Swallows are abundant all over the sanctuary. Tree Swallows, with their metallic dark blue upper parts, fill the sanctuary with their gurgling calls. Purple Martins, our largest swallow species, nest in nest box complexes built especially for them out on the tidal marsh. Elegant Barn Swallows build their mud nests in blinds and under the eaves of information signs all over the sanctuary.

This is also an important place for warblers. From the cattails around the lagoons, breeding Common Yellowthroats sing “wichety-wichety-wichety.” During migration Yellow Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers and other warbler species move through the treed areas, feeding as they go. Herons, blackbirds, sparrows, chickadees, nuthatches, kinglets, and many other

*Snowy Owl painting by Viktor Vandereyk.*



species fill the sanctuary with their intriguing lives. No wonder this is such a popular birding hotspot!

### Photography

Another reason I love this spot is because it is a fantastic place for photography. One of the great advantages this place has for photographers is the comparative tameness of the birds. Since the birds are so accustomed to people, they will go on with their natural behavior at close range. I have watched a Cooper's Hawk snatch a Long-billed Dowitcher merely 20 feet away from me! Another great thing about Reifel is that with so much diversity of species there are no lack of subjects. Where else can you be photographing a gorgeous Wood Duck drake, then spin around to shoot a massive flock of Snow Geese as they rise out of a potato field with a deafening cacophony of high-pitched cries! And there certainly are few, if any, other places in BC where you can photograph Sandhill Crane chicks at close range. There is never a dull day for a "photog" at Reifel.

Strolling down paths around tranquil ponds, set about with birches, willows, and alders, or along dikes with peaceful rippling lagoons on one side and a spreading tidal marsh succeeded by the ocean fading into the low, distant

mountains of Vancouver Island on the other: what better way to spend your leisure hours on a Saturday afternoon?

Reifel is also a special place for me because this is where I first met Melissa and the other members of the young birder program. Melissa is my mentor and I noticed what she was doing with young birders by taking them out on trips and I emailed her. My brother and I really wanted to join the program and she was so welcoming to us. We were both nervous to meet her and the group but she really made us feel welcome and introduced us to all the other kids. Everyone was really nice and Melissa showed us many birds and helped identify them and answer questions. I felt comfortable to call out birds as if I were in the group for a long time and Melissa told me how impressed she was with my skills. We went to a window-strike talk that Melissa organized with Environment Canada and I have implemented all I learned in my home effectively.

On the Young Birder trip to Reifel I got many lifers including a male Red-head, which was a rarity for the park. Reifel will always be special for all the reasons I've mentioned previously but mostly because it brought me in contact with a birder who is so interested in all of the kids in BC. She helps me all the time with any identification questions, keeps all the young birders in the loop about local events and is organizing

young birder tours for the 2018 International Congress which I can't wait for. Melissa encourages my hobby of painting birds but the most wonderful thing of all is that she takes us all on really cool trips. She has given us all so many lifers and great memories. She runs the BC Rare Bird Alert and from her hard work there I have found many rarities with her help. There aren't many people like Melissa and even fewer top female birders in the province, so she is an inspiration. I won't forget what she has done for us all, just as I won't forget the memorable place of Reifel, which I plan to visit for many years to come.

*Editor's Note:* This is Viktor's last year with the Young Birders, as – along with another five YB members – he has turned 18. No doubt we'll continue to hear from him in the years ahead.

## YB Notes

### YB at IO Congress

As mentioned above, Melissa Hafting will be leading Young Birder tours with other guides at the IO Congress 2018. On August 24, there will be a trip to Reifel, Roberts Bank and Boundary Bay, and on August 27, the trip will be to Squamish Estuary, Sea to Sky Gondola, and Porteau Cove. Details can be found at:

[www.iocongress2018.com/tours-youngbirder](http://www.iocongress2018.com/tours-youngbirder)

Children 12–18 registered in the BCFO Young Birder program can receive a free pass to attend the conference daily by contacting Melissa Hafting at [bcbirdergirl@gmail.com](mailto:bcbirdergirl@gmail.com).

### YB Thanks

The Young Birders send thanks to

- Cameron Eckert of Whitehorse, YK, for donating copies of *The Birds of British Columbia* a various check-lists for the province
- John Gordon for donating eight volumes of *The Auk*.

*Below: a painting of a female Belted Kingfisher by Young Birder Cedar Forest (age 13) of Tofino.*







BIRD STUDIES  
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX **CANADA**

# CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

FOR

*Kids*  
2017



Christmas Bird Count for Kids (ages 12-18) in Delta, BC  
Location: Meet at the foot of the 72nd St dyke at Boundary Bay  
Address: 3321 72nd St, Delta, BC  
Time: 9am -12pm on Dec 16th, 2017

Please bring binoculars, a toque, warm waterproof jacket and pants, warm waterproof boots, camera and scope.  
A scope will be provided for the group to share and a field guide.  
You are welcome to bring snacks but we have a strict NO NUT PRODUCT OF ANY KIND policy.  
Complimentary hot cocoa is provided.

Please contact Melissa Hafting at [bcbirdergirl\(at\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:bcbirdergirl(at)gmail(dot)com) to register or if you have any questions.

U.S. Program Partner: **SonomaBirding**



Supported by:



THE W. GARFIELD WESTON  
FOUNDATION



## Birding at the Fire Zone Edge

Tom Leys

At the east end of Chilcotin Lake on the Fraser Plateau, Terry Stevenson and I take care of a piece of land as a conservation area. It is on the north-south migration flyway, like a pull-out or a truck stop for thousands of waterfowl and passerines heading to and from Central America and Yukon. This summer it lay only ten kilometres south of BC's biggest fire in the Cariboo, the biggest conflagration of the season in the worst fire season since 1957. Somehow Chilcotin Lake was not scorched.

Since the birds need this place of refuge, we help them as best we can. This summer we built a barn swallow nesting structure and erected two osprey nesting platforms.

Struggling through mud, snow and hail to get in on April 28, we set up our base camp for a six-week project to build the barn swallow structure. The barn swallow population in North America is declining, and since the local ranchers around Chezacut have them, we thought we could as well. So, we got some plans for the structure, cut some support poles, prepared some found lumber to brace the poles and bought some siding, some trusses and some roofing as well as steel sheets for predator baffles around the poles. It became a bigger project than we'd anticipated, but the end result was a fine addition to the forty-odd duck, flicker, bluebird and Tree Swallow boxes we'd already put up over the last few years.

The Barn Swallow structure is open on the east side and covered on the remaining sides only one third of the way below the roof. This gives the birds a combination of shelter and easy access to their nests, and the building is full of ledges inside for the birds to nest

on. It was gratifying when a pair of Barn Swallows flying over wheeled about to inspect us as we hammered down the roof. We could almost hear their wheels screech. They'll never

more for a week. There was some rain on June 8, but that was it for the season. We didn't know it would become a drought year, but the signs were ominous.

Nevertheless, there were cool birds that came through. A Clark's Nutcracker hawked about over the grassland for a day. A Collared-Dove did its usual passing by. Orange-crowned Warblers, Golden-crowned and White-throated Sparrows were suddenly there for a week and then gone. A flock of about 50 American Pipits stayed for about three days. A Swainson's Hawk showed up once, as well as a Clay-coloured Sparrow (a first sighting for us), a Say's Phoebe which sat on a tent guy rope one afternoon and watched us, a Red Crossbill and six Northern Rough-winged Swallows. A pair of Trumpeter Swans stayed with us until late May, for some reason, and each spring day was celebrated by a Wilson's Snipe and each night by an American Bittern, both of them regulars each year. The Great Horned Owl couple would hoot at night from the spruce trees above our tent. Our spring trip total was 87 species.

When we left the lake in early June we attended two excellent birding days hosted by Adrian Leather and Brian Murland of the Quesnel birding club before returning to Vancouver. A month later, on July 10 and 11 the lightning strikes hit across the Cariboo. Suddenly there was fire everywhere. The forests, suffering from decades of fire suppression, a decade of pine beetle tree kill and the inexorable drying out of the land, the last two clear products of global warming, didn't stand much of a chance. Forest fires burn unevenly,



again have to hover in our wall tent vestibule looking for a nesting place. We are hoping for Robins and Say's Phoebes to use it as well.

The 2017 growing season began strangely. From the initial spring dampness the temperature soared into the 30s in the first week. The snow on Luck Mountain and the hills to the north disappeared and Chilcotin River swelled and lost its noise. It got cooler again, but it didn't rain until May 10. In late May the weather cooked us some



jump when they race and create so much smoke one can't know where the fire is and where it isn't. Wildlife is disoriented, panicked and trapped and burned to cinders by forest fires, especially the kind that hit BC last summer. We heard horrible stories of what happened to grouse and animals. It was a colossal ruin for wildlife on the Plateau this year, something that ought to be investigated and written about. But for pure luck and pluck, our neighbour ranchers nearly suffered the same fate.

With the highways closed by police and the army, and armoured personnel carriers and travel permits and evacuations ordered for central Cariboo residents for about a month, it was impossible to revisit Chilcotin Lake until late August. Highway 24 was still closed then and the Sheridan Lake fire smoke was filling the air in Williams Lake and west into the Chilcotin, adding to the smoke of the Plateau fire which had swept north but which was still burning in patches and did so through September. It was ironic then, in the first week of September, finally to be at Chilcotin Lake again and not be able to see more than 300 metres, to breathe acrid smoke but sit under a tarp in the rain. The rain finally arrived at that point, not lots of it, but enough to dampen the soil.

Through the smoke I could hear the family of Sandhill Cranes calling from the marshes to the west of me, and the Great Horned Owls in the distance at night, but the smoke had to be hard on the birds. Later on, when we cleaned out the swallow and duck boxes at the end of September, we found that there had been a very small success rate. There might be several explanations, but the smoke had been terrible. It had been so thick some days that one of our neighbours said he hadn't been able to see more than three metres ahead of his tractor when he was mowing, and it took a week for his hay to dry because the sun had been so hidden by smoke that the air was kept cool. That must have hurt the insect hatches on the lake and prevented the birds from seeing their prey. The proximity of the fire



*September 28: Erecting the first osprey nesting platform..*

would have frightened many birds away, too. It seems that in the Cariboo 2017 was a ruinous year for breeding bats as well.

One surprising appearance that first week of September was a flock of about 15 Horned Larks. They always live higher up on the plateau. Chilcotin Lake lies at 975 metres. Another 100 metres' elevation makes a huge difference in the temperature, so I think the only reason they were working the grassland around the lake was because their habitat higher up had been scorched. I visited the burn ten kilometres north of the lake. Nothing was left but the thinned trunks of charred lodgepole pines. It looked like pictures of the aftermath of a World War I battle scene. Even the soil was charred, like dust that had been baked in a furnace and left.

But the Chilcotin Lake riparian areas were intact; hurt, maybe, traumatized, perhaps, but otherwise unscathed. While the fires were raging through the summer, we organized to put up two Osprey nesting platforms. A pair of

Ospreys had nested in a big aspen on the west side of our area, but that tree had fallen down one winter. An artificial platform put up years ago by the Nature Trust of BC in a marsh to the west of us was leaning over, so the Ospreys, which used to catch trout and squawfish and carry them about and show off, had stopped doing so. They are now nesting much farther away and when they catch fish they are losing them to thieving Bald Eagles. The big pines that Ospreys have nested in all over BC have largely been killed by the pine beetle scourge, so these days good nesting options are hard to find. We planned to fix that at the east end of Chilcotin Lake.

We contracted a great fencing operator in Williams Lake to buy us a couple of used hydro poles and install them for us in the fall. We found a nesting platform design from Conserve Wildlife in New Jersey who had put their work on the Internet and over the summer we built two modified versions of their platform. On September 24 the poles were delivered. We attached the nesting platforms, added two perching mounts to each one and wired in some encouraging sticks to make it clear to any osprey that they could use the place to nest on. Underneath both platforms we added a four-chamber bat box the design for which we also got off the Internet.

With the fall, the Chilcotin land becomes spectacular. For two weeks the aspens turn gold and then red in a blaze of short-lived glory that challenges the eastern Canadian maples for splendor. Usually the snap of -12 degree nights brings hundreds of Bohemian Waxwings to cavort in the tops of the lakeside spruces. That didn't happen this year. Neither were there the squadrons of White Pelicans soaring by which nest on Stum Lake, almost on the border of the Plateau Fire to the east. Normally the fall brings hundreds of American Robins, sometimes with a Peregrine Falcon picking one off, but they showed up in fewer numbers this fall. And the rafts of hundreds of Coots didn't show up this year either. Perhaps they were all victims of the fire and the

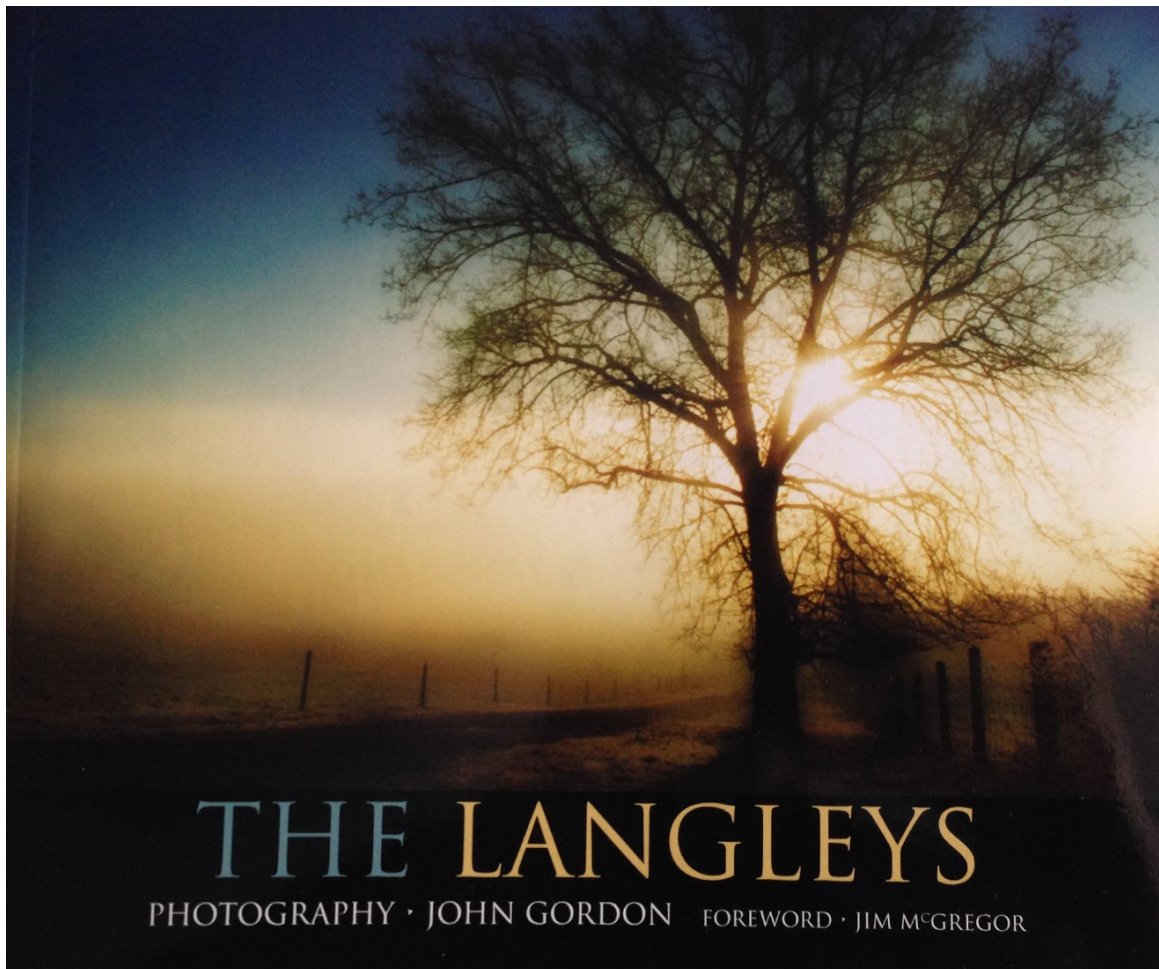
smoke.

However, there were other birds that came by and announced themselves: an Evening Grosbeak, a Sharp-tailed Grouse, a Northern Goshawk and hundreds of Sandhill Cranes climbing for height on their way to Arizona. A few Varied Thrushes came by and sang, and a Townsend's Solitaire hawked about for a day. Some birds were firsts for the area for us: a Northern Hawk Owl, Violet-green Swallows, a Steller's Jay and a small covey of Spruce Grouse. We saw or heard 48 species in total this fall. Most were heading south.

For a while the air will become frozen and silent except for snuffling from the otter family which seems to enjoy frigid air and a lakeside crisp with ice. The beavers say very little, but by early November the air will become noisy again where the lake is free of ice. It should be filled with trumpeting by around 200 Trumpeter Swans and as many Canada Geese and 30–40 Common Mergansers playing their annual tag football with a dead trout, and the night-time woods will be singing with wolves.

We won't be there this November to see if these birds and animals claim their place as they normally do, but we will be there in the spring to see if the Ospreys choose to nest on their new fancy platforms and if Barn Swallows want to make use of their new "barn." With some luck and some help the Chilotin bird and bat populations will recover.

*September 28: Cleaning up after the second platform was erected. The perching mounts are perpendicular to the prevailing west-east wind.*



Readers of this magazine will be very familiar with John Gordon's photography – he is perhaps the nearest thing to a Staff Photographer.

His images appear in numerous birding contexts, but he certainly doesn't just photograph birds. His book *The Langleys* has just been reprinted, after the first edition of 3,000 copies sold out. While it contains bird photographs, the images are an exploration of BC's birthplace – the colony of BC was originally proclaimed there.

For more information see [www.johngordonphotography.com/gallery\\_43060.html](http://www.johngordonphotography.com/gallery_43060.html)



# Book Review

## Birdmania

*Birdmania: A Remarkable Passion for Birds* by Bernd Brunner, 2017. Grey-stone Books, Vancouver/Berkeley. Translated from the original German by Jane Billingham. Foreword by Pete Dunne. 292 pages, colour illustrations, bibliography, list of sources, list of illustrations, index of birds, index of people. Hardcover \$39.95.

Bernd Brunner is a well-known author who “works at the crossroads of history, culture, and science” (Wikipedia). He is the author of several books as well as many articles in prominent English- and German-language magazines.

This book addresses the history of human-bird inter-relationships, spanning myths, love, passion and obsession, collecting, deceit, fraud, and scientific investigation. In his foreword, Pete Dunne describes it better than I can: this “fascinating and comprehensive book explores the many ways birds have figured in the human experience and why so many among us have made birds the centerpiece of our lives.” The text is written in a lively and attractive style that is very readable. Also what makes this book remarkable are the more than 100 splendid illustrations most of them paintings of birds by 19th century artists.

There are too many chapters and topics in this book to address all or even most of them in a short review, so the following are descriptions of some sections that I found particularly interesting.

Chapter 1 includes a brief review of the ancient art of falconry, which may have developed in central Asia as much as 4,000 years ago and, of course, continues to the present time. Brunner suggests that the close relationship between a falconer and their bird (there are female falconers too -- including Elizabeth I of England) -- which has persisted down the ages, may be the closest of all human-avian bonds.

Chapter 2, “Bedazzlement” recounts the discovery of birds of paradise and hummingbirds. The first specimens of the former to arrive in Europe (in 1522) were “gossamer-light dried skins wrapped around a stick.” Glossy and

colourful silky feathers were attached, but feet and most body parts were missing. This gave rise to persistent legends that the birds never flew except when blown by the wind, and that they were nourished by the nectar of spice trees. The first sightings of hummingbirds in the 17th century by explorers of the New World likewise gave rise to amazement and confusion.

“Laying the Groundwork for Science,” Chapter 4, describes the 19th century contributions to ornithology of three persons whose names are familiar to us via the species that bear their names (even if we are unaware of their scientific contributions). They are: Alexander Wilson, Charles Lucien Bonaparte (nephew of Napoleon), and John James Audubon. Wilson is remarkable and was ahead of his time because he observed and documented many North

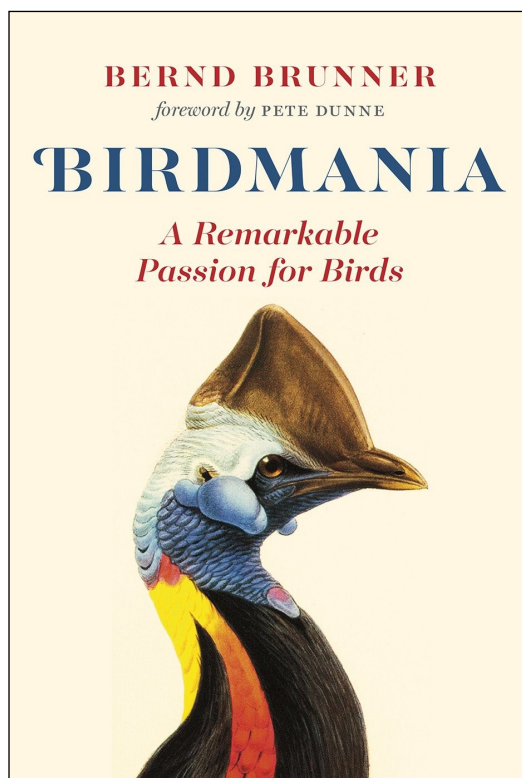
work benefitted from his close proximity to his birds. A double-page illustration of this bird room (from one of Russ’s books) is included, and shows numerous birds, abundant plants and, in one corner, what appears to be a small warbler feeding a large juvenile cuckoo. Bird rooms subsequently became popular across Europe and in North America.

Following chapters deal with ideas and actions that are more familiar to us. “Championing Birds” (Chapter 7) covers the rise of bird conservation and is based on short biographical accounts of people who played prominent roles, for example, with regard to Whooping Cranes, the capture and consumption of songbirds in some Mediterranean countries, and the establishment of bird sanctuaries.

A long but very readable Chapter 8. “In the Company of Birds,” consists of accounts of the relationships between individuals and the bird(s) they lived with. Included are the Frenchman Jean Delacour and his friends who maintained gardens with many exotic birds, the Birdman of Alcatraz, Konrad Lorenz, Peter Scott, and many more. Later chapters consist mostly of short biographical accounts that address a variety of topics, including bird love (do birds love us back?), bird migration (how do they do it?), the fascination of birds eggs (so beautiful!), feathers, and extinctions (Dodo, Ivory-billed Woodpecker and several other lost species). There is a chapter entitled “Mad for Bird Watching,” but as a birdwatcher I found this to be lacking interest (and obviously written by someone who is not closely involved in bird-related activities).

I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in birds or natural history. It is well worth reading or at least browsing extensively. Except perhaps for the first few, the chapters can be read as independent, stand-alone essays, rather than in numerical order. The full colour (and many full page) illustrations are spectacular and well worth attention, although, strangely, captions have been omitted from many of these: the reader has to turn to the back of the book for a list of sources, and only some of these indicate the species of the birds portrayed.

Reviewed by J.M. Ryder



American species from observations made while travelling through their various habitats rather than shooting them first, as was the usual practice.

“A Bird in the Hand” (Chapter 5) is a brief review of birds in captivity but includes a description of the amazing “bird room” of Karl Russ. This was a huge walk-in aviary in his home where he kept up to 200 species of birds and succeeded in breeding many of them. Russ was a writer, and it is said that his

## Briefing

### Phorusrhacids

What? “Terror birds” – truly a super-nasty lot. These were giant, flightless birds that inhabited South America from about 62 million years ago until about 1.8 million years ago (for geologically-minded readers that is throughout the Cenozoic Era, ending only in the early Pleistocene Epoch). They inhabited open, savannah-like terrain. They were very fast runners and they were carnivores. Nothing wrong with carnivory; the modern raptors and owls are carnivores (not to mention most of us). But these birds were the top carnivores of South America during nearly all of their reign! In evolutionary terms, the Phorusrhacids have affinities with modern falcons, parrots and passerines. There are 18 species recognized from fossil recoveries.

Their general body plan was quite similar to that of the tyrannosaurid dinosaurs; the Phorusrhacids were perhaps the last birds to strongly suggest the dinosaurid antecedents of modern birds. In particular, they had a strong, extendible neck surmounted by a massive head that was more than half beak. The largest known species (a middle Miocene fossil about 15 million years old) was up to 3 metres (10 feet) tall and sported a beak half a metre in length. Puffin-like, but much larger, it featured a massive upper mandible with a notable hook, presumably for tearing prey. It is thought that the birds mainly

hunted smaller animals, which they caught by outrunning them, then killing them with a direct, chopping blow of the beak, or by grasping them and throwing them down. (The latter inferred from the habits of the closest contemporary relatives of the Phorusrhacids, the Seriema – also carnivores.) Many species, like the Seriema, were more modest in size, in the range 60 – 90 cm (2 – 3 feet) tall, but still a danger to most other animals. (There are two species of *Seriema* extant, the Red-legged Seriema [*Cariama cristata*] and the Black-legged Seriema [*Chunga burmeisteri*], which inhabit open forest and savannah in southernmost Brazil and the adjacent countries.)

Phorusrhacids arrived in North America after the Panama “land bridge” was established about 2.8 million years ago. Fossils of *Titanis walleri*, one of the largest Phorusrhacids, have turned up in Florida and Texas, making them the only large South American predator known to have moved north. In contrast, North Ameri-

can predators in the form of dogs, cats (read ancestral wolves, cougars, including sabre-toothed cats) and bears moved south. Thereafter, Phorusrhacids declined, presumably under pressure of the new competition, but perhaps also under the stresses of climate change as conditions deteriorated into the early Pleistocene ice ages. There have been claims of Pleistocene fossil finds dated as recently as 17,000 years, but they are not generally accepted.

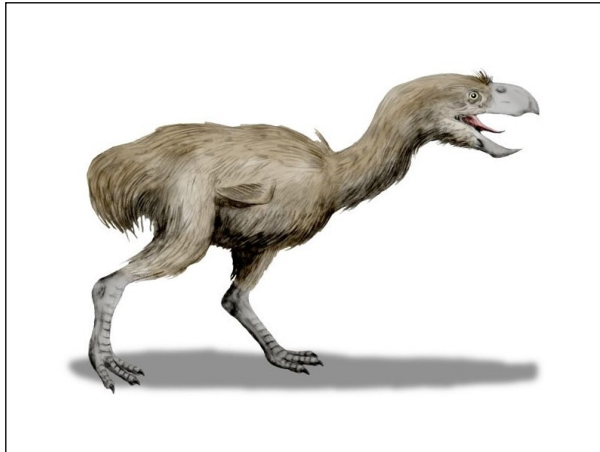
What about that strange name? The discoverer, in 1887, and nominator of these fossil birds was Florentino Ameghino (Argentinian, the leading South American palaeontologist of his day), but he did not reveal the basis of his etymology. The best guess is the Greek “phoros” (bearer) and “rhacos” (scars).

So what is the value of all this fossil knowledge? Well, on your next unproductive birding trip you might fantasize what you will do if you meet a three-metre high Phorusrhacid around the next corner (you are somewhere between 1.5 and 2 metres tall).

#### Sources

Various, mainly Wikipedia.

Summary by M. Church



Artist's conception of a Phorusrhacid, from Wikipedia.

## Recommended Reading

*THE SEABIRDS CRY: The Lives and Loves of Puffins, Gannets and Other Ocean Voyagers*, by Adam Nicolson, 2017. Harper Collins. 400 pages. Black and white illustrations. \$34.99 hardcover. Notes: sources and other information.

Adam Nicolson's love and respect for seabirds evolved from his childhood on

a Hebridian Island off the northwest coast of Scotland that was owned by his family. This book is the culmination of many years of observation, study and travel to learn about these birds. It consists of a 23-page introduction followed by ten chapters, each dedicated to one of the major groups of seabirds – Fulmar, Puffin, Kittiwake, Gull, Guillemot, Cormorant, Shearwater, Gannet, Great Auk and closely related Razorbill, and Albatross. A final chapter addresses the current plight – plummeting populations – of these birds.

The astonishing lives of seabirds are well-described in this book: the beauty of their life on the wing, how some consistently defy gravity and travel

endlessly without expending any energy, and how many survive in some of the toughest environments on Earth. Their historic relationships to humans and their cultural significance are woven into the stories, along with present-day threats to survival related to overfishing, long-line fishing, warming oceans and loss of habitat. The book is extremely well written, poetic, science-based, well researched and engrossing. The chapters are not repetitious: each seems to progress naturally in a manner most suited to its species.

This is a book well worth reading.

J.M. Ryder



# Gone Fishing

Chris Siddle

## MAGPIE 2

The tallest tree in our small yard is a 25-metre tall Blue Spruce, a conspicuous landmark, I like to think, along an otherwise rather mundane stretch of Silver Star Road. It's one of the tallest, biggest trees in our neighbourhood and Silver Star Road passes right by it as it curves up the base of the foothill and begins the serious climb to Silver Star ski village, northeast of Vernon. Since we moved to the property 27 years ago I have often imagined finding a really "good" bird, say a Boreal Owl napping away the day in our spruce, but to date the tree has been a bit of a disappointment, its best birds the occasional passing predator, such as a Merlin, and a Great Horned Owl.

In late April, 2017, I noticed a pair of Black-billed Magpies (*Pica hudsonia*) hanging around the yard far more often than usual. On 27 April, during constant dreary rain I noticed that one, then both, magpies were visiting our neighbours' Manitoba Maple, still without leaves in this colder-than-usual spring. The magpies were snapping off branchlets and flying with them into the spruce, into an area of particularly dense branches about four metres from the top. They were building the framework for a nest, though I couldn't see the nest in the tree's dense foliage, only guess at its location. The branch harvest continued for a few days. In early May, towards the end of this intensive construction, twice I saw one of the magpies gathering the relatively soft, dead detritus from the ground under one of our cedar bushes, for the lining or perhaps to mix with a mud base.

Anyone who is familiar with the shrub-steppe of the Interior or Peace regions is familiar with the conspicuous nests of the Black-billed Magpie. Kenn Kaufman in *Lives of North American Birds* describes the typical nest:

*Nest is a huge structure, a globular canopy of sticks about 3 feet in diameter [the canopy, not the sticks], with entrance holes on either side. Inside is a cup-*

*shaped nest with base of mud or manure and lining of weeds, rootlets, grass and hair. Both sexes help build nest (p. 424).*

Tony Angell in his *Ravens, Crows, Magpies, and Jays* expands upon this basic description:

*The roofed nest of magpies breeding in hot desert areas may very well serve to control the amount of solar heat reaching both the incubating adult and the young. The nest itself is enormous and in at least one case reached seven feet in height after it had been repaired and used year after year. The pair will first gather mud or cow dung and attach this to an appropriately large branch. Next, heavy sticks are inserted into this base in a generally upright position and, when the mud hardens, are cemented in place. A third step involves the build-up of a mud bowl within the structure, which is then lined with bark strips, feathers, horse hair, grasses, or any soft and durable substance that will provide insulation for the eggs and young. Throughout this step-by-step construction, the exterior and roof are being completed. Construction may be carried on intermittently over a two-and-one half-month period. An entire nest may be composed of over fifteen hundred individual branches of varying sizes. The roofed nest also has two entrances, providing not only convenient entry and exit for the adults, but also a passage for air circulation. (p. 92)*

The *Birds of North America* account (BNA 389) states that a well constructed nest can take as long as three months to finish, but a shoddy one can be slapped together in less than a week. My magpies built their nest in about two weeks, placing it on the shoddy end of the spectrum, but it was well enough built to outlast the unusually windy spring of 2017 that set the Blue Spruce swaying day after day. Also, I must add that I do not really know if the pair had completely finished with nest construc-

tion beyond the two weeks of major building.

The birds had selected a site close to the trunk about three quarters of the way up the tree. Branches covered with masses of blue-green needles obscured my view from all directions. I memorized the area to which the birds had taken branches, and by standing on tip-toe and peering out the top pane of the

### MAGPIE FACTS OF LIFE

- *Pairing:* Tends to be long term.
- *Nest site:* In a tree (65% in B.C.) or sturdy shrub (19% in B.C.), and occasionally in a deserted building (*The Birds of British Columbia*, Volume 4).
- *Eggs:* 1-9 per clutch, with 68% in B.C. having 5-7.
- *Incubation:* About 18 days, by female only. Female fed by male during incubation.
- *Nestling Period:* About 27 days after hatching.
- *Fledgling Dependent on Parents:* 6-8 weeks.

upstairs bathroom window, I could see what I was pretty sure were some sticks that have formed the rim of the bowl. Later when the chicks were first moving out of the nest to perch close by on surrounding branches I was able to confirm that I had correctly located the nest.

My wife and I were on an out-of-province holiday from 25 May to 14 June. On arriving home I initially mistook a noisy crowd of about five magpies in the neighbours' yard to be our pair and their chicks, but then decided surely these young birds sporting tails two thirds normal length were too old to be chicks from the Blue Spruce nest. Six days later, back in the upstairs bathroom, I was able to see a nestling on a branch beside the nest rim. Our magpies still had small partially feathered chicks that hadn't fledged. So who were these strange magpies next door? I never found out, but magpies that weren't members of our pair were to play interesting roles in the days ahead.

### Cat on a Cool Tar Roof

On 16 June I noticed that a large tabby cat had taken the opportunity of our absence to move into our yard. It comfortably established itself between the bird bath and the brush pile and regarded me with a cold disdain when I approached it. Before I was within grabbing distance, the cat slunk into the lilacs and was gone.

Two days later I heard harsh magpie chatters, urgent ones that promised something of interest was happening outside an upstairs bedroom window above the flat tar and gravel roof of the carport. The tabby cat had climbed an adjacent shrub to the roof and was now surrounded by three adult-looking and quite upset magpies (where the third bird came from I do not know but two of the birds were our pair for sure).

The terrified cat ran one way to the aluminum cap around the edge of the roof and just as quickly, half hopping half flying, screeching with tail raised and wings flared, a magpie was waiting for it. In its efforts to avoid the loud, determined bird, the cat ricocheted from the edge like a pool ball off the bumper. It ran about three metres to another edge; yet there was another magpie closing in on it from a different direction. The three chattering birds kept that cat careening from side to side for a minute, a minute I enjoyed very much. Then when the cat was stopped in a hunched attitude of feline despair close to the window I tapped the glass. The cat saw me, froze in a hopeless yowl of utter frustration, its mouth pulled back a needle-toothed grimace, then bolted for the tree it had ascended and, with the magpies right on its frizzed tail, plummeted to the ground. It moved as only a terrified cat can, a tabby streak across the lawn and with a crash of leaves, through the border hedge, the magpies flying over the bushes to make sure it was gone.

Who the third magpie was and in what relation it stood to our parent birds I do not know. Perhaps it was an offspring from a previous nesting season? Charles Trost describes how dominant magpie offspring from previous years often hang around their parents' territory, not so much as helpers at the nest like some other young corvids are but ready to assume a parental role should Mom or Dad suddenly disappear. Apparently prime territories are hard to come by in the world of the magpie,



*BBMA fledgling two days out of the nest tree. Chris Siddle photo.*

and if a young bird is able to step in to replace a missing parent, that's a good way to find a place for oneself. Perhaps the third bird was a previous offspring from my pair ready to help rout an intruding cat. As well as having no reason to like cats, magpies are thought by some researchers to have a sense of play, and what could be more fun than to torment one of the neighbourhood's predators.

### Magpie Funeral

The day after the cat episode (19 June), I discovered a dead magpie chick on our driveway about eight metres from the nest tree. Had the cat raided the nest after all? I doubt that the cat could have withstood the inevitable attack of the protective parents. The chick had pin feathers emerging from various feather tracts, but still was naked on a stripe down its back. Based upon photographs of known-age chicks I decided this chick to have been about 12 days old when it died which means it hatched about 7 June.

The next morning (20 June) at 5:45

four adult-like magpies appeared at the nest tree. One parent in particular, the male I presumed, busily chased any magpie that ventured into the spruce. And one stranger was very persistent in trying to reach the nest. It would alight on a spruce branch to be almost immediately supplanted by the parent. This went on for several minutes accompanied by much loud chatter. This episode was a fairly clear example of Black-billed Magpie territoriality. The European Magpie defends a traditional area, and so pairs distribute fairly evenly throughout their range, whereas Black-billed Magpies defend only the nest bush or tree. The small size of North American magpies' territories allows the birds to take advantage of locally rich food sources, like slaughter houses, to nest almost semi-colonially at times. Size of territory is one of the behavioural differences that caused ornithologists to split the Black-billed from the European Magpie.

Just before 6 a.m. that same day, I witnessed one of the mysteries of magpie folklore, the so-called magpie funer-



al, the name given to the gathering of magpies around the body of a dead conspecific. Charles Trost describes the characteristics of a typical so-called “funeral,” a behavior that is poorly understood:

*When a dead magpie is encountered, the individual that discovers it usually, but not always, begins calling excitedly. This calling attracts all magpies within earshot, who perch in trees and other nearby structures, calling loudly. Up to 40 birds have been known to gather in this manner within minutes after a corpse was discovered. Some magpies fly down 1 or 2 at a time and, calling loudly, walk around the body, often pecking at wings or tail; if food is placed near the corpse they will drag the food a short distance away and consume it .... These gatherings last 10-15 min. before all participants fly off silently. (p. 11)*

The six magpies at the gathering I witnessed all looked adult-like, but of course immatures with long tails may have been involved. The parent birds were there. The birds stood on the gravel of the driveway in a semi-circle facing the dead chick that lay on the very edge of the driveway. There was much calling and one or two birds approached the corpse, but after 2–3 minutes the visiting strangers departed and the parents resumed their foraging for their chicks.

A few minutes later I found another dead chick, this one a few days older and better developed than its presumed sibling. The little corpse lay beneath the nest tree. The most developed part of its anatomy seemed to be its strong, relatively long legs. That’s because magpie chicks have a physiology that invests the most growth in the chick’s hard parts: beak, skull, claws, and legs. The relatively hard beak and skull may serve the chick well when fighting with its nest mates. Siblicide is known among Black-billed Magpie young. The rapid development of legs and feet are an adaptation for a ground-feeding life style; when first fledged a chick has flight feathers that require an additional 20% growth and a tail that is only half normal length. However, the chick is a

pretty good climber, which is good because magpie chicks leave the nest quite early and climb about in adjacent branches much as some raptors do. Actual fledgling is determined to be when the young bird leaves the nest tree or bush.

Concerned that two dead chicks represented all the offspring my magpie pair had produced this spring, I found myself once again standing on tiptoe staring out the bathroom window, looking for any signs of life in the general nest area. Just a few hours after the magpie funeral I saw movement next to the nest and within a few minutes determined that two chicks still survived.

Between 22 June and 26 June the chicks grew louder and were often visible as they moved from perch to perch outside the nest. The parents continued to forage for insects on our lawn. Once a foraging magpie parent finds small prey, likely an insect, it switches the item from bill to pouch located just below the bill. The magpie-watcher usually cannot tell what the prey item is, just one more of the challenges facing a person who wishes to learn more about these birds.

On 27 June the two chicks left the nest tree sometime in the morning. Leaving the nest tree was official fledging. I found them settled beneath the canopy of a lilac bush a few metres from the nest tree. They remained in that bush and in the lower branches of an adjacent Ponderosa Pine and a Douglas-fir for four days.

Fledgling was a tense time for the chicks and for me. Fearful of disturbing the parents too much, for they were quick to arrive and scold me when I got anywhere near the fledglings, I took to peeking out various windows to reassure myself that the young birds were still alive and well. On quick visits to the yard to water plants, I tried to take photos of the young birds as quickly as possible. Always I worried that some passing hawk, cat or nosy neighbour was going to discover my babies.

Finally on the morning of 1 July the fledglings were gone. Across the road and beyond the hill I could hear magpies. I hoped that they were the family that had nested in the Blue Spruce and that their chicks would survive and thrive and grow into adult magpies. My final happy thought was that magpies often re-use nests and maybe next spring the parents (or suitable replace-



*An adult male BBMA proclaims his territory by a visual display called tree-topping, fluffing out his white underparts. C Siddle photo.*

ments) will return and that I will add to my knowledge of these fascinating birds.

In the spring issue I described the poor reputation Black-billed Magpies have had in the past and present. These days they are still seen by many people as rapacious, merciless nest raiders; as murderous pests destroying songbirds’ eggs and chicks, cruelly undermining that most prevalent of North American sacred cows, the “Family” whether avian or human. Now having watched a pair build a nest, lay eggs, and raise their chicks against the odds of a cold wet spring, I see magpies for what they can be: hard-working, dedicated, and protective parents. From now on, when I hear magpies chattering, I will be looking with appreciation for these fascinating birds.

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# The Reflective Birder

Clive Keen

## Have Binoculars, Will Travel

Are you dreaming of birding in exotic places? It happens to most birders sooner or later. There are just so many lifers to be had in the home patch, and the itch to find more builds steadily. When the itch gets intense, advertisements start to be scanned, photographs of exotic birds admired, and hard thinking is put into the perfect place to go for a birding holiday.

Wrong. It's not the location that makes for a perfect birding holiday – it's the trip *type* that really matters. This will become evident as you read the following true story. The facts and the names have been put through a blender, but it's no less true, and decidedly instructive.

### The Scene

It's the eighth day of a birding holiday. The birders, seated around a table at their evening meal, had all decided on this particular holiday because of the appealing location. But they are now going through the usual après-birding ritual – being asked by the guide to name the bird of the day – and their answers show that real estate agents are wrong. There's far more to wise choice than location, location and location.

### George

George, asked first, has no hesitation at all naming the bird of the day. The group had spent the morning, and part of the afternoon, chasing one of the rarest birds in the region. After a long, apparently fruitless, search, the bird was heard by the guide and then, incredibly, popped into view. Triumph! George and the guide reacted with great glee, high-fiving and congratulating each other for their persistence. This shows that the right birding holiday for George is *Birding Holiday Type 1 – Endemic & Rarity Chasing*.

For some birders, finding endemics

– birds found nowhere else – is the main aim of overseas birding, and rare endemics are the cream of the crop. Rarity finding, and the thrill of the chase, is for them what birding is all about. Local bird guides love people like George, because it's the rarest, hardest-to-find birds in your patch that give you the greatest satisfaction, and there's a real sense of victory when you can show them off to others. It is no surprise that people like George get on so well with local guides. As a result, there are plenty of rarity-chasing tours on offer, as a web search will easily demonstrate.

### Tony

Tony, asked in turn to name the bird of the day, did not mention that rarity, instead saying he has trouble deciding between several other, much less uncommon, candidates. Tony is very pleased with these. They were all lifers and got him closer to his target of 50 new ticks for the trip. He's too polite to say so, but wishes that less time had been spent on the rarity, as a number of other potential lifers could easily have been found in the same amount of time. Next time round, Tony would be wise to go on the second type of birding holiday: *Birding Holiday Type 2 – Lifer Accumulating*.

Lifers are for many birders the reason for taking part in overseas trips, and many trip organizers recognize this. In their websites they'll list all the species likely to be seen on the trip, and they'll probably even give a specific target for a birding tour: for instance that 250

species can be expected by the conclusion. This type of birding holiday tends to be quite fast moving, without too much delay on any one species, precisely to maximize the number of birds seen. It's exactly what Tony, and many like him, want.

### Chuck and Roy

When it comes to their turn to nominate the bird of the day, Chuck and Roy both mention a bird that was particularly attractive and – this is the key point – co-operative. Chuck and Roy are the serious photographers of the trip, and this particular bird hung around long enough, in decent light, for them to get reasonable shots. Chuck, though, is happier about it than Roy. Chuck collects "record shots" – photographs that show enough fieldmarks for a successful identification, and he now has 700 in his collection. This kind of trip is quite good for him, though he'd probably prefer Birding Holiday Type 2 next time round. Roy, though, has a different approach to photography. He'd sooner get a world-class photograph of a Starling than a slightly out-of-focus photograph of a great rarity. He has not had much luck in that respect so far, and given the nature of the trip, it is unlikely that he'll have better luck soon. He'd have done much better plumping for *Birding Holiday Type 3 – The Photographic Tour*.

Birding photography tours are now widely available. Sometimes they are simply variations of standard birding tours with much more time allowed for photography, but all sorts of enhance-



Right: A juvenile Yellow-crowned Night Heron spotted by the author on a tour in the Galapagos islands.



ments are also on offer. Some tour operators offer expert photographic tuition during the trip; others allow participants generous amounts of time at hides, often near well-stocked feeders. There are so many bird photographers these days that such holidays are multiplying.

### Frank

At this point, Frank disrupts proceedings by nominating Sally as bird of the day. There's laughter, but Frank is not just being flip-pant. At the start of the week, it appeared to him that the trip would be a disaster for Sally. When she first joined the group, her first words were "Were we supposed to bring binoculars?" Then, after being loaned one, and following proceedings for a while, her next comment was "What is a lifer?" Now the eight other members of the group are all hard-core birders. The group will be getting up two hours before dawn, will talk about birds over breakfast, will head out all day into the field, probably missing lunch if the birding is good, and then after dinner will go out owling. And they'll do that every day for nearly two weeks. How on earth could a complete beginner deal with this?

Before meeting Sally, Frank would have argued that a trip like this is absolutely not for beginners. Only experienced birders, he thought, would have the tenacity and interest to keep birding day after day, and only experienced birders would understand and value the novelty of all the new sightings. Sally, though, knew what she doing, and, incredibly, is on the right trip for her. She wanted to plunge headfirst into birding, and now, by day eight, is using her borrowed binoculars well and employing birder-lingo like a native. It's possible that her next overseas trip won't be birding. She might head off with a group of archeologists to explore Mayan ruins, or go white-water rafting in Africa, or join a cycling group in Nepal. But when she's an old lady, she'll be able to say, honestly, that she was a birder once. Good for her.

### Larry

Some normality returns when it's Larry's turn to name the bird of the day: he mentions an attractive species spotted



*Left: One of ten thousand reasons to head to distant places.*

*This Nanday Parakeet was found by the author close to the US/Mexico border.*

from the van, noting that his wife would have loved to have seen it. Larry is a bit regretful that he ended up coming on this trip alone. His wife had decided that the trip was not really for her, but urged Larry to stick with it. She was right not to come. Though she enjoyed watching the birds on her feeder, she found the idea of spending all day chasing birds frankly appalling. This is entirely normal, and that is why there are now a number of holidays that would suit Larry a lot better than this trip: *Birding Holiday Type 4 – Birding Trips Optional*.

Wise marketers know that, more often than not, enthusiastic birders have non-birding partners, and it is a relatively simple process to arrange holidays suited to them both. On offer from a number of holiday companies, therefore, are vacations where birds are abundant around the hotel, and there are numerous but optional guided and self-guided birding trips to be had in the locality. The pair can have breakfast on the veranda watching exotic birds, followed by swimming and sightseeing for one and plenty of birding for the other. Both are happy. And this type of holiday is not just suited to couples, but can work well for some singles, as will be seen below.

### Ken & Bob

Ken, rather hesitantly, gives his vote to a bird he self-identified with Bob, who is not present. Ken is demonstrating one of the characteristics of an introvert – self-directedness. For Ken, a bird found and identified by himself is worth more than a half-dozen distant birds pointed out and named by a guide. Bob, meanwhile, is demonstrating a more well-known characteristic of an introvert. Ken says that Bob is missing the meal because he's

feeling a bit off-colour, but Bob is actually perfectly well, but in severe need of some time on his own. For eight days, all day, the group has eaten, travelled and birded as a group, and for an introvert, even with well-developed social skills, this can get to be a trial. Both Bob and Ken would have been better off on a trip allowing plenty of time to oneself, such as *Birding Holiday Type 4*, or even better, *Birding Holiday Type 5 – Location, Location & Location Plus*.

This brings us full circle, but not in the expected way. Some locations are so geared up to birders that an organized tour led by a guide is simply not necessary. Internationally renowned birding spots are now making full use of their assets by providing festivals, birding trails, numerous half-day walks, talks and more, all designed to lure vacationing birders to the area. Those preferring self direction – the birder/non-birder couples, and photographers – can often have a fully rewarding time just by booking into these locations and following their fancy day by day. It would not do for George, Sally, or Tony, but the point of this fictionalized true story is that, however congenial a group, no single kind of birding holiday can possibly be right for them all.





*A male Bearded Reedling, commonly called a Bearded Tit, photographed by John Gordon. See page 12 for details.*