BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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To travel or not to travel – even for a Mottled Owl? See page 13.

Publisher
BC Birding is published four times a year by the British Columbia Field Ornithologists, P.O. Box 61670, RPO Brookswood, 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 (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). Books for review should be sent to 10790 Grassland Road, Prince George, BC V2K 5E8.

Topics may include birding experiences, casual observations about bird behaviour, bird project reports, site guides, birding equipment, bird photography, trip reports (including overseas trips), and other subjects of broad interest to BC birders. Brief items are always welcome, but average submissions tend to be in the 400–800 word range. For longer submissions the normal maximum length is 1,500 words. Note that this is a newsmagazine rather than an academic journal, so formal reference lists etc are inappropriate.

Articles should be in plain text, either as the content of an email, or as an attachment (preferably Word). Photographs – remember to give the name of the photographer and a caption – should be sent as separate attachments, not embedded in text.

Deadlines (i.e. *final* dates for submission) are as follows:

- March edition: February 15
- June edition: May 15
- September edition: August 15
- December edition: November 15

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

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Young Birder Awards Committee: Carlo Giovanella (Chair), George Clulow.

BCFO Event Dates

Conference & AGM, Smithers

June 24–26, 2022

Zoom Presentations

January 19: *Namibia*, Tom Plath
February16: *Important Bird Area program*, Liam Ragan
March 15: *Canada in 60 days,* John Gordon
April 20: *New Guinea*, Peter Candido.

Back Cover Photographs

More from Costa Rica – see page 16.

Common Black Hawk at Puerto Viejo de Talamanca; Anhinga, Little Blue Heron and Boat-billed Flycatcher at Tortuguero; Brown Jay and Yellow-throated Toucan at Arenal Observatory Lodge.

New Country, New Bird

The Savannah Sparrow to the right might be very familiar to many of us, but less so if you've just moved from the UK to BC. See page 14.

Contents

President's Message

Gary Davidson, Nakusp

Elsewhere in this issue you will find two articles recognising members of the BCFO who have volunteered their time and effort to our organisation. The BCFO could not operate without people like Art, June, Michael, Kaitie and Nathan. I hope you will take a few minutes to read these articles and maybe next time you see one of these people you could offer them your thanks!

Not all the behind-the-scenes work done by board members and other committee members is visible to the general membership. Over the last year or two, a committee of three has been working on a complete review of our policies and procedures manual. This is a lengthy document which also includes a copy of our constitution and bylaws. Tasks like this have little to do with birds but are necessary for the smooth operation of the society. A draft version of the "new and improved" manual will be available to the general membership in the next month or so. It will need to be ratified at the next AGM.

COVID has played a major part in our operating procedures during the last couple of years. Our twice-postponed annual conference is still scheduled for June 2022; we are optimistic that there will be no further delays. We are also hopeful that two- and three-day field trips can begin again in the spring. We continue to offer Zoom presentations each month. Participation levels have been very good; over 80 members signed in to watch Lee Harding's October presentation on Argentina. There will be no presentation in December, but in January Tom Plath will be taking us to Namibia! (I am personally looking forward to this one since I spent three weeks in Namibia in 2017.)

Another victim of the pandemic has been field research. There have been no grant applications to our Education and Conservation Committee since 2019. If you are planning any projects yourself, or you know someone who is, please refer them to our website for information on our grant program. Financial assistance is available for qualifying projects.

Christmas Bird Count season is fast approaching. Check the list on our website and see what counts are happening near you. I'm sure most of you have participated in these counts many times before, but if you haven't, it's a great way to meet other birders and enjoy a day in the field!

Dedicated Volunteers

Gary Davidson, Nakusp

Art Martell

As you all know, the BCFO is a volunteer organization. Those who accept a position with the society give generously of their time and expertise. One such person is Art Martell. Art took on the demanding task of editor of our journal, *British Columbia Birds*, in late 2008. At the time, one of our directors described Art as someone who had been on a lot of boards and "knew a lot of stuff."

Prior to joining the BCFO, Art had made a lifelong commitment to ornithology and conservation. He is a past chair of Birds Canada and had a long career as a research scientist with the Canadian Wildlife Service. Art brought a wealth of experience and expertise to the BCFO. He has served as editor of the journal for 13 years and will be stepping down after the next issue. His past experiences and his many contacts in government, at universities and in non-government organizations have made him a very effective editor. Art's professional approach established high standards for the journal. The relevance and importance of the journal to the ornithological research community has been enhanced during Art's tenure as editor. A final editorial success for Art was the publication in 2021 of a special edition of the journal dedicated to the status, ecology, and conservation of internationally important bird populations on the Fraser River delta. His editorial shoes will be hard to fill!

Art's contribution to the BCFO does not end with his role as editor. His involvement with BCFO field trips and post-conference field trips has been invaluable.

Art was elected to our board of directors in 2009; he is currently serving his second six-year term on the board. In addition to his roles as editor and director, he spearheaded a revision of our constitution and bylaws as required by the BC Societies Act. Adhering to the strict format required by the Act was long and tedious work.

In recognition of his service to the BCFO, Art was given the Steve Cannings Award in 2017. This is our highest honour and is given to a person who has given unselfishly to the organization.

On behalf of the entire membership, the board of directors would like to thank Art for his many years of service to the society and for the professionalism he has demonstrated in bringing a high level of journalism to our journal.

Nathan Hentze – New Editor

Knowing his time as editor was coming to an end, Art committed himself to finding a suitable replacement. Nathan Hentze has been collaborating with Art on the upcoming issue and will assume full editorial responsibility moving forward. We are indeed fortunate to have found such a capable replacement! Nathan is a professional biologist and has been a birder and naturalist virtually all his life. By his own admission, he proposed to his future wife at a sewage facility! Surely that's evidence enough that he is a very keen birder. He has traveled extensively and brings a wealth of experience to the position. He also served as chair of the BCFO Bird Records Committee from 2013 to 2020. Welcome aboard, Nathan.

June Ryder and Michael Church

Putting together the quarterly newsmagazine is a complicated and time-consuming job. Editors and authors get recognition in the newsmagazine, but some of the behind-the-scenes volunteers do not. June Ryder and Michael Church are two of these people. Four times a year, these two dedicated volunteers take on the responsibility of ensuring the newsmagazines are mailed to members. First the printed copies are collected from the printers on West Broadway; then they are put into individual envelopes before being taken to the post office for mailing to members.

In 2011, June handled both the editor's duties and the distribution. In 2015 when Clive Keen assumed the role of editor, June graciously agreed to continue with the distribution. Michael has been assisting with these duties. In addition, Michael is a regular contributor to the newsmagazine with this column "Briefings." After ten years of service to the BCFO, June is moving on and is relinquishing the duties of newsmagazine distribution. The BCFO Board of Directors wishes to offer our heartfelt thanks to June and Michael for their generous commitment of time to our organization. We wish them well!

Kaitie York

The Board wants to thank Kaitie York for stepping up to take over the distribution of the newsmagazine. The current edition is being handled by Kaitie and board member Monica Nugent, and then Katie will take over fully for the March edition onwards.

It is rewarding to know that we have members so willing to help when asked. Kaitie is a graduate student at SFU and a new member of the BCFO. If you see her in the field, give her a big thank-you and warm welcome to our organization.

Below: A co-operative Pale-billed Woodpecker at Tortuguero. See page 12 for the background to this shot.

Bird Listers' Corner

Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows

The March 2022 edition of *BC Birding* will once again include listing tables. To review last year's edition, see the March 2021 issue at

bcfo.files.wordpress.com/2021/02/march2021.pdf

To participate, please submit your life list totals, as of *December 31, 2021*, for the areas listed in the accompanying table. Most listed areas are those with historical published checklists. The number following each area is the threshold level for submissions, in most cases 50% of species in the checklist for that area. You may report levels below the threshold and, space permitted, they will be included. Other areas may be suggested by submitting a total.

Specialized lists may also be submitted, e.g. birds seen above 1,500 metres in BC.

Big Year Totals for 2021: Year list totals were submitted for four areas last year. I will continue the Big Year listings again for 2021. You may submit other areas.

The *ABA list* comprises two listings, one as ABA Continental and a second ABA Continental plus Hawaii. Totals will only be listed for the area given i.e. if only an ABA Continental then it will only appear in the ABA Continental listing and vice versa.

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 is the totalling of all your Canadian Province & Territory lists to create a "total ticks" list.

ARDAT (All Regional Districts Added Together) is the sum of all eBird Regional Districts.

Areas listed individually are those having three or more members providing totals.

If more than one family member is submitting a list, individual lists need to be submitted.

Special Notes

A reminder to those summarizing their numbers from eBird. More than a few "reporting areas" differ from eBird to the historical listing boundaries:

Vancouver Checklist – eBird does not include Point Roberts or all of Golden Ears PP.

Okanagan Valley – eBird includes most of Manning Park; historical Okanagan List does not.

Email your list(s) to lawrencecowan@shaw.ca or mail to my attention at

Larry Cowan, Unit 45 12268-189A St., Pitt Meadows, BC V3Y 2M7

Deadline

Deadline for submissions is February 1, 2022. All submissions will be acknowledged if the member's email address is known. *If you don't get an acknowledgement, I didn't receive your listings.*

On a closing note this will be the final Lister's Corner authored by myself. After taking over the task for the 2010 summary it is time to pass the torch to another BCFO member. If you are interested in carrying this popular *BC Birding* article forward, please send me an email at lawrencecowan@shaw.ca or the editor at clive_keen@hotmail.com.

BCFO LISTING REPORT FORM
December 2021

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

….. British Columbia (250)
….. Canada (340)
….. ABA Continental (400)
….. ABA incl Hawaii (450)
….. World (900)
….. World Families (120)
….. North America (500)
….. Vancouver (190)
….. Okanagan Valley (160)
….. Yukon (45)
….. Northwest Territories (40)
….. Alberta (190)
….. All Ticks Prov & Territories (ATPT)
….. Washington (190)
….. Victoria (120)
….. Vancouver Island (190)
….. Peace River Area (130)
….. Sea & Iona Islands (160)
….. Westham & Reifel Islds (140)
….. BC Winter Seasonal list (125)
….. Non-motorized (NMT) (100)
….. N. Pacific Pelagic Waters (45)
….. Manning PP (100)
….. Prince George (130)
….. Sunshine Coast (135)
….. West Kootenay (150)
….. Creston Valley (140)
….. Fraser Valley (150)
….. Blackie Spit (100)
….. Semiamhoo Peninsula (120)
….. Kamloops (140)
….. Mount Robson PP (90)
….. Princeton (90)
….. Salt Spring Island (110)
….. Haida Gwaii (75)
….. Pitt Meadows (110)
….. Comox Valley (125)

(Other)

….. ……
…..……
…..……

Notes

***Find The Birds* Goes to IOC**

Adam Dhalla's scientific abstract about the benefits of his game *Find the Birds* to conservation education has been accepted by the review panel of the 2022 International Ornithological Congress. Adam will now be traveling to Durban, South Africa in August 2022 to present his research in person at IOC, the most prestigious event of its kind.

The game has been featured a number of times in this magazine, and the latest update is on page 17. Adam himself was first featured in the March 2018 edition, when he was aged 12, and had just received the BCFO Young Birder award.

Rare Bird Alerts

Since the deadline for the last edition of this newsletter, the BC Rare Bird Alert has reported the following.

- ORIENTAL TURTLE-DOVES in Prince Rupert - Nov 14th
- BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER in Kelowna - Nov 4-15th
- WHITE WAGTAIL in Haida Gwaii - Oct 18-29th
- SLATY-BACKED GULL in Campbell River - Sept 28-30th
- ORCHARD ORIOLE in Metchosin - Sept 28th
- SNOWY PLOVER in Tofino - Sept 27th
- MANX SHEARWATER near Port McNeill - Sept 24th
- BLACK PHOEBE in Abbotsford - Sept 10-24th
- FERRUGINOUS HAWK in Edgewood - Aug 30th
- SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS off Tofino - Aug 29th
- Four MANX SHEARWATERS near Port McNeill - Aug 17-Sept 2nd

For details and the latest alerts head to:

bcbirdalert.blogspot.com

BCFO Monthly Zoom Presentations

Larry Cowan

We are approaching another season of our popular BCFO Zoom Presentations. They were initiated in January of 2021 in an effort to replace our well-attended 2 & 3 Day Field Trips, cancelled due to COVID-19.

These Zoom presentations proved very popular with members, participation averaging in the high 60s to over 100 for Alan Burger's Antarctica presentation.

To date we've vicariously experienced birding trips to Australia, Peru, Madagascar & Antarctica. Following this year's AGM, David Bradley's presentation summarizing his Long-billed Curlew project in the Prince George area was also well received.

Going forward, BCFO Zoom presentations will take place every year from September through April, excluding December, on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:00 PM.

Here is the listing for upcoming presentations:

- November: *Endangered Williamson's Sapsucker*, Les Gyug
- January: *Namibia*, Tom Plath
- February: *Important Bird Area program*, Liam Ragan
- March: *Canada in 60 days*, John Gordon
- April – *New Guinea*, Peter Candido.

The Zoom Presentation dates and topics, with more details on each topic, are available on the BCFO website. So mark your calendars and sign on each month to enjoy these informative events.

Creston Valley Birdfest

The 10th Annual Creston Valley Bird Festival takes place on May 13–15 2021. For details see wildsight.ca/branches/creston-valley/birdfest.

Getting Someone Started

David Wood has pointed out that the Prince George Library has six birding kits for loan, including binoculars, local checklist, bird guide and backpack. Apparently they got the idea from the Fraser Valley Library system, and there might be other libraries with the same inspired thought. It is perfect for getting someone started on birding – check out your own local library, and if they haven't got kits for loan, suggest that they invest in them or seek grants. Photo by David Wood.

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.

NOTE: Because of the Covid-19 epidemic, many scheduled meetings and events for the next few months have been cancelled, gone virtual, or been postponed. Events that have not yet been cancelled could still be cancelled at a later date. Please be sure to check event websites before you plan to attend or register for any events.

For most meetings, festivals and other events, the website is the main source of information, and registration can usually 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.

For a detailed listing of birding festivals all over North America, please check the Cornell "All About Birds" website at www.allaboutbirds.org/birding-festivals.

2021 Events

Dec. 20 to Jan. 6 (2022). CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS. For information on dates of counts and contact information for count organizers, check the BCFO website in November and December.

2022 Events

Feb. 18-20: WINTER WINGS BIRDING FESTIVAL, Klamath Falls, OR. For information and to register, please check the festival website at winterwingsfest.org.

Feb. 18-21: 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.

Feb. 23-25: PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP, 49th ANNUAL MEETING. This will be a virtual meeting. For information and to register, visit the conference website at pacificseabirdgroup.org/annual-meeting.

Mar. (date to be announced): First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the year from Westport, WA. Westport Seabirds operates about 20 trips per year from March through October. A detailed schedule of trips for 2022 should be posted by December 15 on the Westport Seabirds website (westportseabirds.com).

Mar. 18-20: 18th ANNUAL WINGS OVER WATER NORTHWEST BIRDING FESTIVAL, Blaine, WA. For information, please check the website at www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com or contact Debbie Harger (phone, 360 332-8311; email, dharger@cityofblaine.com).

Mar. 25-27: 25rd ANNUAL OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL, Othello, WA. For information, check the festival website at www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org or phone 509 989-5606.

Apr. 15-17: 27th ANNUAL GODWIT DAYS birding festival, Arcata, California. This is one of the premier birding festivals in North America, with dozens of field trips to various places. For information or to sign up, visit the festival website at www.godwitdays.org.

Apr. 22-24: OLYMPIC BIRD FESTIVAL, Sequim, WA. For information, visit the festival website at www.olympicbirdfest.org, or contact the Dungeness River Audubon Center by phone (360-681-4076) or by e-mail (info@olympicbirdfest.org).

Apr. 29-May 1: 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.

May 9-15: WINGS OVER THE ROCKIES FESTIVAL (25rd 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 , or check the website at www.wingsovertherockies.org.

May 13-15: 10th annual CRESTON VALLEY BIRD FEST, Creston, BC. For information, please visit the festival website at wildsight.ca/branches/creston-valley/birdfest or contact the organizer, Ulrike, at info@crestonvalleybirds.ca.

June 1-July 7: NORTH AMERICAN BREEDING BIRD SURVEY. This long-established program, supervised by the Canadian Wildlife Service and US Fish & Wildlife Service, is for experienced birders who are skilled at identifying birds by songs and calls as well as by sight. It involves running a roadside survey route once every year during June or very early July. There are several vacant (i.e., unassigned) routes in various parts of BC. If interested, check the Canadian Wildlife Service website at www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/bird-surveys/landbird/north-american-breeding/overview.html, which includes further details and has contact information.

June 27-July 2: 140th annual meeting of the AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in conjunction with Birds Caribbean. For details, please check the AOS website at a later date at americanornithology.org/meetings/annual-meeting.

October 10-13: Annual meeting, ASSOCIATION OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS, Plymouth, Massachusetts. For further information, please visit the AFO website at afonet.org/meetings.

Avian Encounters

A Case for Birding Locally

Carlo Gionavella, Cloverdale

When COVID-19 came upon us, and travel was severely restricted, local birding became the most available default activity. Many of us had already been keeping track of birds we saw each year in our eBird checklist region – for me this being Metro Vancouver. However, I had already been tiring of the Vancouver Year List game. Too much driving, too much traffic! To tick some species within the checklist area required repeated drives of 150 km return, often on heavily clogged routes. I was looking to further restrict the scope of my activity.

I live in Surrey, a city that once proudly carried the slogan "City of Parks." Indeed, there are lots of parks, a few of which I knew well as they are excellent bird-watching venues. I formulated a goal of visiting and birding as many Surrey City parks as I could find during the year 2021. No such thing as a list of Surrey parks is available, but I knew there were lots of them that I had not previously paid attention to, so a minimum target of fifty parks seemed an appropriate goal to reach for. I have since exceeded that target by a wide margin, and continue to chock up new ones. I have posted a blog which provides a more detailed description of the project and interim report, *Birding Surrey Parks – Part 1*. Please view it here if interested:

rokman61.wordpress.com/2021/09/14/birding-surrey-parks-part-1/

Colour-banded Albatross in Hecate Strait

Bruce Whittington, Ladysmith

In July of 2021, I was part of a Bluewater Adventures crew delivering the company's third vessel, *SV Island Solitude,* from Port McNeill on Vancouver Island to Haida Gwaii for some cruises there. At dawn on July 24, we raised the anchor in a sheltered spot near the Ivory Island light on the central coast and motored into Milbanke Sound, and then set a course across Hecate Strait to Cumshewa Inlet, which separates Moresby and Louise Islands.

As we moved further offshore we encountered a few alcids, shearwaters and fulmars. When we got to about 130º 26' W, we had also passed one Black-footed Albatross, and we encountered a large loose group of at least 14 fin whales. We slowed to photograph as many as we could. Also here was a lone sea otter. There were also numbers of birds, including a second albatross. We photographed this bird, and when I looked at the images soon after on my camera, I realized that the bird wore a yellow band with black lettering on its right tarsus. The four digits were clearly legible: "X248." It also appeared to have an aluminum band on its left tarsus which was not legible.

When I returned home after the delivery and one cruise with guests, I submitted the band report to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. I was warned that reports of colour bands sometimes do not get prompt replies. So I was pleased when a reply came by email on August 24th, saying that the bird was banded on December 12, 2007, on Tern Island in the French Frigate Shoals west of Hawaii, and was determined to have hatched in 2006 or earlier.

Later I was purging lower-quality images from my files to make room for newer images. In the process, I found an image of a Black-footed Albatross wearing what appears to be the same sort of colour band, but on its left tarsus. It was taken west of Cape St. James in Haida Gwaii on June 22, 2009. Unfortunately, the characters on the band are not legible.

I am a firm believer that "citizen science" plays an important role in data collection, and I used this example with the group travelling after the incident. And it's a reminder that even a "poor" image might hold useful information, so check your images before you discard them!

The Colour-banded Albatross in Hecate Strait. Photo by Bruce Whittington.

Flat Out on Flatiron

John Gordon, Langley

Sept 24, 2021

Granite slabs are scattered everywhere on Flatiron. The nooks and crannies in the rock harbour insects and plants, the flowers and seeds providing a rich food source for the many inhabitants.

The forest trail to Flatiron was steep, rocky, slippery and wet. There was hardly a sound in the forest, just the odd Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Douglas Squirrels. Mushrooms were abundant. A few pickers were out collecting. After a two-kilometre hike the forest opened up providing 360-degree views of the surrounding mountains.

During the summer there had been numerous reports of Northern Pygmy Owls, Mountain Chickadees, White-winged Crossbills and White-tailed Ptarmigan, all birds I needed for my Fraser Valley Big Year.

Craig, my hiking companion for the day, soon picked up the call of a Northern Pygmy Owl. Fortunately we were able to climb a little higher until we stood on the same level as the bird which was perched right above the trail.

Then to our surprise a second owl perched alongside. The birds had their eyes on something: they seemed agitated. One of the birds plunged into the undergrowth and out of sight. What a start to the day.

We continued upward, my legs turning to putty and heart racing, my lack of fitness leaving something to be desired. Five-minute breaks were the order of the day. Climbing higher, we spotted a flock of White-winged Crossbills feeding on Sitka Spruce cones. They stayed long enough for a few photographs.

> *Flatiron via Needle Peak Trail is a 6.3 mile moderately trafficked out-and-back trail located near Hope, British Columbia, Canada that features a lake and is rated as difficult.*
>
> – www.alltrails.com

Eventually we reached the monument and a fork in the trail. Needle Peak to the left and to the right, Flatiron – and hopefully the Ptarmigan. We were still 1.5 km away. When we arrived there were already a few hikers and swimmers cooling off in the lake, but alas no Ptarmigan. A flock of birds flew overhead; they sounded like Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch but I couldn't make them out or get an ID picture.

Craig decided to make his own way up the granite-strewn escarpment. I waited below. Eventually through my binoculars I could see by his stance he was photographing something, probably the Ptarmigan. It was time for me to move.

Northern Pigmy-Owls photographed on the trip by John Gordon.

Suddenly my legs came to life – the energy that had been drained away on the hike had miraculously returned. Soon I was within metres of the summit and the radio tower. That last scramble was a 167-metre gain but well worth it. As I reached the summit my heart was beating so hard I couldn't hold the camera still, especially a 500 mm. I waited a few moments before firing off a few frames in case the Ptarmigan decided to take off on me. They didn't.

Eventually we counted twenty-five or more Ptarmigan, most were hidden in cracks or in the shade of the rocks, yet others nibbling on a type of sedge. Their presence became apparent only when they moved.

At this point I wish I had brought my Nikon 200mm–500mm F5.6 zoom rather than my fixed 500 mm F5.6 prime. While Craig was able to stand in one spot and compose his photographs I had to back up. A zoom would have been a better option, albeit heavier.

I used a CCS G3 Cotton Carrier camera and binocular harness with the 500 mm on my chest and my binoculars

on the side. During the hike I hardly noticed their presence except when I needed to shoot. I've been photographing for forty years and it has proven to be the very best carrying system I have ever used.

We reached an elevation of 1,898 m with a combined elevation gain of 867 m from the car park. Eventually it was time to leave and make our way back down the mountain. White-tailed Ptarmigan was my third year-bird for the day. The walk back was filled with the most majestic views imaginable. It's been a long time since I had been hiking; I had forgotten how beautiful the mountains can be. I used my iPhone 8 to take scenics.

The descent, I was warned, could be as difficult as the accent. True to form the steep trail was a combination of wet moss and slippery granite, and for me at least it was treacherous. I'm glad I carried a pole for balance.

On the descent I thought I heard chickadees. Eventually, after a bit of searching we found four Mountain Chickadees, right on the trail, the fourth year-bird of the day. I screwed up the exposure but thankfully I had shot in raw and was able to save the picture, albeit the highlights were lost. A shame really as the background was perfect.

An hour later were we almost back at the car. My brain and feet were completely out of sync. I was exhausted, both mentally and physically. However both the birds and scenery were well worth the effort. Who knows, I might even try another hike one day.

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"Their presence [White-tailed Ptarmigan] became apparent only when they moved." John Gordon photos.
For more shots from the trip, see thecanadianwarbler.blogspot.com.

Briefing 1

Who Needs Sex?

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

The California Condor was recently among the most severely threatened of all birds. By 1982 there were a reported 22 surviving individuals and in 1987, when the last wild birds were captured to be part of a last-ditch captive-breeding program, there were 27 individuals. (There are, in different accounts, some minor variations on these numbers.) The birds turn out to have decided that this is just fine – there are now 329 of them back in the skies and 175 continuing in the breeding program. It's one of the most successful wild-animal breeding programs ever.

Such a program leads, however, to special monitoring of eggs and offspring. In the course of this work geneticists were stunned to discover two unrelated cases of parthenogenesis – also known as "virgin birth." Parthenogenesis occurs in some insects and reptiles (for example, Komodo Dragons!), and is known in mammals and birds, almost exclusively when the birth-giving female has no access to a male. Such events have been recorded in pigeons, chickens, and a few passerines. In the present case, an additional surprise is that, in both of the unrelated cases, the female was living with a fertile male with whom she raised normally conceived chicks both before and after the parthenote birth.

The scientists cannot (yet) explain this. A clue may lie in the history of the offspring. Both died before reaching maturity, one apparently of starvation in the wild and one of an injury in the captive colony. Both were unusually small birds. Genetic defects are suspected.

Reference

Ryder, O.A. et al. 2021. "Facultative Parthenogenesis in California Condors," *Journal of Heredity*, esab052, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhered/esab052.

El Río de Rapaces

Costa Rica, October 1 – 12, 2021

Clive Keen, Prince George

Above: Mottled Owl found in the extensive grounds of Hotel Bougainvillea. Below: Great Green Macaws at Virgen del Socorro. All photos by author.

The Spectacle

We were high on a hillside close to the Caribbean coast. Far to the northwest was a huge kettle of raptors – a swirl of perhaps seven hundred Broad-winged Hawks and a hundred Turkey Vultures. Far to the southeast was a mirror-image kettle. They were both magnificent sights, but the real wonder lay between the two raptor elevators: El Río de Rapaces, a birding spectacle of a lifetime.

As the raptors reached the top of the northwest thermal, they would peel off and head in a straight southeastern glide, creating a wide, dense, living river, flowing silently almost as far as the eye could see. It took an act of will to take one's eyes off the mesmerising spectacle, though some needed to do so to wipe tears from their binocular eyepieces.

We guessed that 8,000 Broad-winged Hawks and 1,000 Turkey Vultures passed overhead while we watched. Since the nearby hawkwatch tallied 30,000 Broad-wings and 5,000 Turkey Vultures that day, our guess would not have been too far off. We were fortunate to have been there on one of the better days, but it was by no means rare: some *one and a half million* Broad-winged Hawks fly over that strip of land during their southern migration. It provides one of the most stirring sights of the natural world.

The Tour

The River of Raptors occurred on the fourth day of our Eagle-Eye tour, as we moved from Costa Rica's Central Valley toward the Southern Caribbean lowlands. The previous days had already been superb, based first at Hotel Bougainvillea and then at Hotel Quelitales. Both have extensive birdy grounds, long eBird lists and superb food. Both gain very high recommendations from me, particularly Hotel Quelitales, which is a dedicated birders' resort owned and run by a birder-chef.

Accommodation was much less enjoyable at the next stop, at the rather seedy Puerto Viejo de Talamanca on the Caribbean coast. The town's suburbs, though, provided extremely good birding, including first sightings of one of our targets: the expected, though critically endangered, Great Green Macaw. A bird I had *not* expected to find – the Black-chested Jay – can be found only in this small enclave, but was also expertly tracked down by our guide along with a torrent of other lifers.

The next stop, Tortuguero, promised a great deal, as it is a national park accessible only by a series of canals, and was apparently the home of a wide range of must-see waterbirds such as Sungrebe, Agami Heron and Fasciated Tiger-Heron. Though I got lovely sightings of Tropical Fruitcrows, White-collared Manakins and more on dry land, seven hours of boat trips yielded nothing more than the common Central-American species. Perhaps we were just unlucky, but I'd give Tortuguero a miss on any future trip.

Our penultimate destination was the number one birding spot in the whole of Costa Rica, the Arenal Observatory Lodge. I'm sure it deserves its high reputation, though I had to miss the only full day there, as flight times meant that I needed to get a COVID test on a Sunday, when they were only available far away at San José. The limited time I spent at Arenal was nevertheless wonderful, starting with a night sighting of a Black-and-White Owl, and ending

with one of my target birds: a Black-crested Coquette. I hope I'll be back.

The final destination was Hotel Robledal, a stone's throw from the San José airport, again run by a birder. This location deserves a worthy mention. After my fellow travellers had left for the airport, the owner asked me if I wanted to see a very special bird. He led to a corner of the extensive grounds, told me where to train my binoculars, and advised me to wait patiently. Twenty minutes later I had my lifer Lesser Ground-Cuckoo to add to the 67 others lifers from the trip. Not too shabby.

To Travel in a Time of COVID?

I booked this trip a long time ago, when it seemed that COVID issues would have been resolved by departure time. Was it still worth going, with the pandemic unabated? Well, the birds and guide were terrific, and the tour delivered many great moments. Eagle-Eye and Costa Rica generally scored well in terms of COVID preparations, though people on the Caribbean coast don't seem to have heard of face masks, any more than people in American airports have heard about social distancing. And rules for the pandemic add a level of stress that shouldn't be underestimated.

Fine though this trip was, and as much as I'd love to give firm support to all the tourist industry folk involved, I'd recommend carefully considering your own stress tolerance before booking flights.

Right: Collared Aracari at Arenal Observatory Lodge.

Middle: Black-crowned Antshrike at Cahuita National Park.

Bottom left: Purple-throated Mountain-Gem at Freddo Fresas, Poasito.

Bottom centre: Roadside Hawk at Villas del Caribe, Puerto Viejo de Talamanca.

Bottom right: Social Flycatcher at Hotel Quelitales, Cachi.

See also page 5, the back page and front cover.

Do the photographs alone justify travelling in times of COVID?

New Members' Page

Mike Cronk, Sunshine Coast

From UK to BC – A Bird World of Difference

I suppose I should declare that I am a photographer first and birder second. I need to know about whatever I photograph so had joined the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) in the UK and sent in sighting reports on my local travels. The local "record keeper" was really helpful if I was unsure of a bird, often a juvenile, and usually put me right. It was a great way to learn and contributed to my better understanding and the BTO's accumulated knowledge of bird numbers. It was a natural decision to join the BCFO when we arrived in Canada in April of this year.

Most of my hikes in the UK were close to home, which was near Marlborough in Wiltshire. The Marlborough Downs/Vale of Pewsey, Savernake Forest and Salisbury Plain were my stomping ground. Three fundamentally different habitats; rolling chalk downlands, mixed coniferous and deciduous forest and open grassland. All relatively small compared to Canada, but each unique in their own way. Savernake Forest is an ancient forest, famous for its named old oak trees and where Henry VIII used to hunt, and close to Jane Seymour's house. We lived close to the original site of Wolfhall.

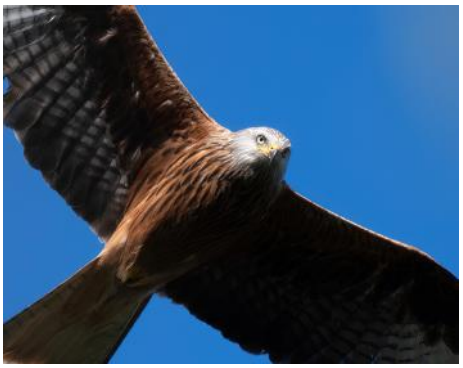
My favourite was the open grasslands of Salisbury Plain. The 200 square miles of military training ground are a rich ecological habitat, fauna and flora and of course birdlife. The military exercises, which discourage the public, encourage the wildlife which just move out of the way when armoured vehicles race across the open ground.

In summer, Skylarks, Meadow Pipit, Kestrel, Hobby, Barn Owl, Red Kites, Buzzards, Stonechat and Wheatear were a delight. The highlight of my Salisbury Plain birding photography was to capture pictures of the male Montagu's Harrier. The only breeding pair known to be in the UK. Their nesting site, known only to a few.

In winter, Short-eared Owls were often seen hunting over the Plain during the day, and in Spring, Curlew were known to breed on the eastern extremes.

As the size of my lens increased, the size of the birdlife I captured decreased. I discovered that not every little brown bird was a sparrow and the lens opened up colours and plumage I'd not seen before. If the male Montagu was a highlight in the larger birds, the flocks, or "charms" of Goldfinches in later summer and early autumn were a delight as the flashes of gold shimmered as they took flight..

After a month in North Vancouver, while we completed quarantine and were reunited with our spaniel, we started to settle into Canada. We have been coming here for twenty years and when our son became a Canadian citizen, we decided it was time for an adventure. We moved to the Sunshine Coast in May and have spent six months exploring and working out where we want to live. The camera has gone everywhere (until it went in for a lengthy service) and captured bear cubs and their inquisitive mother, otters, seals, orca and birds. I am still getting used to the bird life and Sibley accompanies me everywhere.



I am not one of life's twitchers (a UK term for birders that gather in flocks whenever a rare bird perches on a local tree), more an opportunist wildlife photographer. Most of my pictures are taken on dog walks or trail hikes. I've not yet come across anything rare in Canada but being part of the BCFO will help ensure that when I do, I am able to record, photograph and share it, and learn as I go along.

My main camera kit is a Nikon D850 with a 200–500 Nikon lens. It is just about OK without a tripod in good light, but a monopod or tripod is essential in poor light.

Above: A Red Kite, very rare in the UK in the 1960s, with just a few pairs hanging on in Wales, but now seen often in England and Scotland as well as Wales, due largely to a reintroduction program spearheaded by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSBP).

Left: A Blue Wagtail, quite scarce in the UK, particularly on Salisbury Plain, away from its natural habitat.

Photos by Mike Cronk.

Ancient Shorebird Tracks on Mount Roman

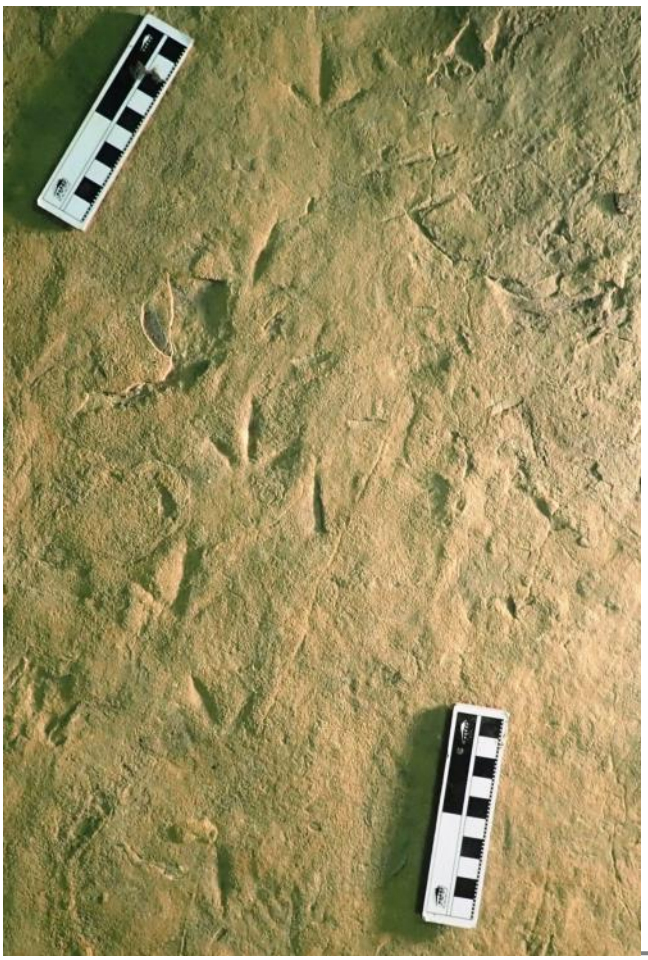
Charles Helm, Tumbler Ridge

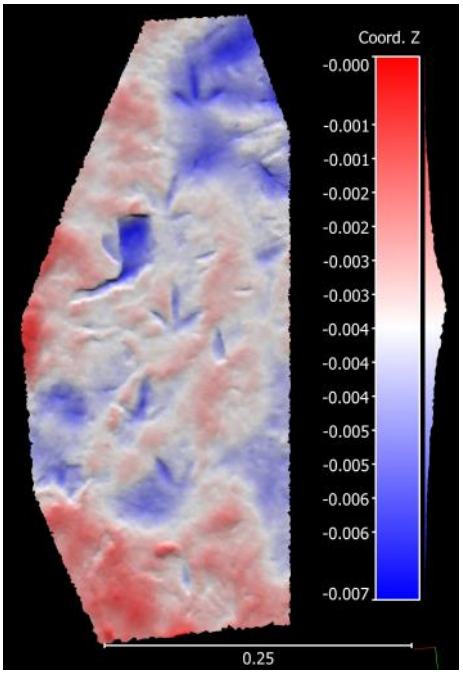
In 1994, soon after I arrived in Tumbler Ridge, I went on a climbing expedition up Mt. Roman, the highest summit close to town, with my friend and colleague Dr. Nigel Myers. Today this mountain is a shadow of its former self, having been subjected to extensive coal mining, but back in those days it was pristine, and it was my first time on its slopes. We stopped on the way up for a sandwich, and somehow the angle of the sunlight was just perfect to illustrate something strange on the rock beside which we were sitting. Quite unmistakably, there was a sequence of about nine fossil footprints in the rock. In those pre-GPS days I made a mental note of the locality, and we speculated that the tracks must have been made by a small dinosaur.

The concept of fossil tracks in the region was completely foreign to us. Much later we learned that a set of dinosaur tracks had been discovered in a regional coal mine, but that discovery had not been reported to a broader audience. My ignorance of fossil tracks was abysmal at that stage, but when a while later I visited the museum exhibits in Hudson's Hope, and saw Cretaceous avian tracks, I realized that that is what we had probably discovered on the slopes of Mt. Roman. I must somehow have appreciated that this was something significant, because the first book I wrote on the Tumbler Ridge area, *Beyond Rock and Coal*, featured a colour photo of the trackway on the front cover (although it was incorrectly captioned as "small dinosaur tracks").

Over the next decade I occasionally visited the site to check on the condition of the tracks, and once showed it to the palaeontologists at the Tumbler Ridge Museum. They explained the significance to me of such tracks, and why the Hudson's Hope area was so important in their history. Prior to the inundation of the Peace River Canyon and its famous dinosaur trackways in the 1970s, Dr Philip Currie and his team had mounted a number of expeditions to document them and recover the most noteworthy specimens. In the process he identified small, thin-toed, tridactyl (three-toed) bird tracks in 1979, probably made by a shorebird about 117 million years ago. They were assigned the name *Aquatilavipes swiboldae*. At the time these were the oldest bird tracks ever recorded, and the third type of fossil bird track to be described and assigned a scientific name. The tracks we had found on Mt. Roman were slightly younger, probably about 110 million years old, but could probably also be assigned to *Aquatilavipes*.

The Mt. Roman Aquatilavipes *trackway under good lighting conditions. Photos by author.*





3D photogrammetry of the tracks; horizontal and vertical scales are in metres

We realized that there were no nearby roads, and that helicopter recovery by long-line was the only feasible option. That required funding which we did not have. I suggested that we use a rock saw to reduce the slab to a size that could be carried out, but the idea was vetoed by our palaeontologist at the time, Dr Richard McCrea. "There could be other tracks on this surface, which we may only see under optimal lighting," he insisted.

Every year the Emperor's Challenge Mountain Run took place in the area, and the route led over the summit of Mt. Roman. It was an interesting notion that hundreds of participants would pass within 20 metres of the tracksite without knowing of its existence. Finally, in 2014, twenty years after the discovery, a donation of helicopter time was made available through Anglo American's Peace River coal mine. On a misty day our team carried the net up the mountain and placed the 300 kg rock within it. Five days later, with the first break in the weather, the track-bearing slab was airlifted from its alpine location onto a trailer, and brought into the museum collections.

This was cause for celebration, as the trackway did not seem to have deteriorated significantly over the two decades. However, there was an unexpected bonus, thanks to Dr. McCrea's insistence on recovering the whole slab and not paring it down. Once ideally angled bright light was shone onto the surface, it became clear that there were not just nine tracks on this surface, but dozens more. Most of these were typical three-toed *Aquatilavipes* tracks, but the discerning eye of Dr. Lisa Buckley noted something very subtle: towards one end of the slab were slightly larger tracks with a faint backward-pointing hallux (digit I). In other words, they were tetradactyl, not tridactyl. Combined with the discovery of similar tracks near Grande Cache, this led in time to the naming In 2018 of *Ignotornis canadensis* (the first of the *Ignotornid* family from Canada) in a peer-reviewed paper by Dr. Buckley and colleagues in the journal *Cretaceous Research*.

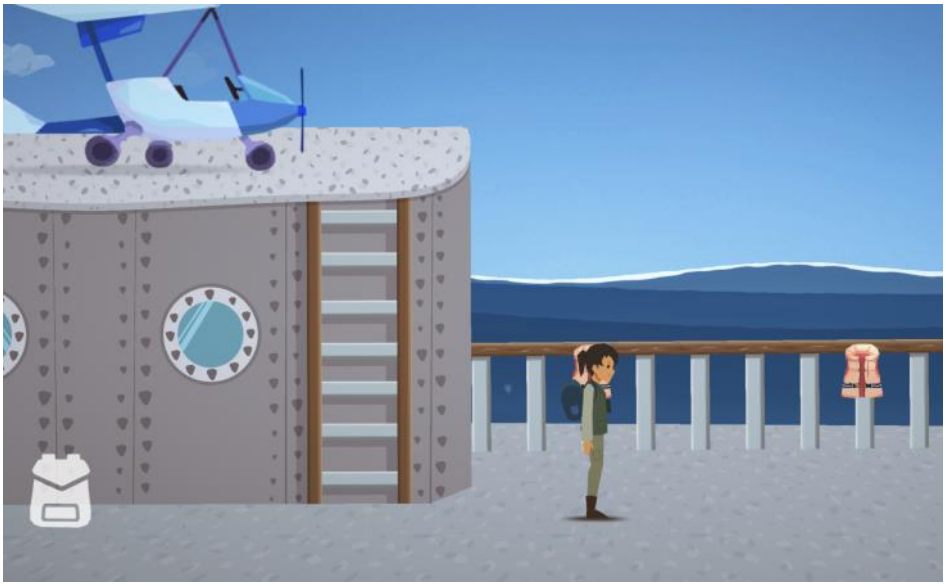
The *Ignotornid* tracks are faint, but the *Aquatilavipes* tracks on this surface are clearly impressed, and a replica of them is on exhibit in the palaeo-ornithology section of the Tumbler Ridge Museum's Dinosaur Discovery Gallery. When I view them I am reminded of how far we have come in less than 30 years, and how northeastern British Columbia has become a global hotspot for palaeo-ornithology. And I have a soft spot for these tracks. They were, after all, the first indication of what was to come: a bonanza of tracks that led in time to the creation of a palaeontology museum, a UNESCO Global Geopark, and a diversified local economy.

Find the Birds

British Columbia Location Launches

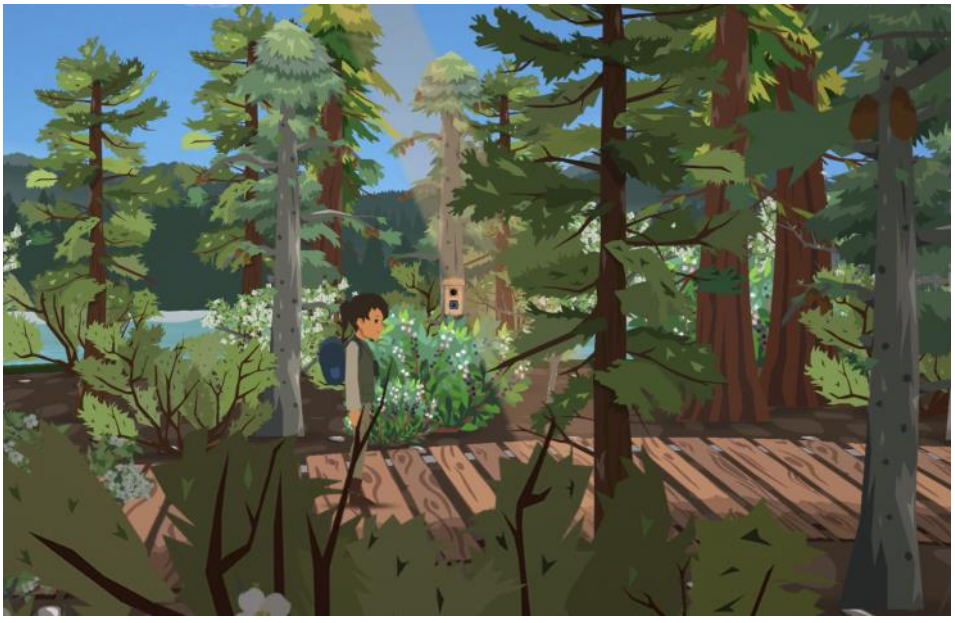
Adam Dhalla, Coquitlam

Since its launch six months ago, with an initial Arizona simulated birding location, *Find the Birds* has accrued over 7,000 players in 46 countries on six continents. The game, where players explore realistic habitats, find, and take virtual photos of accurately animated local bird species, and complete conservation quests, continues to grow in both scope and audience. A true Canadian-made, COVID-19-safe & zero-carbon success story!



BC pelagic birding scene from Find the Birds.
Images courtesy of Thought Generation Society.

Find the Birds *BC player exploring the boardwalk at Sawmill Lake.*



Recently, the British Columbia location was added, featuring Sawmill Lake in the Okanagan Valley, Tofino on the coast, and a pelagic journey in the Pacific Ocean. Some of the local bird species included are the Steller's Jay (BC's provincial bird), the Black Oystercatcher, and the Western Meadowlark. Conservation quests added entail placing nest boxes for Northern Saw-whet Owls and cleaning up beach litter.

To assess the game's impact on conservation education, I recently conducted an online player survey. Of the 101 players who completed the survey, 71% were in the 8–15 age group, which means I am reaching my peers. But 21% were late teens & adults, so the game's appeal is not limited to children. 51% were male and 49% female: this equality is encouraging, as most games

have a much smaller percentage of female players.

98% of players said the game increased their appreciation of birds. 85% stated it improved their knowledge of birds and 84% reported it made them birdwatch more. 56% said the game increased their knowledge of conservation and 47 said they volunteered with real-world conservation organizations because of playing the game. The average player rating was 4.5/5 stars.

As a result of the game's reputation and the above impressive data, I was invited to present my findings at the 2022 International Ornithological Congress. So, I will be traveling to Durban, South Africa next August to spread word of the value such a new method can have at reaching and teaching a new generation of birders, ornithologists, and conservationists. To learn more about *Find the Birds* and to download the game for free for your Apple and Android phones and tablets, please visit:

www.findthebirds.com

In addition, I recently connected with Merlin Tuttle, who is considered by many to be the top bat expert in the world. We're now working together, along with Thought Generation Society (the non-profit BC game production organization I volunteer with for these projects), on the fundraising and production of *Find the Bats: Presented by Merlin Tuttle's Bat Conservation.*

Above: Find the Birds *scene depicting a Western Meadowlark at Sawmill lake.*

Those who love *Find the Birds* will be pleased to know this new game will be in the same art, animation, and gameplay style, but, this time, bats will be the species players are trying to find and conserve. As many birders know, like some birds, bats are very important for pollination and insect control, so learning how to appreciate and protect them is crucial.

Find the Bats will include photography from Merlin, as well as featuring him as a simulated character, walking around in the game, teaching players about bats.

For more information and to give your support to this exciting & innovative digital awareness project, please visit:

www.findthebats.com

And finally, the urban forest conservation project I'm working on in Coquitlam is gaining public interest! The petition I launched, to stop proposed condo development of the land, now has over 11,000 signatures. To watch the video and sign the petition, please visit:

www.save3038.com

Long-tailed Duck by Mike Cronk. See page 14.

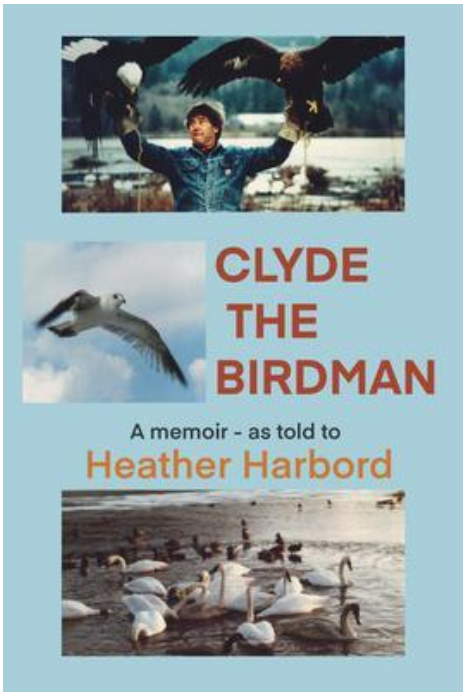
Book Review

Art Martell, Courtenay

Clyde the Birdman, by Heather Harbord. 2021, 176 pp, eBook: https://books2read.com/u/bWGgP0. $12.99.

Clyde Burton is a well-known British Columbia naturalist and bird lover. For more than 50 years he has worked, observed birds and carried out his conservation activities primarily in the Powell River area. A lifelong birder herself, the author Heather Harbord teased the anecdotes and stories out of Clyde to create this memoir of his life. In this, her sixth book, she tells the story in an engaging style that makes it easy for the reader to visualize. We get a glimpse of what created and motivates this expert naturalist and keeps bringing him back to his childhood passion.

Clyde grew up in a small Newfoundland outport, which allowed him to explore and have close contact with nature. From an early age, he was acutely aware of all birds and wanted to know more about them. Many of his experiences observing and raising



young birds are reminiscent of those of Gerald Durrell. The experiences were to shape the remainder of his life.

After working for the Hudson Bay Company in northeastern Quebec and as a bush pilot flying in Atlantic Canada and Ontario, he moved to Powell River in 1969. He loved the place and noticed that Cranberry Lake would be the perfect location for a bird sanctuary. He worked for Municipal Parks as he began efforts to establish the sanctuary. He recounts the many encouraging and frustrating experiences he had with waterfowl, eagles, and Trumpeter Swans, where he played a role in establishing a previously unknown migration route north through the inlets and mountains.

After almost fifteen years of trying to work two full-time jobs, he left the sanctuary but continued with the Parks Department. A founding member of the Malaspina Naturalists, he gave many presentations and led many field trips. He was instrumental in establishing the Powell River Christmas Bird Count.

I recommend this memoir to anyone interested in nature and Canadian history.

Art Martell enjoys birding locally, nationally and internationally and is the Volunteer Caretaker for the K'omoks Important Bird Area.

A Memorable Score

John Gordon, Langley

This year I have been attempting a Fraser Valley eBird-region Big Year. A few weeks ago I reached 200 species, which I am told is the benchmark. The astonishing thing is that my 200th Fraser Valley bird was a Brown Pelican on Harrison Lake. I am told by Wayne Weber that this is only the third inland BC record for the Brown Pelican on record - but would be grateful if members can volunteer any sightings of any BC inland Brown Pelicans (not coastal BC where they are becoming more common).

(Photo by John Gordon.)

Featured Species No. 16

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

Golden-crowned Sparrow
(*Zonotrichia atricapilla*)

Status: Common, often abundant, spring migrant. Uncommon in fall and winter, though may be locally fairly common.

This member of the genus *Zonotrichia* is exclusively western. Its breeding range extends throughout much of British Columbia east of the Coast Mountains, north and west to the Yukon and Alaska, and eastward into the western Northwest Territories and the Rocky Mountains of Alberta. Its preferred breeding habitat is shrubby open habitat, usually at higher elevation. There is a single isolated breeding record for southern Vancouver Island, near Sidney, at 21 m elevation. The species winters from southwestern British Columbia south through western parts of Washington, Oregon, and California to northwestern Baja California.

The Golden-crowned Sparrow is well known to residents of the west coast, particularly devoted gardeners for whom these sparrows are a scourge each spring, nipping off the tender leaves of just-emerging garden vegetables. Long-time gardeners may therefore be more knowledgeable than field ornithologists as to just when the migration period begins and ends. Based on data over a period of several decades, a few early individuals may begin trickling in by mid-April or shortly thereafter. These can be distinguished from local wintering birds by their plumage. Migrants from further south are in breeding plumage, whereas local immature birds are not. The main movement from the south usually occurs during the last week of April and the first week of May, and often occurs as an inundation or "fallout" involving large numbers. For example, 50 birds were seen in Tofino on 26 April, 1969, and 250 were estimated feeding along the beach at Grice Bay on 3 May, 1974.

Fallout occurs when, during the peak of the migration, birds are forced down by a weather front that obscures the sun and stars, making navigation impossible. In our region, this is usually a southeasterly front with low scudding clouds, accompanied by rain or drizzle. On 29 April 1993, a fallout of 300 birds occurred in Pacific Rim National Park. An even larger number was tallied on 5 May, 1999 at the Long Beach Airport, when 261 Golden-crowned Sparrows were counted as they passed slowly by just above the ground. A count at the nearby golf course produced an additional 270 birds, for a total of 530 birds that morning. On 2 May, 2000, 450 birds were counted at the golf course, and on 28 April, 2008, an estimated 300 birds were in the immediate vicinity of my residence in Tofino.

Such moments are very impressive and memorable, as the air is filled with their song, and the excitement of these birds at being en route to their breeding territories is readily apparent.

Most sparrows will readily take sunflower seeds at feeders, and this species is no exception. Up to 50 birds have crowded onto my second-storey balcony after the deck has been seeded. These birds are also very trusting. Once, I inadvertently left the sliding glass door slightly ajar before leaving, and returned a short time later to find a dozen birds exploring all corners of the living room, appearing not the least bit discomfited by this alien environment. Their song, which consists of a pleasing but plaintive descending series of three notes, is described by a friend from the United Kingdom as sounding like too-fat-to-fly, too-fat-to-fly.

Records after the first week in May are scarce. The spring of 2008 was exceptional, with 35 birds still at the golf course on 14 May. The latest spring bird on the central west coast was one seen at the airport on 26 May in 2010. A bird on Triangle Island, seen in a scrub crabapple bush on 4 June 1974, was very unusual. This species is entirely absent during the summer months, but by the third week of September or early October, the first birds appear once again, either on their way south or as winter residents. I have a single record of a bird earlier than that, recorded on 1 September 2004 at the airport.

Unlike the spring migration, the fall movement is inconspicuous with low numbers. Flocks are rarely larger than 12 birds and occasionally exceed 20. A record of 100 birds in Tofino on 9 September 1996 is exceptional. Another flock of 100 migrating birds was estimated on Lennard Island on 13 October 1976. By late November or December, any birds still present can be presumed to be wintering birds. Although Birds of Pacific Rim National Park listed no winter records, there have been winter occurrences since at least 1979, and these are quite normal on the west coast, primarily in backyards and other semi-open areas such as the Long Beach Airport. Nearly all wintering birds are juveniles. Adults are rarely seen in winter.

Elsewhere on the west coast, such as in the vicinity of Browning Inlet, Golden-crowned Sparrows are not as common, and are considered only occasional spring and fall migrants.

Note
This is an extract from Adrian Dorst's *The Birds of Vancouver Island's West Coast*, UBC Press, which covers 360 species in its 550 pages. The book can be ordered at ubcpress.ca. Golden-crowned Sparrow photo by author.

Briefing 2

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Local Seabirds: How Are They Doing?

In 1999 a group of bird-oriented organizations, including government, non-government and volunteer groups, established a citizen-science survey of water birds wintering along the British Columbia coast. Since then, volunteers have conducted monthly surveys (September–April) along local coastlines. The data are recorded by Birds Canada. Results from the first 20 years have been published. What are the trends?

Surveys along the BC Coast are practically limited to settled regions. Around the Salish Sea, surveys are conducted along the east coast of Vancouver from Campbell River south to the Strait of Juan da Fuca, and along the Mainland coast from Lund to the American border, with a strong concentration around Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Delta. On the Pacific coast, sparsely distributed surveys have been carried out on the west coast of Vancouver Island and the north coast.

Analysis has been conducted separately for these two distinctly different coasts. The Salish Sea is much more affected by human activity than the Pacific coast, but it also possesses a higher proportion of sheltered waters. These differences encourage different avifaunas, depending on the habitat preferences of individual species.

Trend analysis for the 20-year period has been conducted for 50 species in the Salish Sea, selected from 72 coastal marine species (and a total of 172 species that occur in the coastal zone). These were birds for which the records are of sufficient quality and the reported numbers sufficiently large for meaningful analysis. For the Pacific coast, 37 species have been examined. Species exhibiting significant trends of increased or decreased abundance in the period are listed in the table.

Species	Δ%/year	Migration*	Feeding**
Salish Sea			
Canada Goose	+4.9	Local	Herbivore
Trumpeter Swan	-8.2	Short Distance	Herbivore
Ring-necked Duck	+13.6	Short Distance	Omnivore
Scaup spp.	-10.7	Long Distance	Omnivore
Surf Scoter	-2.3	Long Distance	Benthivore
White-winged Scoter	-4.3	Short Distance	Benthivore
Black Scoter	-15.0	Long Distance	Benthivore
Long-tailed Duck	-5.1	Long Distance	Benthivore
Western Grebe	-12.7	Short Distance	Piscivore
Black Turnstone	-4.2	Long Distance	Benthivore (hard shore)
Dunlin	-9.7	Long Distance	Benthivore (soft shore)
Mew Gull	-4.6	Short Distance	Omnivore
Pacific Loon	-6.0	Long Distance	Piscivore
Common Loon	-3.0	Short Distance	Piscivore
Pacific Coast			
Barrow's Goldeneye	-8.2	Short Distance	Benthivore
Hooded Merganser	-5.8	Local	Piscivore
Red-necked Grebe	+7.6	Short Distance	Piscivore
Common Murre	+13.7	Local	Piscivore
Great Blue Heron	-6.8	Local	Piscivore

Δ%/year = percentage change in abundance per year. *Local = non-migrant; short distance = within BC; long distance = Arctic, subarctic (mainly). **Feeding preference: Benthivore = bottom feeder.

The sheltered Salish Sea clearly is creating more stresses on its birdlife than the wilder waters of the ocean coast. Physical disturbance, food supply and water quality may all be contributing to the difference. Recreational and commercial ship traffic is more intense on the inland waters, fisheries compete for food resources in the inland waters, especially near the major river mouths, and industrial pollution affects water quality locally. The latter particularly affects benthic food production. Potential shoreline habitats are extensively "developed."

Not all the negative changes necessarily indicate species declines. Western Grebes, for example, are known to have moved their wintering sites southward, toward the same latitudes as the greater part of their summer range. In general, long-distance migrants are considered more likely to shift their wintering areas simply by varying the trajectory of their migration, perhaps because of weather.

In the list of significant changes readers will find interesting data for speculation. It is important to remember, however, that this is the list of those species for which the statistical confidence range about the estimated percentage annual change (the range within which the true figure is apt to occur) does not contain zero. If the true figure might be zero (the confidence range includes zero), the change is considered to be not significant. So there are some birds for which the indicated change may be greater than that of some of the birds in the list above but, mainly because of lower numbers of sightings and – consequently – larger confidence ranges, we cannot be sure that their status really has changed.

Reference

Ethier, D., P.Davidson, H.Sorenson, K. L. Barry, K. Devitt, C. B. Jardine, D. Lepage, and D. W. Bradley. 2020. Twenty years of coastal waterbird trends suggest regional patterns of environmental pressure in British Columbia, Canada. *Avian Conservation and Ecology* 15 (2):20. doi.org/10.5751/ACE-01711-150220.

Gone Fishing

Chris Siddle, Vernon

The Quiz

Here are 35 questions meant to test your background knowledge of birds, with a bias towards the birds of British Columbia. It is not a test of your ability to use a search engine.

1. The large northern sparrow that breeds only in Canada.
2. The often absurdly tame, conifer-needle-eating bird found in boreal forest.
3. This physiological feature enables an Osprey to keep a firm grasp on its food.
4. First published in 1934, this bird ID book revolutionized field identification.
5. *Columbarius*, *suckleyi*, and *richardsonii* are its subspecies in North America.
6. This seabird's nest was only discovered in 1974 (in N. America). Currently the bird is threatened by old growth logging and coastal development.
7. This zoological rule states that more heavily pigmented forms tend to be found in more humid environments.
8. This vulgar species was introduced far too successfully to North America in 1890–91 at New York's Central Park.
9. The only *Aquila* found across the Northern Hemisphere.
10. Written by Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher, this volume chronicled their 100-day birding journey around North America.
11. New Zealand's St. Stephen's Wren (aka Lyall's Wren) became extinct due to the predations of this creature.
12. The name for any area where males aggregate to engage in competitive displays in front of females.
13. Of all the raptors on BC's bird list, these two diurnal species have the widest distribution range of all raptors in the world.
14. The birth country of John James Audubon.
15. In December, 1900 Frank Chapman initiated this widespread birding activity.
16. Arguably the rarest Australian bird, this species' rediscovery has been likened to discovering Elvis flipping burgers in an outback roadhouse.
17. The first nest known to Canada for this little nocturnal insectivore was discovered near Penticton in a Ponderosa Pine felled by a logger.
18. This goose grazes on natural grasslands on island volcanoes.
19. Alder and Willow flycatchers were once considered a single species. What was its common name?
20. Name the world's smallest bird.
21. In binocular terms, dividing the small number (the magnifying power) into the big number (the diameter of the objective lens) gives you what kind of ratio?
22. The tallest bird to have ever lived during human times was the Giant Moa. What is the modern name of the nation were the moa occurred.
23. Of the 13 species of owls that occur in BC, one owl has a subspecies restricted to part of the province. Name the owl species.
24. In recent decades this sugar-loving species has expanded its range northwards along the Pacific Coast and inland where low winter temperatures make winter survival a challenge.
25. The largest passerine in the world, this dark species may be the smartest bird on the BC list.
26. In southwest BC this species is most likely to be confused for a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.
27. This kind of birding trip is on the ocean, hopefully out of sight of land.
28. The Red-tailed Hawk and the Rough-legged Hawk belong to this group of broad-winged soaring hawks.
29. Another word for a full set of eggs.
30. On what part of a bird would you find the cere?
31. Ducks are lumped into four groups in BC: dabbling ducks, diving ducks, mergansers, and stifftails. What anatomical feature sets mergansers apart from all the other ducks?
32. The common name for BC's water ouzel.
33. Brightening many a Christmas Count, this colourful but somewhat reclusive passerine comes out of the conifers to sing a weird, single long whistle.
34. By the early 1980s this aerial insectivore had almost vanished from southwest British Columbia, but establishment of suitable nest boxes, especially in coastal areas, brought it back.
35. Where in BC would you go to study Northern Shrikes year-round.

Answers are on the next page.

Below: Downy Woodpecker by Sage Pasay, Quesnel.

Briefing 3

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Scientist Cormorants

"Inshore waters" are difficult to survey. This encompasses the zone between the shore and depths of 10 metres or more, depending on the irregularity of the bottom – hence hazard for boat navigation. Yet it is precisely the area where detailed information about water depth and currents is most critical. Ship time for surveying is also very expensive. Fixed moorings are possible, but return information from only one point, while autonomous underwater vehicles (self-piloted robotic rovers) face difficulties in the sometimes violent wave conditions of inshore waters and are also expensive. Who can sample these waters safely, economically and comprehensively? Cormorants!

The family *Phalacrocoracidae* (cormorants) consist of about 40 species of relatively large, mainly inshore marine diving birds. They may execute as many as 100 dives a day to depths of as much as 80 metres in search of food. They are also sufficiently docile for humans to be able to work with them (most readers will know of their use in southeast Asia as fishers for humans' benefit). Researchers have addressed the inshore survey problem by attaching miniature data sensor/recorder/transmitter packs to the birds' backs. These provide information on water properties as the birds dive, and on water surface conditions when they rest on the surface. Sensors include a fast response thermistor (for temperature), conductance probe (salinity), pressure sensor (depth) and an "inertial measurement unit" (IMU) to sense the bird's position. Full depth is inferred from analysis of the bird's dive trajectory, the shape of which identifies when/if the bird has descended to the seafloor. When the bird is on the surface, the IMU measures wave height and frequency as the bird bobs on the waves, while the thermistor senses air temperature. The package also contains a GPS to locate the bird in geographic space, a cell-phone type transmitter to send information to shore (from the water surface), and a solar cell to recharge the unit's batteries. All this is stuffed into a 40 gram package! In use, individual units have continued to perform for periods of up to two years.

In the Columbia River estuary, where shoaling due to sand deposition from the sediment load of the river poses a hazard for ship navigation, researchers have recruited 22 Brandt's Cormorants in order to obtain updated depth and water column data. These are relatively large cormorants – typical weight being about 2.1 kg – so that the instrument package weighs only about 2 percent of the bird's weight. Hardly noticeable. Since 2019 these birds have completed more than 300,000 dives. The information returned has shown that some of the maps and information based on earlier, relatively sparse information gathered from boats incorporated significant errors. While the birds are relatively faithful to their home waters, some do wander. The Columbia cormorants have recorded data as far north as our 'Salish Sea' (Strait of Georgia) and as far south as the central California coast.

Additional trials with cormorants have been conducted at Middleton Island in the Gulf of Alaska with Pelagic Cormorants (1.9 kg) and in the Arabian Gulf (Abu Dhabi) using Socotra Cormorants, a smallish tropical cormorant listed as "vulnerable" by the IUCN. The particular interest in this bird is its reputation for being able to remain submerged for up to three minutes, implying that it is a deep diver. Altogether, more than half a million dives have been recorded so far, making cormorants champion marine field scientists.

Reference

Orben, R. A., A. G. Peck-Richardson, G. Wilson, D. Ardağ, and J. A. Lerczak (2021). Cormorants are helping characterize coastal ocean environments, *Eos*, 102, doi.org/10.1029/2021EO163427. Published on 23 September 2021.

Who, me? A damp Double-crested Cormorant. CNK photo.

Quiz: Answers

1. Harris' Sparrow
2. Spruce Grouse
3. Scales on the bottom of the foot
4. *Field Guide to the Birds*
5. Merlin
6. Marbled Murrelet
7. Gloger's Rule
8. European Starling
9. Golden Eagle
10. *Wild America*
11. Domestic cat or lighthouse keeper's cat
12. A lek
13. Peregrine Falcon and Osprey
14. Haiti
15. The Christmas Bird Count
16. Night Parrot
17. Flammulated Owl
18. Nene
19. Traill's Flycatcher
20. Bee Hummingbird
21. The exit pupil ratio
22. New Zealand
23. Northern Saw-whet Owl (Queen Charlotte Islands race)
24. Anna's Hummingbird
25. Common Raven
26. Hutton's Vireo
27. A pelagic trip
28. Buteos
29. A clutch
30. The beak or bill
31. Teeth-like projections on the bill
32. America Dipper
33. Varied Thrush
34. Purple Martin
35. The extreme northwest of the province. Haines Triangle or Atlin are also acceptable.

Editor's note: If you got all the answers right, I'm honoured to have you reading this publication. If you got no more than three wrong, get in touch because you deserve a column of your own.

Bird Photographers' Corner

Time to Retire the DSLR? Going Mirrorless, Part 2

Clive Keen, Prince George

The EVF Advantage

In the last edition I explained that I'd just bought a Nikon Z7 ii, and my first impressions were of the following advantages offered by the central feature of mirrorless cameras: the electronic viewfinder (EVF).

1. With mirrorless cameras, what you see through the viewfinder is what you get when you press the shutter. That is absolutely not the case with a DSLR, as I've found far too often to my cost. (E.g 100 potentially marvellous shots of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches which I had to throw away because I'd inadvertently switched to manual exposure.)

2. You can immediately see the exact result of exposure compensation, and never have to take your eye off a bird to stare at the monitor and adjust the exposure while the bird flies away. (Binthere, dunthat, countless times.)

3. The viewfinder is always bright, however low the light conditions: wonderful in shadows, dark forests, twilight, etc, where I'm often blind.

4. You can switch to DX mode from FX, gaining the magnification advantage, with the viewfinder image increasing accordingly – great for birds that are too far away for full-frame shots.

I can now add two more EVF advantages. First, there is an excellent diopter adjustment, which allows for a clear viewfinder image for us eyeglass wearers whether we are wearing the glasses or not (I shift often). Secondly, there is a greatly increased amount of information offered through the viewfinder – and it is crystal clear, because of that diopter adjustment. One of my bad habits is forgetting to take off exposure compensation, and the EVF prevents this in two ways – first, through the WYSIWYG function, and second, because the precise exposure compensation is shown digitally in the viewfinder. I can indeed see all the information that matters to me – and of course it is customizable, so you can display just the information you want.

Other EVF Benefits

The absence of a mirror allows for very fast continuous bursts (the Z9 will offer 30 shots a second), and since there is no mirror slap, there is no concern about the consequent vibrations. In the absence of a mirror, the camera can also be set for complete silence, which can be invaluable when photographing from a hide, or when close to nervous birds.

Downsides?

There's always a lot to learn in moving to a new system, and the manual for the Nikon Z7 ii is 852 pages long. It's an easy read, fortunately, and much of it can be skimmed, because you know you won't use the feature in question. Some will find this far from a chore, anyway, as there are many new, rather incredible, features to read about – far too many to list here.

A more significant problem in moving to a new system is that old-system lenses can only be used with an adapter, which is never ideal. I had a particular problem with my main birding lens, a Tamron 150–600 G2, as it would only work with the new camera after receiving a firmware update, which required spending $150 on special equipment which only arrived after my Costa Rica trip (see page 12) – the reason I'd bought the camera. This has been the worst problem I've come across, adding frustration, delay, and significant cost.

The downside of mirrorless cameras most often mentioned in reviews concerns their battery life. Batteries in DSLRs last a remarkably long time, but this is not true of mirrorless, which I'm told can restrict you to 300 shots before going dead. I don't see this as particularly troublesome, as it is easy enough to carry a second and even a third battery. Again, though, there's more fiddle and cost.

Some people find the size of mirrorless cameras a bit of a problem. They are a lot thinner than DSLRs, as the flip-up mirror box is no longer needed, and this can make for more fiddly controls: indeed, my fingers don't seem to want to go to those very useful function buttons on the Z7. Of course, some people will be pleased with the smaller, lighter cameras. They do away not just with the mirror, but with the prism, so while the D500 body weighs 860 g, the Z7 body weighs 705 g – an 18% reduction.

The Future

An advantage of mirrorless that I've not flagged, because it is not currently too evident, lies in lens design. The "throat" of the mirrorless camera (where lenses attach) is a fair bit larger than with DSLRs, and the distance between the lens and the sensor is also significantly less; these two factors apparently open up a number of new opportunities for lens improvement. Perhaps they do, but at the moment, while there is a huge array of available DSLR lenses, there is a serious paucity of the mirrorless kind. When I bought the camera, Nikon offered nothing longer than 200 mm in Z mount, good grief, so I was stuck using older lenses with the adapter. But that is changing – Nikon brought a 100–400 lens while I was writing this article – while DSLRs will not. Numerous technological advances are being incorporated into mirrorless cameras (the Z9 will automatically focus on the eye of a flying bird), while DSLRs look to be stuck in a time warp. Manufacturers have made up their minds about the future, even if the rest of us haven't.

Slam-dunk to Upgrade?

But hold on. Something we should never forget is that DSLRs take fantastically good shots of birds. Many great shots on a DSLR would be not a jot better on a mirrorless. Why, then, change? The answer for many, especially when they see the price (the Z9 body is $6,999), will be "Fergeddit!" I went the other way, believing that the newer cameras will give me a higher proportion of winners. Much of the time there may be no difference, but there will be some shots that a mirrorless will take in its stride where a DSLR will struggle.

If my bank balance had been less forgiving, no doubt I'd have held off for a year or more. Holding off would also give time for new lenses to appear in reasonable numbers, so I'd never suggest that there's any hurry.

But cameras eventually get old, and my DSLR, wonderful though it still is, is definitely past its prime. If we live long enough, the issue for bird photographers will surely boil down to *when* to make the change.