BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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Ruffed Grouse by Bob Steventon. See page 3 and the back cover.

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 (online version) is a benefit of membership in the society. A hard-copy version will be posted to members for a $12 annual premium.

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 400–600 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 tend to be inappropriate.

Articles should be in plain text, either as the content of an email, or as an attachment (preferably Word). Photographs should be in mid-resolution jpg (preferably 1–4 MB, and 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

Advertising Rates

Full page: $125 per issue. Contact editor for other options.

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Steve Cannings Award Committee: Gary Davison, Clive Keen.

Conservation and Education Committee: Gary Davidson (Chair), Stephen Partington, Art Martell, Charles Helm, Marian Porter.

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

Quote of the Quarter

"Birding is just a fantastic excuse to get out and enjoy nature and explore the world. What's life without that?"

– Jared Clarke

Front and Back Cover Photos

On October 14, Bob Steventon (Prince George) was working at the compost bins behind his old wood-shed, taking his Nikon D500 and 500mm lens with him in case something interesting happened in his acreage. Some activity above him caught his attention: a grouse was strutting about on the roof of the shed. The bird moved up to the ridge of the roof and performed a drumming routine several times before sauntering to the roof edge, dropping down to the ground and strolling away. Bob had to back up some distance from the shed to take the photos, as the view with the 500 mm lens was too tight – a nice problem to have.

Right: Red-breasted Nuthatch by Sage Pasay (Quesnel).

Contents

President's Message

Gary Davidson, Nakusp

2023 Conference

Plans for next year's Vernon Conference are well underway. We have booked the Prestige Vernon Hotel for June 9, 10 and 11. In consultation with members of the North Okanagan Naturalist Club, (NONC), we have a tentative list of field trips and field trip leaders. And we have booked a dinner speaker. When the plans are complete, full details will be posted on the website and in the March newsmagazine. The hotel has booked 20 rooms for us at a conference rate. Please note that when you book your accommodation, use the following phone number – (250) 558-5991 – not the toll-free number on their website.

Steve Cannings Award

Elsewhere in this issue, I'd like to draw your attention to a notice (page 6) requesting nominations for the Steve Cannings Award. Criteria for the award are listed in the notice. I hope you will read this carefully and consider whether you know someone who is a worthy candidate. For many years this award was coordinated by Wayne Weber. Sadly, we lost Wayne earlier this year. The combination of the Covid pandemic and Wayne's health has meant that no award has been given during the last couple of years. The board is keen to remedy this situation; previously the award was given annually.

We are in the process of establishing a new committee to administer this award in the future. When a person is nominated for the award, their name remains on the nomination list indefinitely (or until they are given the award). Unfortunately, Wayne had the list and we have thus far been unable to locate it. Perhaps you had previously nominated someone and assumed their name remained on the list. Since that is no longer the case, you might want to consider re-nominating them. If you have never nominated anyone, give it some thought now. I'm sure there are worthy candidates out there somewhere!

Website Manager

You may have seen the appeal in the last newsmagazine, and again on the website, for a new website manager. For the past 12 years, George Clulow has done a terrific job of managing your website and keeping it up to date. But George is now ready to move on to other things. George tells me that he is "self-taught," so you don't need to be a computer expert! If you would like information on the website and the work involved, please contact George directly at gclulow@shaw.ca. The website is crucial to the smooth operation of the BCFO, so if you have any interest at all, please give it some thought.

Welcome New Members

Robin Weber - Sidney

Luc Ryan - New Hazelton

Yousif Attia - Richmond

Krista De Groot - Vancouver

Doug Bell - Denman Island

Rachel Foster - Vancouver

John Bradshaw - 100 Mile House

Rick McKelvey - Penticton

Brian McKenney - Gibsons

BCFO Director Deliberations

2023 Conference & AGM

Twenty rooms have been set aside for our members at The Prestige Vernon Hotel, which must be booked at least 30 days before the conference. The dinner speaker will be Richard Cannings, and progress is being made with booking afternoon presenters and field trip leaders. Full details will be given in the March edition.

The Name Game

A passing remark from a new member led to a discussion by the directors about the BCFO's name. The new member said he had not previously joined the organization *because he didn't realize he was entitled to – he was just a birder, not an ornithologist*. This raised an important point. Is the organization failing to reach many of the people BCFO was created to serve, by hiding behind a too-restrictive name?

The suggestion was made that the BCFO could retain the existing name for formal purposes such as for charitable status, but use a working title such as "Birds BC," for everyday communication and promotion.

Changing names always tends to stir strong emotions and shake things up, so can't be undertaken lightly. The directors will continue to discuss the issue. Do you have any views on the matter? Contact any of the directors, or write a letter to this magazine.

Steve Cannings Award

The death of Wayne Weber, the longstanding Chair of the Steve Cannings Award Committee, meant that the committee needed to be rethought. Directors agreed that on a temporary basis the committee would continue with Gary Davidson as Chair and Clive Keen as a member. It was also agreed that the existing criteria for the Steve Cannings Award needed to be expanded to recognize a wider range of individuals who have made major contributions to the causes for which BCFO was formed. A fourth criterion for the award was therefore agreed: "Distinguished service to BC Birding" (see next page).

BCFO Webmaster

A new webmaster for the BCFO website has not as yet been identified. See the President's Message (page 4) and the BCFO website for details about the vacancy.

Young Birder's Program

The Young Birders' Award program was recognized as in need of reinvigoration. Ideally, a leader for Young Birder trips would step forward, based either in Victoria or the lower mainland, as that is where the great majority of potential young birders are likely to be located. Alternatively, an individual might take on the Young Birder leadership role by finding ways of encouraging the activities and involvement of young birders throughout the province. Members are encouraged to forward ideas either through contacting a director or by writing to this magazine.

Membership Survey

Directors agreed to undertake a membership survey to get a better idea of the age demographics of members. Though membership is currently at a record level, it would be useful to understand whether there was a need to encourage more involvement from birders in a wider age range. Details of the survey will be announced in the new year.

British Columbia Birds, Volume 33

The latest edition of *British Columbia Birds* is now available at:

bcbirds.files.wordpress.com/2022/10/bcbirds-voume-33-opt.pdf

British Columbia Birds is a refereed journal published annually by BCFO.

Find the Birds

Adam Dhalla, a 2018 BCFO Young Birder, is planning to create a free version of his *Find the Bird* game to allow gameplay on large screens (see page 5). Directors unanimously agreed to contribute $500 seed money towards this project – the maximum allowed for in the bylaws. (Applications to the Conservation and Education Fund, which can disburse up to $2,000 per project, go through a different process.) The sponsorship message appearing when the game will open is shown below.

Notes

Magazine Rejigging

This is the second edition of *BC Birding* to be printed in colour. The change from monochrome has inspired some other improvements in the publication's look-and-feel. The main font has now been changed to Calibri, replacing the serifed Times New Roman: sans-serif fonts tend to look less scholastic, and so are more suited to a newsmagazine. Calibri also looks less busy. Though it is less economical, taking up ten percent more space than Times, the reduction in density makes for a more relaxed reading experience. Matura Script, which was previously used to give distinctive page headings, has also been replaced, partly because of its low readability when capitalized. The new font has the peculiar name of *Elephant*.

The front cover has been tidied a little, and colour has been added to the banner, though a more thorough redesign would be preferable. Readers with expertise in graphic design are urged to contact the Editor if they could look into this, or if they have further ideas for improving the look and feel of the magazine.

2022 Audubon Photography Awards: Liron Gerstman

Congratulations to Liron Gertsman (Vancouver) whose photograph of a White-tailed Ptarmigan was the winner in the Professional Category of this year's Audubon Photography Awards, and whose video of a Sharp-tailed Grouse was the winner in the Video Category. Another of his photographs, of a pair of Sharp-tailed Grouse, received the Professional Honorary Mention. See

www.audubon.org/magazine/summer-2022/the-2022-audubon-photography-awards-winners-and

Liron, who became a BCFO Young Birder in 2018, did not stop there. Among Audubon's Top 100 Photographs were another two by him: a shot of a Wood Duck at Reifel, and a group of Bald Eagles in the Fraser Valley. You can see them and the rest of the magnificent hundred, which were selected from almost ten thousand shots, at:

https://bit.ly/3CMRYEK

The Steve Cannings Award

Nominations Sought

The Steve Cannings Award has been presented by BCFO since 2007 to honour the memory of Steve Cannings, an outstanding amateur ornithologist, naturalist, photographer, and conservationist. The Steve Cannings Award recognizes someone who has made significant contributions over a long period of time in one or more of the following areas:

1. Research on bird biology or ecology, or detailed documentation of the birdlife of any portion of BC
2. Conservation of birds or of bird habitats in BC
3. Public education about birds in BC
4. Distinguished service to BC birding.

Presentation of the award is usually made at the annual BCFO conference.

Nominations are sought from any BCFO member. Nominations should include at least a brief statement as to why the nominee is deserving of the award. The Award Committee will follow up for more details as needed. All nominations for the award will be gratefully received.

Nominations should be sent to Gary Davidson, Chair of the Steve Cannings Award Committee, either by mail to P.O. Box 294 Nakusp, BC V0G 1R0, or by email to gsd37@yahoo.ca.

Find the Birds: Adam Dhalla

Another BCFO Young Birder from 2018 continues to make things happen. The fourth version of Adam Dhalla's *Find the Birds* game has been released, this time with the birding location of Illinois. The Nature Conservancy, Audubon, The Wetlands Initiative, and the Sun Foundation provided funding for this version, continuing to allow the game to be available for free.

Adam next plans to create a free version for PCs, downloadable from Steam, the number one PC game distribution website. This will allow gameplay on large screens, rather than the tiny screens of cell phones. He is currently looking for sponsorships, and BCFO has stepped forward (see previous page).

For the latest information on *Find the Birds* – it has been covered in detail in a number of editions of this magazine – head to findthebirds.com.

BC Bird Alerts

Since the deadline for the September edition of this magazine, the following alerts were issued:

- BROWN BOOBY, Delta, Nov 14
- BELL'S VIREO, Victoria, Nov 6–9
- ACORN WOODPECKER, Port Moody, Nov 1
- BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER, Fort St. John, Oct 29–Nov 4

(cont)

- Two EURASIAN SKYLARKs, Ucluelet, Oct 24–28
- ACORN WOODPECKER, Ladner, Oct 8–10
- EURASIAN SKYLARK, Haida Gwaii, Oct 2–3
- CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, Harrison Hot Springs, Sept 22
- LARK BUNTING, Victoria, Sept 20
- HAWAIIAN PETREL off Cape Scott, Vancouver Island, Sept 18
- CURLEW SANDPIPER, Delta, Sept 2
- NORTHERN PARULA, Ucluelet, Aug 27
- EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL, Sechelt, Aug 15

See bcbirdalert.blogspot.com

BWD & BC

BWD, as *Birdwatchers' Digest* now labels itself, included "Spotlight on British Columbia" in its September/October edition. It was a very brief report, mostly just showing a map with the rough location of twelve BC hotspots, but it did include the BCFO among five recommended Birding Resources.

Rodenticides Banned

The Province has banned the use of anti-coagulant rodenticides because of their impact on owls and other wildlife. See

www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-permanently-bans-rat-poison-1.6633727

Not Bad for a Youngster

A Bar-tailed Godwit aged just four months has set a new world record by completing a nonstop 11-day migration of 13,558 km from Alaska to Tasmania.

How Are Birds Faring?

The 2022 *State of the Birds* report can be found at www.stateofthebirds.org/2022/

Haikubox.com

A remarkable device called the Haikubox would now be available if it had not immediately sold out. The rush to buy is not surprising. The device, shown below left, attaches to the outside of houses and monitors bird sounds, alerting you when a new species is identified. If any reader manages to obtain one, please write a review for this magazine. See:

https://haikubox.com/

Sport for the Snowed-In?

A suggestion for a snow day: see how many species of birds you can spot on live bird cams. You could start with Cornell's feederwatch cam at Sapsucker Woods, but there are many more. Camwatching could be a whole new sport for the house-bound.

www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/cornell-lab-feederwatch/

Below: An American Kestrel eating a European Wall Lizard, photographed by Val George (Victoria) at Martindale Flats in Saanich, 29 October 2022.

Bird Listers' Corner

Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows

Listers' Corner has been a popular feature for BCFO members for many years. It was my pleasure to pen Listers' Corner since 2011. As I indicated in my March article I have stepped down as its author after 10+ years.

Thankfully Kathryn Clouston has graciously accepted to take on the task for the 2022 listings and hopefully beyond. As of this writing Kathryn is enjoying a birding adventure in Ecuador so I have volunteered to pen this announcement.

To review last year's edition see the March 2022 issue at:

bcfo.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/march2022.pdf

To participate please submit your life & year totals, as of December 31, 2022, for the areas listed in the accompanying table. Most listed areas are those with historical published checklists. Other areas may be suggested by submitting a total. The number following each area in the table is the threshold level for submissions, in most cases 50% of species recorded. You may report levels below the threshold; space permitted they will be included.

For diehard AviSys users out there the 2022 taxonomy and world checklist updates are available at https://avisys.info/update/.

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

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) offshore from 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 Provincial Park BUT the historical Vancouver Checklist does!

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

Submissions

Email your list(s) to morrisoncreek@yahoo.ca or mail to Kathryn Clouston, 1540 Embleton Cres, Courtenay, BC V9N 6N8.

Deadline is February 1, 2023. All submissions will be acknowledged if the member's email address is known. If you don't get an acknowledgement, your listings weren't received.

BCFO LISTING REPORT FORM
December 2022

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) ....

Avian Encounters

After the Lord Mayor's Show Comes the Dung-Cart

Jo Ellen Floer (Cranbrook) and her husband were birding along the dike at Duck Lake in Creston when they noticed two substantial piles of objects, each one inch in diameter. A mystery. When they returned a little later, the mystery of the piles' origin was solved. Six Trumpeter Swans – two adults and four young – had returned to one of the piles, apparently not having completed their business there. An internet search failed to find anything mentioning this characteristic of swans.

Not Without a Fight

Dennis Forsyth watched this Common Loon fishing in a shallow bay on Denman Island, coming up with a Staghorn Sculpin. The sculpin attempted to avoid being swallowed by rigidly extending its gill covers and pectoral fins. The defence failed. The backward pointing, teeth-like structures in a loon's mouth make its grip on a largish, slippery fish unescapable.

Harassment in the Workplace

Jan Kerr was parked by East Shuswap out of Kamloops when she saw this Bald Eagle land on an electricity pole, attracting harassment from a group of blackbirds.

Knowing the bird would fly at some point, Jan sat and waited on the hood of her truck and set her Canon t7 + 70–300 zoom for birds in flight. When the Eagle flew towards her, it could be seen to be panting from the effort of carrying an impressive trout while evading a group of tormentors.

Sad sighting

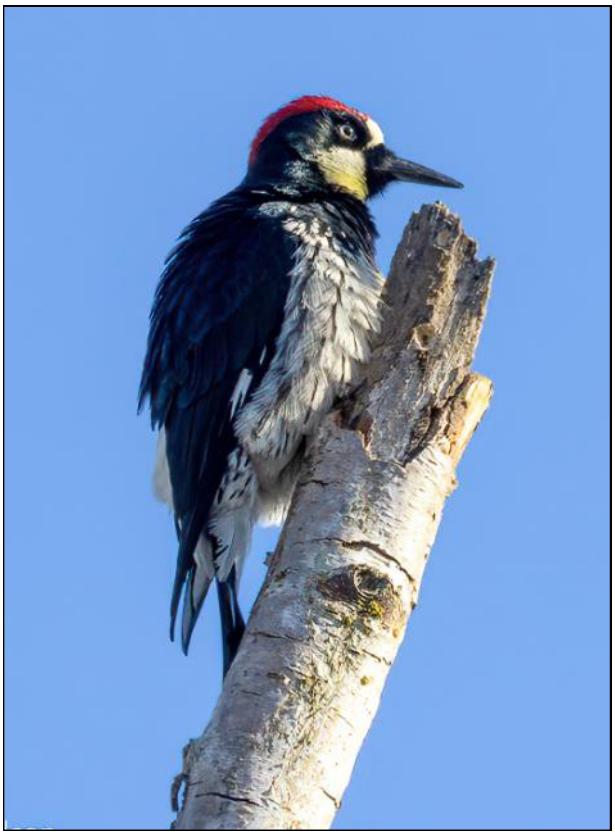
Gary Davidson (Nakusp) spotted a Common Loon nest on Armstrong Lake, and feared that the rising water would flood the nest. On a subsequent visit there was regrettably no sign of the nest, and no young were seen on the lake this year. Nesting failure is of course nothing new – those of us who monitor swallow nests know it only to well – but is always disheartening.

Sad Tail

This Juvenile White-Crowned Sparrow was spotted by Kevin Krebs (Vancouver), at Jericho Park in Vancouver. Perhaps a close encounter with a cat?

Rare Double

On October 11 Scott Edwardson (Delta) spotted not one, but two rarities: an Acorn Woodpecker and no less than four California Scrub Jays. He writes:



"Both species were observed harvesting acorns. I first noticed the Scrub Jays while walking in Ladner Harbour park. They were flying from perch to perch along the harbour shore. After ten minutes or so I then spotted the Acorn woodpecker. After some time I noticed that both species were flying between the park and a nearby neighbourhood across the river where there are a number of large acorn trees that the birds were gathering the acorn nuts from. The birds would then bring the nuts back to the park side and stash them in various trees. There were also some Northern Flickers that seemed agitated and were following the jays and woodpecker when they left their perch. It almost seemed like they were snooping around seeing what the newcomers were up to."

Both photos by Scott Edwardson

We'll Take It Anyway

The UVIC Birdwatching Club were on Mount Tolmie taking part in an Introduction to Hawkwatching event. This Horned Lark didn't add to their raptor score, but they were happy to take it anyway.

Photo by Liam Ragan.

Spotlight on Senior Birders

Carlo Giovanella, Surrey

On occasion, this newsmagazine contains articles that specifically feature our Young Birders. That is a welcome theme, as these youngsters are so very skilled, enthusiastic, and deserving of our attention and support. At the same time, the other end of the age spectrum of the birding community is not often mentioned. This brief article modestly attempts to address that shortcoming.

The photograph presents (as far as we are aware – apologies to anyone missed) the three oldest active birders in the Metro Vancouver Area. On the left is me, the youngest of the trio (not yet having quite attained full human height), Dave Schutz is in the middle, and on the right is Brian Self, the most senior and longest-birding birder of all. Together, about 140 years of birding experience is represented here!

Us "Old Guys" have witnessed first-hand the sweeping changes that have taken place in the world of birding over the decades. Recently I have been composing a blog in which I summarize the changes as I perceive them. This blog will be posted soon, under the title "Fifty Years of Birding," and it will be viewable at:

https://rokman61.wordpress.com/

Birding Trivia Quiz

Aiva Noringseth, Saanich

Test your knowledge (or powers of best-guess) with this eclectic assortment of BC Birding trivia.

1. This small, compact seabird species is highly maneuverable while foraging under water, and has been clocked flying at nearly inconceivable speeds of over 80km/h while traveling between open water and its nest in mature, inland forests.

2. eBird divides British Columbia into regional "counties," such as Central Coast, Bulkley-Nechako, and Fraser-Fort George. How many such "counties" are there?

3. The northernmost eBird HotSpot in BC is:

(a) Swift River area – Alaska Hwy (Stikine, CA-BC)

(b) Atlin–town (Stikine, CA-BC)

(c) Petitot River crossing, Liard Hwy (Northern Rockies, CA-BC)

(d) Coal River Trail–trailhead (Northern Rockies, CA-BC)

4. Providing a spectacle for the residents of Courtenay in late spring, this species of aerial insectivore swarms into the city's museum chimney to roost while on migration.

5. This primarily crepuscular owl is often described as flying in a slow, moth-like manner.

6. How many species of chickadees (genus *Poecile*) are found in BC?

7. Along the Pacific Northwest coast, many Indigenous languages identify this thrush as the Salmonberry Bird, as its arrival in spring corresponds with the seasonal ripening of salmonberries.

The answers are on page 22.

Donald Duck Was Framed

A loud "Quack!" was heard from the scene of the crime. Donald was arrested. But only female Mallards and barnyard ducks say "Quack!" Males produce just a muted *rabrab*. Cherchez la femme.

Geese, Deer, & Good Neighbours

Dennis Forsyth, Denman Island

One of the many changes I have noticed in a relatively long lifetime of observing and photographing wildlife is a relaxation of the absolute rejection of anything resembling anthropomorphism. Sixty years ago, while I was attending the Alberta Forestry Wildlife Officers Training School, the biology instructors were adamant that we should never ascribe human motivations or emotions to any other members of the animal kingdom. Happily, I think, today most of us are much more at ease with finding that we are not the only living things that form emotional relationships. And not just within specific species, but that we all live in an inter-connected world.

On the small island I live on we have very healthy populations of Columbian Black-tailed Deer and Canada Geese. These animals share a liking for the many hay fields and pastures on offer. Not surprisingly both species can often be found sharing a field. Over the past year however I have observed and photographed what seems to me to be a much more intimate bonding behaviour.

Local deer here have what I think is an extended breeding season. Does here often seem to produce fawns quite late into the summer. These late fawns then become subject to what must be a fairly traumatic experience when the next rut begins and a mature buck drives the young deer off and collects the mother up into a harem. For the young fawn, suddenly abandoned by its mother, the world must all of a sudden become a big, scary, and lonesome place. So, I am never surprised to find at this time of year to regularly see lone fawns come into the pastures to hang out with a flock of grazing geese (an example is right above). I suspect there is some comfort to be had there. What I am recently finding more surprising is evidence that these relationships may become extended over time.

Last year in late fall I watched a mature Black-tailed buck show up every day for more than a week to walk through a nearby pasture and seemingly choose to move into a flock of adult Snow Geese who were over-wintering here. While there were Canadas in the same field, this individual seemed to prefer the Snows.

This summer there was an even more interesting encounter. On the beach below my house one afternoon I watched as another mature buck walked calmly along the waterline apparently accompanying a small flock of Canada Geese who were swimming along with it. Most surprising was that when the geese reached a small, shallow cove and swam into it to feed, the deer waded out into belly-deep water and stayed in their company for about five minutes. It wasn't feeding, of course, but seemed for all the world to just be visiting. Then, the capper, when the deer left the water to walk into the shrubs and bushes along the shoreline, the geese left the water and followed him.

I have no real idea about what it was that I was observing there, but I do have conjectures. Maybe some of those abandoned fawns that take up with geese for company retain some sense of community with this other species. And, a bigger stretch I admit, maybe some of the geese can remember fostering a four-legged youngster.

Photos by author.

UVic Birding Club

Inter-University International Big Day

Hannah Hickli and Simone Littledale

The University of Victoria Birdwatching Club (est. 2020) is a collaborative community of young birders based out of our local university, located on the traditional and unsurrendered lands of the W̱SÁNEĆ and lək̓ʷəŋən peoples. Our goal is to enrich youth birding culture across the South Island by creating welcoming, accessible, and educational opportunities for fledgling birders. When we heard of the opportunity to participate in an inter-university Big Day collaboration, we couldn't have been more thrilled to connect to international groups strengthening the same purpose. The inter-university Big Day was a concept borne out of the Ornithology Club at Ohio State University, which first welcomed collegiate birding clubs across the world to compete by birding in their home region (in our case, the Capital Regional District) in March of 2022. Each club was to create a trip report on eBird, collecting checklists submitted by members throughout the day in order to tally the species observed and crown a Big Day champion. As a young club, there is always uncertainty of how many people out there are interested in participating (especially for such stakes as defending our honour), but we have been thrilled to see dozens of young birders participate in the competition.

In March, UVic faced off against American birding clubs, with foes such as Ohio State, University of California Davis, and Cornell University, ultimately coming in third place with our team identifying 112 species over the course of the day. This October, we reached out for a rematch, garnering participation not only within North America but from schools as far afield as Chile. Groups of club birders covered nearly the entire breadth of the CRD region, from morning seawatch in Sooke to last-minute scrambling for big misses — such as this year's incredibly tardy Buffleheads — in Sidney. We had birders competing sunrise to sunset, for a few minutes in between their daily plans, in the rain, and from their living room window. It was a decidedly gloomy westcoast day with an atmospheric river looming above and an agreement amongst the seabirds to be as reticent as possible.

By the end of the day, we had amassed 44 eBird checklists and identified 118 bird species. Highlights of the Big Day included American Dipper; singing happily in the stream, as if in celebration of the fins that broke the clear water around them, signaling, finally, the arrival of a favorite fall food source: salmon roe. A solitary Band-tailed Pigeon was seen perched on a lamp post along the coastal bluffs of the Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary, huddled miserably against the rain and wind alongside its naturalized urban brethren. A few more annual rarities were picked up including Swamp Sparrow, Canvasback, and Harris's Sparrow. It was a day that highlighted the joy to be found in "embracing the suck" with friends. It is much easier to shake off the cold and appreciate small things with good company—like sitting in the rain just a little longer to coo at the Northern Shovelers forming an adorable duck vortex.

It seems like more young people than ever are birding, many coming out of the first few waves of the pandemic with a novel or renewed interest in the pursuit of feathered friends. While embraced in a time of unprecedented isolation and for being a primarily personal pursuit, birding has proved a crucial connection point for many of us. We hope that by competing against (and consistently crushing) other university birding clubs around the world, we will continue to foster connections and community across the varied lands that the birds we love rely on.

You can find our club on Facebook (UVic Birding Club) and Instagram (@uvicbirdingclub). Tell your friends to join us in our future endeavours!

Below: One of many UVic's Big Day memes.

Saving *Rufous Procrastinatus*

Clive Keen, Prince George

Every October in Prince George we're on the lookout for young Anna's Hummingbirds, as they disperse in the autumn and can find themselves in inappropriate places too far north. As a result, I wasn't too surprised when my wife announced on October 9 that she'd had a clear sighting of a hummingbird in our yard. Since Anna's have been the only hummers ever seen in Prince George in October, I duly reported an Anna's to eBird – soon deleting it, for reasons that follow.

On October 21 I spot a hummingbird in the garden, and take a long-distance record photograph to confirm its identity. Blowing up the tiny speck (right) I discover to my great surprise that it is in fact a Rufous. Most Rufous hummers leave Prince George by the middle of August, and the latest record we'd ever had was mid-September.

Sometimes good sightings aren't so very good – how could the bird survive? The weather was currently unseasonably warm, so we were hoping that as soon as the temperature returned to normal the bird would take the hint and wing its way south. But the bird was still hanging around on October 26 when snow and sub-zero temperatures had finally arrived. Fifteen below zero was expected in a few days. Time to take action.

Bird banders apparently have a special device allowing hummingbirds to be caught easily, but not having one handy, I took some online advice and set up a bird cage with a hummingbird feeder inside. With some string tied to the door, it was a matter of waiting for the bird to enter and giving the string a yank.

Only someone with infinite patience would wait for two days for the bird to enter the cage and successfully close the door. Fortunately, I'm married, and she-of-infinite-patience proved far better at pulling strings than me, finally succeeding on the morning of October 28. I'd long since given up, particularly after the bird sat on the string leading to the cage, as if to thumb its nose at us.

Wait a minute … that's not an Anna's!

Having captured the bird – and being reminded how tiny and perfect hummers are – the formidable task of relocating the bird south loomed. But again, I discovered the great benefits that marriage can bring. A highly suitable mode of hummer transport was soon created in front of my eyes, and before long, off went my wife on the 800k drive south. On the evening of October 28, the still-healthy bird was released and provided with a well-stocked hummingbird feeder, to ensure it would have some initial nourishment in its new location.

A great sigh of relief reverberated through the local birders' listserv, whose members had been following the saga with bated breath. One subscriber wrote "The little hummer had us strung along all week waiting in anticipation of the capture and journey south! Thrilled and relieved …."

Good news stories can soon find their way into the media, and the local TV station and then Global News, CBC Radio and the CBC national website carried the story, leading to a flood of congratulations. It's pleasing that so many people can be touched by small acts of kindness.

One version of the media coverage can be seen at:

ckpgtoday.ca/2022/11/02/local-rescue-mission-saves-hummingbird/

"Look out Tweetie-Pie, it's a twap …"
(Online comment by Roger Wheate.)

Chasing a Bluethroat

Spain 2022

Andy & Marilyn Buhler, Vernon

Several years had gone by without the possibility of taking any birding tours. Covid had put a damper on any thoughts of travel, for birding or otherwise. By early 2022 we, like most people, really needed a break. However, another complication was that we had had a brush with cancer in 2020–21 so we did not want to push ourselves with the usual challenges of tropical birding. Spain provided a possible option – Europe, spring, healthcare nearby, many of the "mod cons" present. After some booking trials (we were eventually the only participants) we were confirmed to travel at the end of April for a 13-day sweep through central Spain from Malaga to Madrid.

Getting to Spain was much more of a challenge than we ever anticipated. What should have been a normal ten-hour flight became a 34-hour endurance race. "Toronto" and "Air Canada" are swear words in our vocabulary now, but that is a story for another time.

May 9, 2022 was the penultimate day of our guided 13-day birding tour of Spain. The itinerary for our tour contained the following paragraph:

"We first visit the Reserva Natural de Gredos, a spectacular park situated below the rugged 2,600m Pico Almanzor. Here we walk along trails, looking for Eurasian Buzzard, White-throated Dipper, Western Yellow and Gray Wagtails, Black Redstart, Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, Stonechat, Eurasian Crag and House Martins, European Goldfinch, Ortolan and Rock Buntings, and with luck Bluethroat, and we make extra effort to find the magnificent Spanish Ibex."

A few of those listed species we had already seen on our tour but Bluethroat was the guide's carrot that kept us going. Most Bluethroat have migrated back to northern climes by this late in the year, but our guide, and we, had hope that one or two might still remain to enjoy this Spanish spring.

Plans were for a pre-dawn start. Our guide made arrangements with the hotel staff to provide us an early continental breakfast since he wanted to get us up into the mountains before the sun rose over the horizon. The hotel complied – in a fashion.

Morning dawned early. Carefully, we negotiated our way in near-dark down to the dining room area. Luckily Marilyn had worn her headlamp. On the way to the dining room, we found light switches for the upper hallway and the staircase. However, we could not find a light switch anywhere for the dining room. Marilyn quickly scanned round the dining room and even in the nearby kitchen area using her headlamp. No useful switches could be found anywhere. Time was moving on. Our guide was antsy. There was nothing for it but to continue with what little light we had.

By the dim glow of the single headlamp, we located the table set for us tucked in a darkened corner. This was no coffee/tea and a croissant Continental breakfast! There were several beverage pots; one for leche, one for coffee and one for hot water. The pots were not labelled so Marilyn did a little test by pouring a tiny bit from each into a saucer to make sure what was what. A tea-granny, she does not drink coffee at all so was making certain she got the right pot.

In addition to the beverage pots, there were three bottles of peach juice, three plates, napkins, knives and forks. There was a tray that had several types of ham and six slices of a mild cheese. There was a basket of fruit with oranges, apples and kiwi fruit; another bowl with tea bags in it; a bowl with instant oatmeal packets; and a bowl of chopped dates. There was one little platter with three ramekins of orange jam, three ramekins of strawberry jam, three ramekins of olive oil, and sufficient pats of butter. Nearby was a basket of breads, three biscuits, and several slices of baguette. Another small basket held three cookies, three cupcakes, three pieces of chocolate cake, and three pieces of lemon loaf. There was a bottle of olive oil and a salt shaker. It was all very nicely presented and definitely sufficient. Now if they could only have supplied us with a light! We breakfasted carefully, but well, by headlamp.

The sky outside was just starting to lighten when we finished. By 7:25 we were driving out of the maze of roads that led to our hotel. The sun was just hitting the peaks of the mountains surrounding the valley. It was a very pretty morning, full of potential.

The plan for today was to drive to a parking lot up in the mountains, do a hike to the top, then bird on the way down. Our guide did not want to stop to bird on the way to the parking lot as he wished to get us on the mountain before any crowds arrived.

The snow on a couple of the nearby mountains seemed quite brownish. We were told that was because there had been winter windstorms coming from the Sahara. The winds had dumped quite a bit of sand onto the snow. You could actually see brown silt in some patches.

We were making good progress up a paved road on the way to the parking lot when suddenly, from

right above us, a herd of about two dozen Iberian Ibex bounded over the road right in front of the car. Our guide slowed a tad. Some Ibex paralleled us by running along our side of the road. They kept pace with us until suddenly, one group decided to speed along the road ahead of us. It was an amazing wildlife encounter!

Soon we arrived at the parking lot at the base of a hiking trail. It was a fairly large lot but there was only one other car there, probably a hiker's. As we got out of our vehicle, a friendly Dunnock, our first of the trip, came up to the car to see if we had disturbed, or had brought, breakfast for him. Unfortunately, he quickly left disappointed as our guide was on a mission to get up the mountain.

Now if you look back at that itinerary paragraph it states, “Here we walk along trails ….” I looked for a birding-type trail. Wrong! Trails in the mountains start with “up” and just continue going in that direction.

Our guide directed us to a spot with moderately rounded stones, all laid vertically IMHO! We got our hiking poles and checked that our footgear was secure. We needed our boots for ankle support and we sure needed our poles for stability. Much of the whole track had a rill running through and over the rocks, since spring sunshine was melting the snows above. The way was muddy and fairly slippery in many spots, especially as we neared the top. The soles of our boots got quite wet and became very slick.

Marilyn and our guide made fairly good progress in staged climbs. They had to stop fairly often to see whether I was still following. Actually, I had just stopped a few times to compile some photographic records of this trail for our trip diary. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it! We hiked up about 2 km taking care not to slip as Marilyn and I have old bones. It took us an hour to get to the top, a bit less to get down later.

Near the top of our hike there were the remains of an old rope-tow for what had once been a small ski hill there. The trail we had climbed was probably originally put in for four-wheel drive vehicles to reach, and take out, injured skiers, hikers or any foolish tourists.

Our guide finally stopped near a bit of a grassy meadow. There was a bushy area on our side of the meadow. I was glad of a bit of a breather. We scanned bush tops and the surroundings for any alpine birds. Dunnock! Dunnock! Yet another Dunnock! The bushes seemed rife with them!

Bluethroat by Andrej Chudi, Creative Commons.

My attention wandered. I found a nice dry stone, sat, and looked over at the ski area. Suddenly our guide yelled, "There it is!" Unfortunately, he was looking towards the other side of the meadow. By the time I got turned around and oriented, there were only the bush tops plus a few bobbing Dunnocks. The “it” had apparently been the Bluethroat. It had perched a fair distance away on top of a bush. It did not stay long.

Our guide kept looking as did we. Finally, far and away, on top of a well-weathered rock, a bird, which was NOT a Dunnock popped up. We all got fleeting glimpses. I thought that would be all we would see but persistence paid and, sure enough, a male Bluethroat again popped up on top of a weathered rock to survey his surroundings. We all got a much better view and even some distant, quick and fuzzy photos. Now we could tick the Bluethroat with confidence!

Once back at the parking lot Marilyn did her usual audio recording for our diary. This took longer than usual as even she did not have any extra puff to talk into our recorder.

I didn’t know whether coming down would be worse because of the slope, but it was about the same as going up. It was a little easier on the legs, but a little more treacherous on the footing, especially several particularly steep sections. Still, we managed and proved that two old folks could still hike, at least a little bit. I determined that neither of us had any broken ankles, knees or hips. We suffered no unusual chest pains, sprains or scrapes. Though tired and achy, we had made it both up and down safely.

On our hike down we spotted Rock Bunting, Wheatear, one Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush and still more Dunnocks.

It was now past time for elevenses. Our guide drove us down the mountain and we stopped in Hoyos del Espino at a little café, La Bodeguilla. Our hotel last night had been on the outskirts of that town. Marilyn ordered, and enjoyed, a “te negro con poco leche.” The barista knew how to “do” tea. He actually heated the milk, poured some into her cup, gave her a teapot of very hot water and a tea bag – her best tea yet on the trip. Life was good. It was even better since WE HAD SEEN THE BLUETHROAT!

A Thousand Days of Continuous eBirding

John Gordon, Surrey

It was a typical dull and dreary Vancouver morning, having just landed after a 15-hour flight from Sydney, Australia. After the warmth of Oz the cold breeze was quite a shock. I was jet lagged and in no mood to bird but I couldn't resist the sight of hundreds of Mallard in the ditches leading from the airport. I had become accustomed to submit at least one eBird list every day so I dutifully submitted another. The next day, still jet lagged and still raining, I didn't bother leaving the house; I didn't see any birds either: my Best Streak, as eBird calls it, was over. I was kind of relieved. Don't get me wrong, I find listing, ticking or counting birds one of the best ways to keep focused and grounded, but enough was enough. My streak had ended at 1,036 days.

I've used eBird to keep track of my birding exploits for nearly a decade. Before that I had neither guidebook nor an overriding interest in birds. That said, I did spend two weeks on Mittlenatch Island in the mid 1980s as a volunteer so I must have had some underlying interest in birds even back then.

Since retirement that has changed and I have kept a list. I originally began to use the eBird system after I had lost count of how many Canadian birds I had seen. I do have a few lists, mostly from the UK, Mexico and most recently Australia. The ones that matter most to me are the Canadian, BC, Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley regions. I'll never see all the birds, so whatever I see I am happy with and that's the end of the story.

The challenge of birding a thousand days began by chance. One day I just happened to notice on my eBird account that I had reached 654 days of continuous birding. I am not too sure why, but I decided – why not bird seven hundred and fifty, that's a good even number. That goal was reached, and of course why not then go for a thousand days? What I didn't know at the time was that the thousandth day would almost align with my thousandth species, a Sacred Kingfisher.

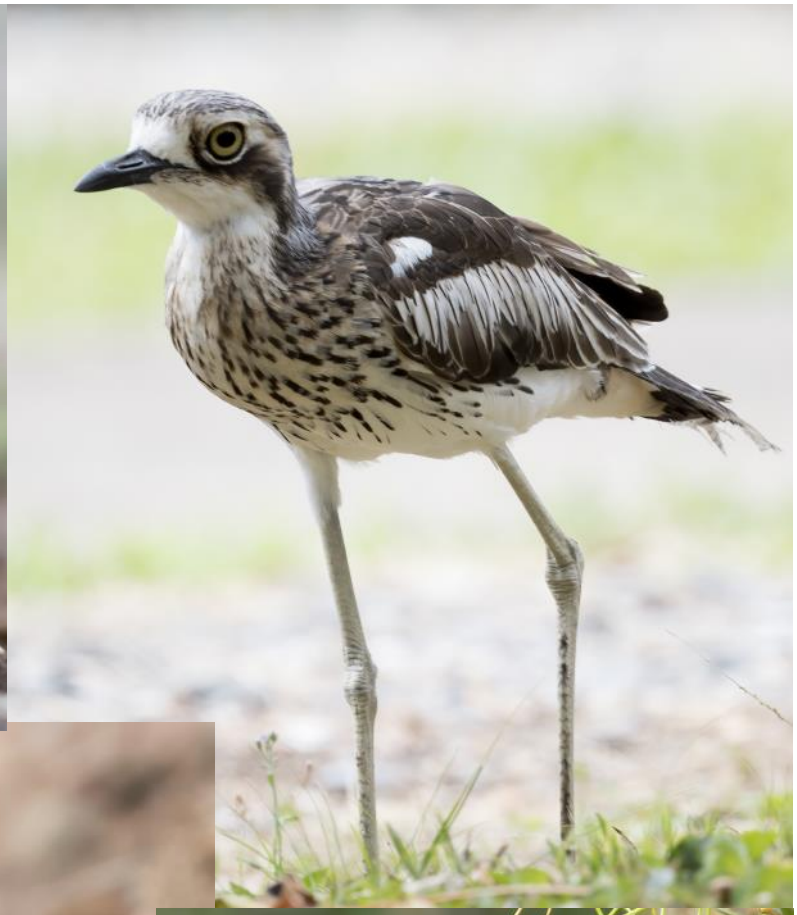
That said, I have never been really interested by numbers, though I can't handle seeing nineteen, twenty-nine or thirty-nine species on a walk: I'll often bird until a twentieth, thirtieth or fortieth appears, and sometimes this leads into a much longer trek. Occasionally it pays off with an unusual find; sometimes just with blisters. You can always count on birding.

The following are notes from my birding journal:

Day 1,000: Sept 25, 2022

I picked up 17 species walking around downtown Sydney and the Royal Botanical Gardens. Next morning I birded with Barry Lancaster [no relation to the Barry Lancaster from Oliver] a Birding Pal I had corresponded with online. He picked me up at the hotel along with another birder and we toured the Windsor area. Devastating floods had caused much damage to residential areas and farmlands. There was debris hanging off telephone wires, and mattresses in trees. The birds were scattered and the going was harder than normal. But Barry found us 68 lifers, so by the end of the day I had 87 Australian birds. A great start to my six-week family holiday in News South Wales and Uluru (Ayer's Rock).

Below: A Splendid Fairywren photographed by John Gordon in central New South Wales.



More From Oz eBirding

Top left: The Eastern Yellow Robin is a bird of open forests, woodland and coastal thickets. The bird eats insects but will take small geckos when available.

Top right: The Bush Stone-Curlew is nocturnal but is often seen during the daytime where it normally lies still as if sleeping.

Above: The Chestnut-breasted Mannikin is found in Northern Australia and the East Coast especially where tall grasses are prolific.

Right: The Rainbow Lorikeet is one the most common birds in Australia and can be found in rainforest, city park and gardens. Large flocks are common.

Photos and notes by John Gordon.

The Black Swift Project

Unravelling the Mystery of the Black Swift in BC: Discoveries and Next Steps

Rémi Torrenta,
BC Projects Coordinator,
Birds Canada

Following the teaser poster in the last edition of *BC Birding* about our Black Swift Conservation Project, our Birds Canada team wanted to give you some exciting updates and results from the 2022 fieldwork season.

The Black Swift is an Endangered aerial insectivore (and Blue-listed in BC) that mostly breeds in North America and spends the remainder of the year on migration or at non-breeding sites in South America. 80% of the global population of this species is thought to breed in Canada, with by far the majority in British Columbia. The main goal of our pilot project this year was to fill some knowledge gaps about this species – one of the most mysterious bird species in North America! This is due to two main reasons: (1) the birds spend most of their time in the air, flying and feeding for insects, and they rarely visit their nesting location; (2) nests are cryptic, built on inaccessible ledges or niches on cliff faces near waterfalls and canyons – themselves often located in remote areas!

For example, very little is known about the distribution of nesting sites in British Columbia; only ten nesting sites had been discovered in our province, although it is not uncommon at all to see Black Swifts feeding in the air during the day with other aerial insectivores. Its breeding behavior is also relatively unknown – e.g., how much time do adults spend at the nest during each breeding stage, and do they switch roles for feeding the unique chick?

During the 2022 fieldwork season, our team, composed of five Birds Canada staff but also six volunteer teams, surveyed 22 waterfalls across southwestern BC. In total, we conducted 44 site occupancy surveys (in order to confirm detection of the species at the waterfall site or not), and 20 nest searching and/or nest monitoring visits (in order to find nesting locations, and then collect breeding data).

We found a total of ten nests, seven of which were active nests and three inactive nests. Five of these active nests were discovered at the same waterfall site, and so it is the first coastal colony of Black Swift ever discovered in BC! Nobody would have thought that there was a colony there, but week after week we were able to find new nests – to our surprise – as we were monitoring the ones that we had previously discovered. We monitored all those active nests every week, until each juvenile fledged. At the colony location, all five juveniles fledged around the second week of September. We were able to collect important data about site-specific habitat requirements, local potential threats, breeding behavior, the timing of each breeding stage, and juvenile feather formation. We are excited to share that we will submit a manuscript to the scientific journal *British Columbia Birds* this winter! This publication will describe this colony and our findings, notably results from nest monitoring.

Black Swift site occupancy surveys – Photo by Rémi Torrenta.

But this is not the end of our project – it is actually just the beginning! We have been applying for funding for this conservation project, and so we will keep you updated about future work. More research is needed to fill knowledge gaps and so that conservation measures are put in place to prevent the further loss of the species. Indeed, the species appears to have declined by 87% over 1970-2019, and 44% over 2009-2019!

For the next years, we

have three main objectives:

Objective 1:
Keep raising awareness about the species and its habitat. We have been engaging with different groups, including First Nations, naturalist groups, outdoor recreationists, and municipalities. We will develop our communications around this project (brochures, website page, webinars, social media posts, The Warbler podcasts (thewarblers.buzzsprout.com), newsletter articles, (www.birdscanada.org/enews), and a BirdWatch Canada article (www.birdscanada.org/news-reports/birdwatch-canada).

One of the workshops we delivered this year about the Black Swift can be found at

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP8idKPbxX8

We will foster knowledge sharing, capacity building, and outreach, notably with Indigenous communities and the canyoning community, as they play a central role for Black Swift conservation. More than 30 different First Nations were contacted this year, and several of them are willing to be involved in this project, which is very positive news!

Above: Young chick fed by the two adults – Photo from a video by Kris Cu.

Objective 2
Survey potential or known breeding locations of the Black Swift across southwest BC. We will keep training target groups and volunteers for those specialized surveys, and we will produce a laminated Swift ID guide to aid in identification of Black Swift. Of course, we will keep monitoring the nests we found this year, as the species reuses its nesting sites year after year – fortunately for us! Hopefully we will fill more knowledge gaps associated with Black Swift through this collaborative research.

Objective 3
Promote Black Swift conservation at known breeding locations, and address the threat posed by direct human disturbance to Black Swift nests. Planning and implementing conservation actions will involve various stakeholders in this project, depending on the location. Conservation actions may include: in situ outreach activities, production of signage, stewardship work by Indigenous Guardians, habitat stewardship or protection, and mitigation of human-related disturbance – e.g. by outdoor recreationists.

Thanks
As a conclusion, we would like to thank the British Columbia Field Ornithologists for their financial support this year, and all our current and future partners involved in this project. Stay tuned!

Below: Juvenile almost ready to fledge – Photo by Kris Cu.

Briefing 1

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Albatrosses Do Career Development – They are Now Fishery Cops

Seabirds often follow ships at sea. They may be scavenging for edible material thrown overboard or searching the water churned up by the ship's propellers. On the other hand, marine authorities are interested in what vessels are where and what are they doing. This is a matter of safety, of sovereignty (in waters of Exclusive Economic Zones) and conservation of marine resources. Particular attention focuses on fishing vessels because their activities – whether legal or illegal – directly impact the world's fishery resources and, incidentally, much other marine life. But much of the world ocean is remote: surveillance of fishing activities by ship or aircraft at any practical level is prohibitively expensive. Satellite remote sensing permits vessels with appropriate positioning instruments to be located, but what they are up to remains obscure, and vessels up to no good – typically ones engaged in illegal fishing – habitually turn off their positioning instruments so they cannot be located.

Enter someone who frequents the remote oceans: the albatrosses. They are the champion cruiser of wide swaths of the world ocean, including its most remote regions. French investigators interested in marine conservation around French administered Kerguelen, Amsterdam and Ile Crozet – sub-Antarctic islands in the southern Indian Ocean (40-80°E;50°S) – have investigated the possibility that these birds can provide useful information on the location of "silent" vessels in the region.

While vessels may turn off their GPS at will in order to avoid being located, they all carry radar and use it continuously in order to avoid all possibility of a collision with another vessel. The French investigators have developed an instrument that detects ship's radar signals. Packaged with a GPS, a data transmission radio, a tiny solar panel for in-flight battery recharge, and some units with long-term "onboard" storage capacity, the units weigh 55 to 65 g. That is less than 1% of the weight of an adult albatross (protocols for attaching instruments to birds permit units of up to 3% of the bird's weight). In a test of the system's ability to detect ships, 169 units were deployed on Wandering Albatrosses and Amsterdam Albatrosses. The units were glued to feathers on the bird's back. Non-recording units were deployed on breeding adults (90

Below and next page: A Black-footed Albatross spotted off Tofino. CNK photos.

birds), who returned to their nest frequently where they could be captured for data download; recording units were attached to immature and juvenile birds, who might remain at sea for several years.

Albatrosses can detect a ship at up to 30 km distance and frequently home in on it, presumably to see if it might yield food. They habitually spend about two hours inspecting non-fishing vessel, but up to four hours or more following fishing vessels, hence their various encounters are relatively easy to discriminate in the records obtained, especially when the data are compounded with GPS records from most ships and the logs of ships on official business (naval and scheduled ships). During a six-month deployment (December 2018 – May, 2019), the birds recorded 632,333 vessel GPS positions and 5,108 radar detections, representing encounters with 353 different vessels (most with many repeated records, hence the high number of detections). A vessel "encounter" or "contact" means that the bird approached within 30 km of the ship. The contacts were distributed over more than 47 million km^2 of ocean stretching eastward from South Africa to New Zealand (about 145 degrees of longitude – almost half-way around Earth). Most contacts, however, occurred on the shelves or at the shelf edges around the southern ocean islands – the places where fishing is concentrated. Of the 353 contacts, the birds approached within five km of 70 vessels. The Wandering Albatrosses proved more curious than the Amsterdam birds, choosing to approach within 5 km of a vessel about 2.5 times more frequently than the latter. Only 10% of the birds failed to find any vessel during their travels.

Of the 353 vessel contacts, 72% could be matched to signals emitted by the vessel and recorded in the international automatic ship recording system. However, 28% had no match within 30 km of the albatross-detected position and were evidently running "silently." Within the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) surrounding the southern ocean islands 26% of vessels encountered were running "silently," increasing to 37% in international waters. Essentially all such cases were fishing boats. The occurrence of a vessel running silently could be reported to marine supervisory officials for the relevant ocean sector within hours of detection. If air or marine patrol craft were conveniently located, the vessel could subsequently be intercepted and inspected for its activities. In the region "patrolled" by the albatrosses the principal fisheries are a long-line fishery for southern Bluefin Tuna [*Thunnus maccoyii*] conducted mainly in international waters, and a Patagonian Toothfish a.k.a. "Chilean sea bass" fishery conducted around the ocean islands. (The tuna is listed as endangered by the IUCN.)

Fishing within an EEZ, relatively close to land, is easier to patrol than the open sea. However, the success of the albatross flights suggests that the birds might be effective deep-sea fishery cops, permitting substantially increasing detections of illegal fishers far from land. The activity is not without some danger to the birds, however, for they are prone to diving on baited long-line hooks with fatal consequences.

Reference

Weimerskirch, H. + 7 others. 2020. Ocean sentinel albatrosses locate illegal vessels and provide the first estimate of the extent of nondeclared fishing. PNAS (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* (U.S.A.)) 117: 3006-3014. www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1915499117

For information on the loss of seabirds, notably albatrosses, due to the longline fishery, see Anderson, O,R.J. + 6 others. 2011. Global seabird bycatch in longline fisheries. *Endangered Species Research* 14: 91-106. doi: 10.3354/esr00347. The paper is now dated, but contains comprehensive statistics. It can be accessed by googling "global seabird bycatch in longline fisheries."

Answers to Page 12 Quiz

1. Marbled Murrelet.

2. Currently, 28 counties.

3. d) Coal River Trail–trail head Northern Rockies, CA-BC is located at approximately 59°59'54.2"N, just shy of the Yukon border!

4. Vaux's Swift. The Courtenay Museum boasts a temporary roost of several hundred Vaux's each spring.

5. Short-eared Owl.

6. There are four species: Black-capped, Boreal, Chestnut-backed, and Mountain.

7. Swainson's Thrush.

For Your Ears Only

Corey Mazurat, Kelowna

Three Initial Steps

I was birding with a group and a Regional District guide in September and heard something which to me sounded like a jumbled mess of *chrrrp* and *pweeeet* and *ssssWrrrelll*. Our guide was explaining something to a recently-fledged birder but despite that he turned his head ever so slightly and rattled off the species with seemingly no more effort than he'd use reading a menu board at a coffee shop.

"Northern Shrike," he said. "American Pipits. Ruby-crowned Kinglet… and another Pipit."

In the minute or so it took me to flail unsuccessfully with my binoculars, then pull out my phone and activate Merlin, he was already walking off with the group towards a riparian area. Somehow, he'd heard leaves rustle in a way that was, he assured us, totally characteristic of Dark-eyed Juncos. Minutes later, as we all observed the small group of DEJU cavort in the bushes, I realized that the guide not only ID'd birds by song, but also by the way they shuffled leaves out of the way.

The fact that he is in his (very) early 20s didn't crush me at all, dear reader.

The guide told me his mother swears the first noises he made as a baby were bird imitations, and his pishing skills attest to that: on several occasions he triggered positive IDs on Merlin. Birding is essentially his only hobby. I realized his seemingly supernatural sound-ID skills reflect a lifetime of concentrated attention.

Earbirding – like juggling chainsaws – ultimately comes down to repetition. If you want to get good at it, you must practice, practice, and practice. In our case, though, the practice is more birding, and significantly fewer severed limbs, so I think it's a good thing.

If you're itching to attain Earbirding Bliss, try the following process:

1. Record birdsong for later study

Recording birdsong is easier than ever before using little more than the phone in your pocket. Compared to your phone's camera, which is basically useless for birding, the microphone is sensitive and accurate. Coupled with a recording app – even the stock video app works in a pinch – you can easily capture a clip filled with birdsong, calls, and sonations.

External recorders offer a big jump in quality and customization and are available at many price points. The Zoom H1N Handy Recorder is less than $130 at time of writing and works a treat. We'll revisit this topic in a later column.

Once you have the recordings, you edit them with simple and free software. RavenLite or Audacity are easy to get and only mildly baffling to learn, but a little practice once again yields surprisingly good results. The Macaulay Library has a great tutorial for using Audacity specifically for birdsong and it yields a clean final file – Google "Audacity Tutorial Macaulay Library" to find it.

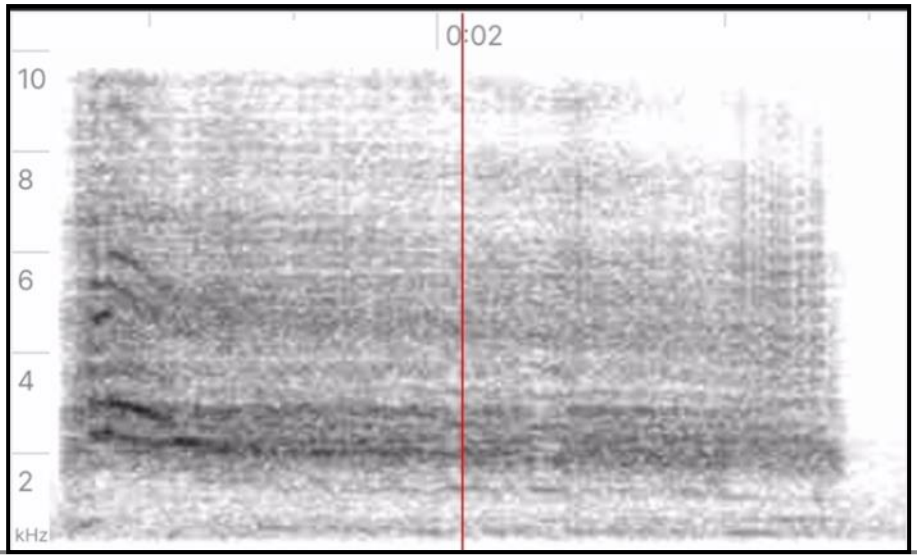
2. Learn to read spectrograms

Spectrograms are a graphic representation of sound. Pitch is indicated vertically, time is shown horizontally, and intensity is shown by density (darker is louder). The y-scale is kilohertz (kHz), and usually goes from 0 to 10kHz, which covers the range of hearing of a typical adult. The x-scale is in seconds.

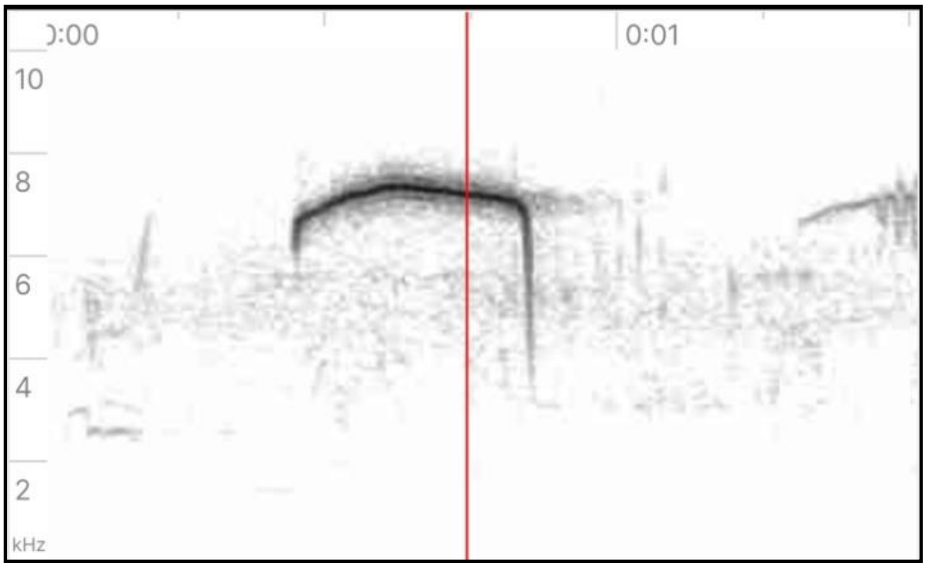
Let's look at the spectrograms for the Red-Tailed Hawk (below) and the Cedar Waxwing (next page).

The spectrogram below shows the iconic scream of the Red-Tailed Hawk. It's almost 3.5 seconds duration and starts off with strong downslurs in the first half second, especially in the 2–6kHz ranges. The darkest tones appear between 2.0 and 3.0kHz and so this is the loudest part we hear. While these are the biggest sounds, the entire range is full of data, showing us that the entire scream is burry or buzzy. I think of it as thick or layered, even though the scream itself sounds more like a single sound to most ears. Listen to a recording of the scream while viewing the spectrogram and you will start to hear the multiple tones, the burry notes, and the fall off.

The spectogram at the top of the next page shows the *seet* of the Cedar Waxwing. Ignore the faint grey bits (which is background noise) and concentrate on that marvelously bold staple-shaped figure in the middle. Unlike the longer scream of the Red-tail, this spectrogram shows a single high (7–8kHz), clear, short tone – the very characteristic sound of the Cedar Waxwing. This is a case where what we clearly hear matches what the sound is. The



Left: Scream of a Red-tailed Hawk.



Left: The seet of a Cedar Waxwing. Below: The very different sound of a Bohemian Waxwing.

bird's trill, while audibly different, is also in the same range of 7–8kHz and importantly doesn't downslur.

Spectrograms are clearly useful when identifying birds you're not entirely sure about. Little Brown Birds (LBBs) abound and can trip up even experienced birders, but their recorded calls are often characteristic and with a little experience can lead to positive IDs.

Imagine on a casual walk you see a flock of Cedar Waxwings frolicking in a fruiting tree and decide to take a quick video. A later review of the spectrogram could reveal a longer trilling figure with a distinct downslur around the 3.5–6kHz area.

This may not even have been particularly audible in the moment, but the spectrogram doesn't lie, and you now know that the Cedar's voice is in a different range entirely. Armed with this knowledge, you could reasonably conclude that this fellow is a tag-along Bohemian Waxwing, and thus you can add another bird to the day's list.

An afternoon spent recording noises and then viewing spectrograms will teach you all you need to know to get started. For further information – a lot of information – check out the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Western North America* by Nathan Pieplow, as well as the accompanying website petersonbirdsounds.com. These are by far the best Earbirding resources I've ever used.

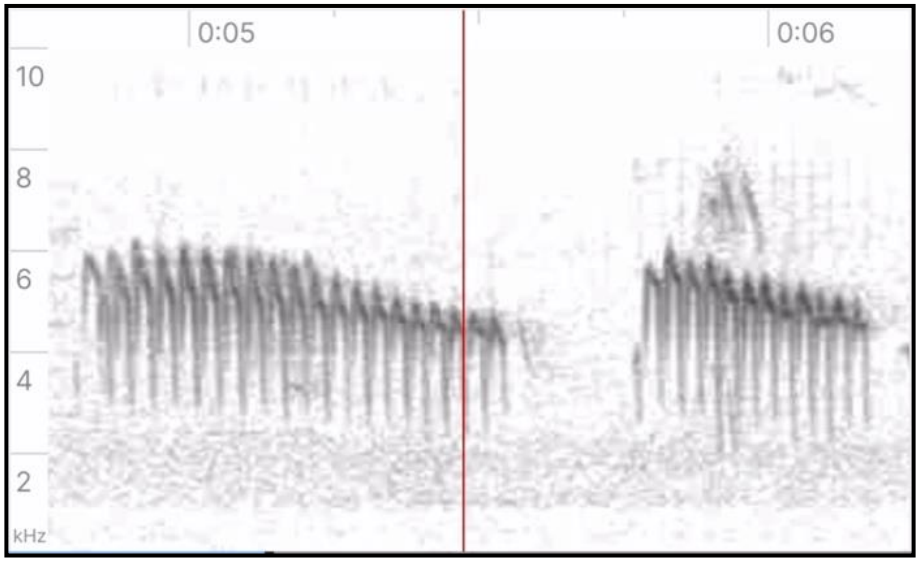
Believe it or not, once you've made the association of the sound to the spectrogram, viewing the spectrogram later clearly recalls the sound. The first time it happens it feels like a magic trick you've somehow played on yourself, but it does work. How do you make the association in the first place, you ask? Well…

3. Watch birds make noises

Hands down the best way to learn a birdsong is to watch the bird as it sings. When we see a bird we don't precisely know, we can at least loosely categorize it in reference to other birds we do know: nope, that's neither a flycatcher nor a heron, but something in the middle. We don't have that relationship to bird sounds, though, and so a random *tzzzzzWEEET*! gives us little to go on. Comparing unknown spectrograms to written examples helps, but the absolute hands-down best way to get those bird songs into the little grey cells is to see the bird as it makes the call.

The best way to see birds sing is to spend more time mindfully birding instead of twitching. Slow down and invest the time in a familiar area. Turn on the recorder, watch the birds as they make those sounds, and repeat. Once you get dead-on familiar with the Robins and Chickadees in your local patch, the unusual polyphonic trill you previously may have blithely ignored suddenly becomes glaringly, almost comically, obvious. Later, when you're reviewing your recordings, you'll know what to look for and concentrate upon in order to discover which birds you've been hearing but not seeing.

Practice maketh the birder, as someone probably said, and by adding this three-step process to your own sessions you'll gain confidence at earbirded identifications. One day, if you practice really hard, you might be able to turn to your 20-something guide and smugly declare "American Crow!" Hey, you have to start somewhere….



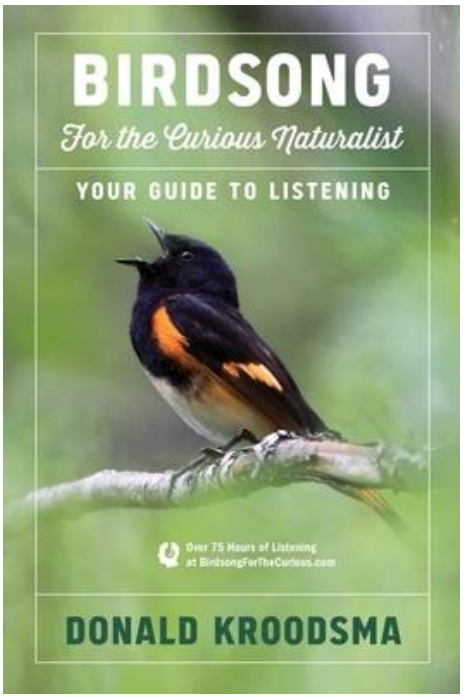
Book Reviews – Earbirding

Clive Keen, Prince George

The *For Your Ears Only* column in this newsmagazine will inspire many readers to look for additional reading on birding by ear. Here are two books I was inspired to buy, and they are certainly worthy of attention.

***Birdsong for the Curious Naturalist,* by Donald Kroodsma, Houghton Mifflin, 2020**

This remarkable book is not so much a guide to identification – though it will certainly be a help in that – but about delighting in the sounds made by birds.



Kroodsma starts by saying "In the following pages are great joy and happiness, just waiting for you." One of his messages is – don't start off by worrying about an ID. First, luxuriate in the sound; listen in admiration and wonder. A related message is that real attention to the sound opens up far more opportunities for understanding than just knowing the bird's name. "I challenge you to listen to this singing planet as you have never listened before. Don't settle for a few brief sound bites that provide the minimum clues needed to successfully identify a bird to species. No, strive for a deeper understanding of each singing bird, trying to fathom who it is, what's in its head, why in this moment it is singing the way it is…."

Kroodsma is a world-renowned ornithologist who has been publishing on birdsong for more than fifty years. He really knows his science. But he also thinks and writes like a poet. Take his introduction to the sound of the Common Loon: "Here is the spirit of the northern wilderness, where fir and spruce point skyward and graceful birches line rocky shores, and the sound of these birds transports you instantly to the wilds of the North, in splendor and solitude." Again: "In the Barn Swallow's jumbled, bubbling ecstasy of a song I hear happiness, perhaps because I am whisked back to a happy childhood spent outdoors, on farms and in barns…." Of course we don't just get streams of such lovely descriptions. Each is linked to a recording which can be instantly evoked by pointing a cellphone at a QR code, or by navigating a related website containing 734 recordings.

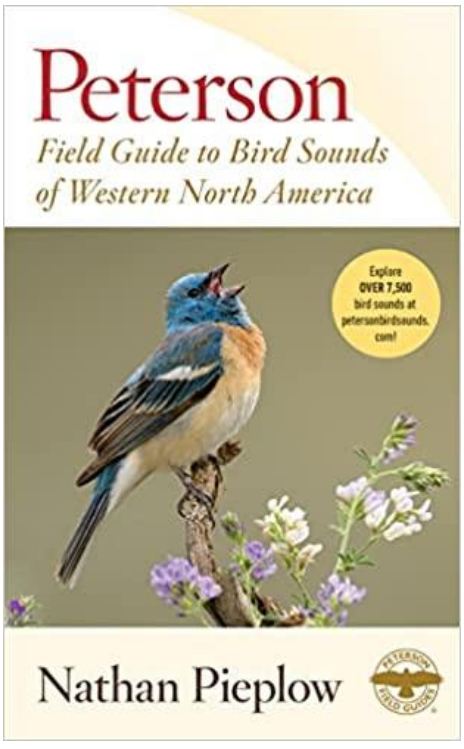
Kroodsma asks us to remember what he calls The Juliet Principle, after a kindergarten girl who wrote him a note saying "Thank you for teaching me that if I listen, there is song everywhere."

This is a beautiful, heartfelt book. Buy it, read it twice, and then buy some more to give away as presents.

***Peterson's Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Western North America* by Nathan Peplow, Houghton Mifflin 2019.**

While the Kroodsma book is primarily a love letter to birdsong, *Petersen's Field Guide to Bird Sounds* is very definitely a field guide – rather like a Sibley for earbirding. It is a massive work of well-organized erudition. The main body of the book comprises details of 537 species of North American birds, arranged in taxonomic order. There is usually one page for each bird, carrying half a dozen or so sonograms with commentary. The depth of information is immense, and birdsound afficionados will revel in every page. I have to say that for those less committed, the amount of detail will be intimidating. The "visual index" will reinforce that impression. The "index" starts off by asking you to select from a list of descriptions, such as "a series of long nasal notes." You are then guided to simplified sonograms which finally lead you on to a choice between real sonograms. Those aficionados will, I have no doubt, acclaim this as a magnificent tour de force. My admiration is indeed great. But being a mere mortal I was reminded of another comment by a small girl: "A nice man came to talk to us about birds today. He told us more than we ever wanted to know about penguins."

But, buy this book with alacrity if you already are an afficionado, or intend to become one. It is better than most of us deserve.



The Paleo-Ornithologist: Dispatch from Southern Africa

Charles Helm, Tumbler Ridge

"...three distinctive tracks of a very large flamingo...."
scale bars = 10 cm. Photo by Richard Webb.

Finally, after a three-year hiatus due to COVID, we begin a two-month field season on the Cape south coast of South Africa, in search of Pleistocene vertebrate tracksites. Since 2007 our research team has identified more than 350 such sites in aeolianites (cemented dunes) along a 350 km stretch of coastline. And, being a birder, I am particularly interested in fossil avian tracksites. In previous years we have identified more than 30 fossil bird tracksites. So far this year there have been lots of new tracks of reptiles and mammals (including those of ancestral Homo sapiens), but no birds.

And then suddenly, in late October, we seem to hit the motherlode in a remote, rugged area of coastal cliffs… four (maybe five) avian trackways within the space of 300 metres, or within one hour of searching. First up is what my wife Linda notices on the undersurface of an overhang: three distinctive tracks of a very large flamingo (photo top right). Next, my colleague Jan sees five smaller tracks, possibly made by an oystercatcher, under another overhang close by. These tracks are all in hyporelief, and are thus "natural casts" – they represent the layer of sand that filled the tracks in when these surfaces were composed of unconsolidated dune sand.

Not long afterwards, we come across a large surface on a mansion-sized fallen block. At its top end is an arcuate feature containing 18 tracks, also in hyporelief. Inspection with binoculars reveals that they are avian and were probably made by a large gull. Across the surface runs an arrow-straight trackway comprising 23 nebulous tracks. We cannot be certain that they are avian, but the regular pace length and the fact that track width exceeds track length are useful clues to suggest this. The surface is also crossed by tracks of a cricket, a snake and a slug. And, wonder upon wonders, we can see where a mouse had scurried around, leaving more than 100 tracks in a rambling trackway.

Finally, on an adjacent slab, about ten tracks of a medium-sized tridactyl avian trackmaker are evident in epirelief, as "natural moulds." This was an original dune surface on which tracks were made. We lift each other up so as to get good up-close views and photos of the tracks.

What to do with this ichnological cornucopia? Firstly, document it. Take measurements. Take hundreds of photos for photogrammetry, which will be done in my basement in Tumbler Ridge in December. Then consult the literature, and confirm that the long trackways are among the longest fossil avian trackways ever identified. Celebrate that they were found just 500 metres east of two equally long trackways (see next page) which we published on in 2017.[1] This area is clearly a global hotspot for such phenomena. Then, confirm that the flamingo tracks are longer than those of the extant Greater Flamingo – this supports findings published by our team in 2021, that some Pleistocene birds along this coast were larger than their extant counterparts.[2] A similar observation has been reported for some reptiles and mammals.

The area is unstable and hazardous. When we return four days later to fine-tune our observations, a heap of sediment occupies the place where we had been perched to take our photos of the avian tracks. A large crack has developed in the mansion-sized block. Rhinoceros tracks had been visible on a surface high above our heads. We had planned to document them further too, but they are gone, probably the source of the debris heap. Perhaps there are worse ways to leave this life than to have a rhino track fall on your head, but we opt for caution, get our

Two long avian trackways just west of the new sites, found in 2016; the anisodactyl tracks were probably made by a guineafowl or spurfowl.

readings, and beat a hasty retreat.

Once the excitement and euphoria have settled, it is time for reflection. Each of these glimpses into the Pleistocene past is a miracle of preservation and exposure. Each deserves to be recorded, and brought to the attention of the wider ornithological community. The tracks may only be there for a few weeks before they are destroyed by high tides, wind or rain, or they slump into the sea. Be grateful, we tell ourselves, for the privilege of discovering these ephemeral, evanescent tracks before they disappear forever.

We make a fire, cook some meat, drink a beer or two from Namibia, and watch the descendants of those birds on the contemporary African coast. We celebrate a birding cousin's 70th birthday and aim to find 70 species on the day, one for each year. We end up with 92 with no trouble. Southern Africa is, and clearly was, a wonderful place to be a bird.

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2. Helm, C.W., Lockley, M.G., Cawthra, H.C., De Vynck, J.C., Helm, C.J.Z., Thesen, G.H.H. 2020. Large Pleistocene avian tracks on the Cape south coast of South Africa. *Ostrich* 91(4), 275–291.

Briefing 2

M. Church, Vancouver

No Room at the Inn?

Environmental change, compounded of human land use and climate change, is forcing adaptations in the animal kingdom (and the plant kingdom, for that matter). As ranges change, organisms that previously had had no overlapping range may come into contact and competition with each other for space and resources. In the course of these changes some bird populations will be reduced – even to local extirpation or global extinction – while others may actually prosper, at least locally. Significant interest is focused on what extinctions may occur. How many species might we have in the future and what might their communities look like?

Researchers at the University of Sheffield (UK) have made an attempt to gain insight into these questions. On the supposition that unusual anatomical features (that usually indicate some specialized behavior adapted to the animal's present environment) might predispose a species to have a greater probability to become extinct, the researchers made selected measurements on museum specimens of most known species (8,455 species to be exact). Specifically, they measured beak size and shape, tarsus (foot) and wing length, and body size, supposing that these morphological features influence ecological function and habitat choice, hence the likelihood to survive in the coming world.

To analyze the data they formed the distribution of the measured mor-

phological data about the mean value and noted the occurrence of extreme values. (Statistical note: to incorporate all the measures simultaneously, they actually used a statistical technique known as "principal components analysis.") They referred to the IUCN lists of species at risk to provisionally identify birds that might eventually become extinct. First removing from their analysis birds that are critically endangered (i.e. those currently considered to be at highest risk of extinction), they noted a reduction in the spread of morphological data about the mean. Continuing sequentially with "endangered," "vulnerable" and "near threatened" species, they noted a continuing reduction in the spread of the data. Only at the last step (comparing "near threatened" with "not at risk" species) was there no further contraction.

These outcomes are interpreted to mean that those birds most likely to disappear in the future are ones with the most extreme morphological adaptations – hence, presumably, the most specialized ecological functions. Consequently, surviving bird life in the future is apt to be more uniform in physical appearance and more generalized in ecology. Perhaps birds will come more generally to resemble your medium-sized thrush? Repeating the analysis for each of 14 major "ecological regions" of the world, it appears that the problem is most critical in East Asia and the Himalaya.

The analysis depends, however, on a key assumption – that the present-day IUCN lists truly represent those species that are most likely to actually become extinct.

A related issue rises from a recent study that set out to determine the factor or factors that limit the range of elevation of individual species on tropical mountains. It has long been thought that temperature was the key control, and that the mountains would become more crowded, with increasingly limited ranges of elevation available for individual species as the world continues to become warmer. But, from the analysis of 4.4 million eBird records, it turns out that the crowding is itself the principal controlling factor. Birds on tropical mountains are really constrained more than on temperate mountains simply in view of the greater number of tropical species. But crowding might eventually become a significant factor in determining who survives in the more general case of limited remaining habitat posed above.

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Below: A Bonaparte's Gull photographed by Liam Ragan (Victoria) at the Little River Ferry Terminal in Courtney: it was among five birds feeding in the kelp wrack close to the river outflow.

Featured Species No.19

Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini)*

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

Above: a Sabine's Gull in juvenile plumage. Photo by Adrian Dorst.

Status: Fairly common in spring and fall in offshore waters, occasionally abundant.

For this species to be referred to as a "seagull," is not quite the misnomer it is for most other gulls, for like the kittiwakes, the Sabine's Gull spends most of its life at sea, coming ashore only to breed. Its breeding range is circumpolar, spanning both North America and Eurasia. About half the world population breeds in Canada. On this continent, it breeds mostly north of the Arctic Circle except in eastern Canada and western Alaska, where it breeds also along the entire length of the Aleutian Islands. Although this species is confined largely to the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, some individuals wander overland, having been seen in every province in Canada and every state in the contiguous United States. In the Pacific Ocean, birds spend the winter offshore, from Panama to Chile.

This small gull is very distinctly marked, both as a juvenile and an adult, and is therefore easy to identify. It often congregates in large flocks, feeding by fluttering low over the water. It is seen mostly well offshore in pelagic waters and is rarely spotted from shore. While there are several records for March, such early observations are rare. Birds usually begin to pass by our shores in April, with the largest numbers passing by in May. There are not a large number of spring records to draw on, however. On 29 April 2012, 20 birds were recorded on a pelagic trip out of Ucluelet, on 2 May 1970, 8 birds were tallied off Tofino, and on 13 May 2001, 22 birds were seen off Tofino. In The Birds of British Columbia, mention is made of a flock of 50 birds off Ucluelet on 17 May 1949, and 66 birds at Esperanza Inlet on 28 May 1966, these being among the larger numbers recorded in spring. However, on a pelagic trip off the central west coast on 8 May 2017, an estimated 2,000 birds were reported. That birds are still moving through in June was demonstrated when on 5 June 1999, during a northwesterly gale, 150 birds were seen from the south shore of Vargas Island with the aid of a spotting scope, and as late as 9 June in 2010, 200 birds were recorded offshore. Records for July are probably nonbreeders.

A map in The Atlas of Pelagic Seabirds Off the West Coast of Canada and Adjacent Areas is revealing. It shows 37 locations in our offshore waters where the species was recorded in spring. At 10 locations, from 1 to 10 birds were recorded, while at 2 locations numbers ranged between 10 and 100. All other observations involved single individuals.

By mid to late August, the southward migration is well under way. Flocks of 200 birds were reported offshore on 25 August 2012, 12 September 2010, and 14 September 2013. An even larger flock of 300 birds was seen on 20 August 2011. An estimated 500 birds were seen on 13 September 1969, 22 km west of Tofino, and again on 2 September 1984, at La Perouse Bank. An estimated 900 birds were seen at La Perouse Bank on 5 September 1982. There is one report of an even larger number. On 28 August 1985, on a pelagic birding trip out of Bamfield, 2,000 Sabine's Gulls were reported.

Lest the foregoing give the impression that Sabine's Gulls are to be found in abundance on almost any ocean voyage, encountering a large flock involves both timing and good luck. Most observations in fact involve only a few birds.

The height of the autumn migration likely occurs from late August to early October. The migration is over by the end of October. November records are rare.

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. Photo by author.

Gone Pishing

Chris Siddle, Vernon

Waxwing Questions

Recently a member of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club asked me – Why does Vernon have Cedar Waxwings in the summer and Bohemian Waxwings in the winter? I took a quick dive into waxwing literature and came up with the following.

Scientists believe that during the Pleistocene Epoch (2 million to 20,000 years ago) one ancestral waxwing species inhabited the connected landmass of Europe, Asia, and North America. With the separation of the landmasses into Europe-Asia and North America, and the beginning of the last glaciation 20,000 years ago, the waxwings diverged into Eurasian and North American populations, eventually evolving into separate species. The Bohemian Waxwing was at home in the boreal zone across northern Europe and northern Asia including Japan. With the retreat of the continental glaciers Bohemian Waxwings spread across the Bering land bridge invading northwestern North America.

The Bohemian

Compared to the lightly built Cedar, the Bohemian Waxwing is bigger, heavier (56 grams body mass vs 32 g), rougher voiced, and to this day breeds in more isolated and northerly locations. It's a true Holarctic boreal species, nesting from Norway to Kamchatka and in North America its breeding range is centred on Alaska, Yukon, the western NW Territories, the northern two-thirds of BC and northern half of Alberta. It nests in open coniferous or mixed woodlands, sometimes in the edges of Black Spruce muskeg where it feeds heavily in spring and summer on insects. Think of it as a wilderness bird, a bird of the higher-latitude forests, able to withstand low temperatures (I've seen Bohemians eating juniper berries at -40 C), and able to capitalize on burgeoning warm season insect populations and spring and summer wild fruit. In autumn North American Bohemian Waxwings gather into large flocks and wander out of the wilderness of northwest America in search of fruit. Some winters are waxwing winters where Bohemians turn up in numbers far south and east of their summer haunts. When they turn up in places like New York State, birders get excited to see these northern wanderers.

Most years, the Okanagan Valley is a favoured winter area for Bohemian Waxwings, pretty much in the centre of the species' winter range. Some winters, Vernon, Kelowna, and Penticton have tallied thousands of these birds, especially around urban plantings such as hawthorn bushes and Mountain Ash trees with their bright red berries. Bohemian Waxwings first descend upon the valley in November and depart in March.

The Cedar

So much for our winter waxwing. What about the Cedar Waxwing? It is thought that it evolved from the same ancestral waxwing as did the Bohemian Waxwing but in the Pleistocene absence of the Bohemian from North America, the Cedar Waxwing evolved to live in the more temperate climate of southern Canada and the northern United States from Washington and Oregon east to New England. It's well known for nesting very late in spring in various kinds of open woodlands including wooded backyards, riparian shrublands, orchards, conifer plantations and suburban gardens, habitat quite different from the remote boreal forest of its bigger relative, the Bohemian. It is far less able to withstand severe winter weather than the Bohemian can and generally occurs in smaller flocks, though both species are highly social. In the North Okanagan Cedar Waxwings begin to withdraw to the south, to warmer areas from late September onwards. By mid October, Cedar Waxwings have become quite local around Vernon, the few remaining birds faithful to the few shrubs and trees still bearing fruit.

Cedar Waxwings arrive suddenly in late May and early June in the North Okanagan, and begin nesting almost immediately upon arrival to capitalize upon ripening fruit and insects. Stragglers can linger in tiny numbers right into November, and being social, individuals may occasionally join Bohemian Waxwing flocks, just as farther south

Bohemian Waxwing photographed by the author in Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park.

the occasional Bohemian will join flocks of wintering Cedars.

Why *Bohemian*?

While researching my answer to the question asked at the article beginning, I happened to check the dictionary definitions of "Bohemian," just to make sure that my belief that one of Bohemian's definitions was "wanderer." I checked two online dictionaries as well as the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. Nowhere could I find definitions reflecting the idea of moving about the map randomly. All I could find were

1. Of or pertaining to a native or inhabitant of Bohemia (now a part of western Czech Republic)
2. Of or pertaining to Gypsies
3. Pertaining to a socially unconventional person, especially an artist or writer, of free-and-easy habits, manners, and sometimes morals.

None of these definitions seemed to work for the naming of the bird. Frustrated, I turned to the normally reliable classic *Words for Birds: A Lexicon of North America Birds with Biographical Notes* by Edward Gruson (1972). Gruson reported that *Bohemian* referred to the type locality, a taxonomical term for the place where the first Bohemian Waxwing had been collected for science, a part of the formal process of describing and assigning Latin binomials to a species new to taxonomists. That just didn't seem correct because nowhere else in the literature could I find Gruson's explanation confirmed. Indeed, *Handbook of the Birds of the World* stated "Sweden" as the type location which seemed more likely to be accurate since Carl Linnaeus, the man who invented the Latin binomial system, lived in Sweden and knew the bird well. Still, I was haunted by the notion that "Bohemian" had acquired at least the connotation, if not the denotation, of wandering.

Finally Christopher W. Leahy's wonderful *The Birdwatcher's Companion to North American Birdlife* (second edition 2004) came to the rescue. Leahy's book of 1,039 pages is a goldmine of ornithological information. Under "Bohemian (Waxwing)" was the following:

> *"Bohemia is a region (once a kingdom) in western Czechoslovakia, where* Bombycilla garrulous *occurs only as a winter visitor. It is the alleged home of the gypsies and the name may refer to the species' habit of wandering unpredictably and at irregular intervals south of its normal wintering range."*

The very social bird with the waxlike drops on its wings that wanders unpredictably makes more sense than the bird of Bohemia or the bird of the gypsies. Ah, words, words, words as Hamlet says. They can revise, restore, destroy, define, limit, and hint around ideas, but above all else words can morph into other meanings. *Czechoslovakia* no longer exists as anything beyond a word. *Gypsy* is no longer politically correct. Now we are to call them "travelers." Perhaps one day "Bohemian" may be replaced by a committee assigned to improve the meaningfulness of birds' common names. I'm happy that a belief I held that *Bohemian* can mean *wandering* does exist, but I'm happier to scan the wintry landscape for the birds themselves, the fruit-hungry flocks, whatever we call them.

Sandpipers Galore

Monica Nugent and Joan Nicholson had the extraordinary experience of seeing over 50,000 Semipalmated Sandpipers at the Johnson's Mills Shorebird Centre in New Brunswick, just a few of which (!) appear in their photograph to the right.

During their ten-day trip to New Brunswick, Monica and Joan recorded 132 species, including Nelson's Sparrow, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, Carolina Wren, South Polar Skua, Pomarine Jaeger, Parasitic Jaeger, and Red-necked Phalarope.

Bird Photographers' Corner

Lens Envy

Clive Keen, Prince George

It's rather a shame that birds are not just small, but like to keep their distance. If we aren't to become offensive bird-botherers and yet want images larger than postage stamps, we have to tackle the issue head on. Three main ploys are on offer: use a blind, employ a remote shutter release, or get a long lens.

This article is about the most flexible solution: the long lens. Readers with experience of blinds and remote-release systems: *please tell us about it in future columns*.

Length of Lens vs Sensor

What is the ideal length of lens for bird photography? It depends crucially on the size of your sensor and ambition. The smaller the sensor, the greater the magnification, meaning that lenses don't have to be so long. This sounds the way to go, except that there's a catch. Small sensors "crop," acting like pruned negatives which are useless without a great deal of enlargement. And the more the enlargement, the more the loss of resolution and general quality.

For quality, there's no getting around the fact that the larger the sensor, the better. That is why the Nikon Coolpix P1000, which would seem the most perfect bird camera imaginable, isn't. With a minuscule sensor, a mere 6×4.5mm, the zoom lens becomes effectively 3,000mm (!), so can deliver shots of the smallest birds from one heck of a distance. John Gordon's photographs taken with this camera regularly grace this publication, and in his expert hands can indeed do a respectable job. But when John is after the highest quality, he knows he must switch to a camera sporting a *much* larger sensor.

This brings us next to the 17x13mm Micro Four Thirds (MFT) sensor. MFT still offers a lot of "reach," and brings with it technological advances that ushered in the mirrorless age. At the medium end of the market, MFT cameras have met with great success due to their compact size, light weight, and easy zoomability.

But the competitor to MFT, the 24×16mm APS-C (also known as DX) has 60% more surface area, with its attendant quality advantage. So, at the higher end of the wildlife photography market, it was the DX sensor that became dominant.

DSLR Era

Throughout the DSLR era, DX was recognized as the sensor of choice for serious bird photography. With the addition of a reasonably long lens, DX DSLRs could create photographs of which earlier generations could only dream. A lot of fine shots were taken with a relatively modest 70–300 mm lens, but as ambitions grew, bird photographers found they could achieve even more success with some investment. 400mm, 500mm, and then 600mm zoom lenses came along which did not require the house to be mortgaged, but made it significantly easier to get bird shots of which to be proud.

Mirrorless

We've now fully entered the mirrorless era, though, and FX sensors (36×24 mm) are the new standard for serious wildlife photography. From the point of view of shortening the distance to birds, that might seem a major step backwards. It is, but not entirely. The new FX sensors have such a high megapixel count that when they are used in DX mode (using just the central 24×16mm), the quality is exactly the same as if a DX sensor had been used. If the bird is near enough, you get the extra quality provided by shooting in FX mode; if it is not, you can still get the level of quality offered by DX sensors. It's a win-and-a-draw situation.

FX sensors, though, make you greedy. The 150–500 mm lens that made you really happy on your DX-sensor DSLR just doesn't seem so exciting any more, now that your standards have been raised and you want to stay in FX mode permanently. Even the 150–600mm zooms, which produce lovely large images on a DX DSLR, can seem to have lost some of their lustre. Zooms don't come any longer, though, so should the most ambitious bird photographers now be hankering for a supertelephoto prime lens?

Switch to Prime?

Paradoxically, big prime (fixed focal length) lenses tend to be far more expensive than zooms. You'd think it would be the other way round, since zoom lenses are much more complex. Very long prime lenses, though, have traditionally been produced in tiny volumes for professional sports and celebrity-chasing photographers, who don't mind dropping $20,000 for a bespoke lens capable of delivering the money shots. For hobbyist bird photographers, that sort of outlay has always been preposterous.

800mm? Seriously?

Along comes the Nikon Z 800mm lens (left), which wins rave reviews referring to it as compact, lightweight, surprisingly affordable and megasharp. Is this today's ideal bird-photography lens?

Well, let's put the plaudits in context. "Compact" means that you just have 15 inches of lens hanging off

the end of your camera rather than 17. (Add another five inches for the lens hood.) "Lightweight" means that your camera and lens weigh a mere seven pounds rather than eleven. "Affordable" means that it is just very, rather than outrageously, expensive. "Megasharp" is an unalloyed good, but today's zooms, combined with A1 Sharpen from Topaz, deliver sharpness that has satisfied us in the past.

On top of this, prime lenses lose the flexibility of zooms. Though zooms are most often used at full extension when photographing birds, there are times when throttling back – particularly if the bird is large or unexpectedly close – creates the needed composition.

So, Nikon's pricey new toy is far from a solution for everyone. Contented photographers in the Micro Four Thirds camp would no doubt consider its size ludicrous. It all boils down to a matter of ambition. If you hanker after the performance of a Ferrari you'll never be entirely happy with a Volvo. There is certainly no shortage of wildlife photographers fired with ambition: the queue for the new lens is nearly a year long.

Those in the queue might indeed have more ambition than sense, but this writer still took a deep breath, risked freaking out the spouse as well as the credit card, and jostled his way into the lineup. When the lens finally appears, he'll let you know if the expense and wait were worth it.

A Passing Thought

The annual *Bird Photographer of the Year* awards raise an interesting issue. See

www.birdwatchingdaily.com/photography

Many of the winning photographs – they are of course all superb – were not in fact photographs of birds, but photographs *in which birds appear*. In several, it is not even possible to tell what species is involved. The overall composition might be of the highest quality, and tick every box that photography awards judges are taught to consider, but the photograph might tell us nothing whatsoever about the birds "depicted." There's something here that doesn't add up.

When deciding on who judges photography contests, it would seem reasonable to appoint expert photographers. But if they are not emotionally invested in birds, but heavily invested in the overall aesthetic value of photographic images, the bird will essentially be no more than one item among many.

A suggestion to organizers of competitions: understand the crucial difference between *bird photographs* and *photographs in which birds appear*, and make it clear which you are seeking to honour. Then, choose your judges accordingly.

John Sprague of Salt Spring Island captured this image of an Anna's first day out of the nest, as mother flies in with a tiny insect.