BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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Fall 2019 has been the Season of the Rarities in British Columbia. Above: a Yellow-browed Warbler (John Gordon photograph) seen in Victoria on October 18–24. If fully confirmed, this could be the first Canadian sighting – and it is not the only ABA Code 4 bird to be found in BC this fall. More details can be found on pages 3 and 8.

Publisher
BC Birding is published four times a year by the British Columbia Field Ornithologists, P.O. Box 61670, RPO Brookswood, Langley, BC V3A 1K0. A subscription to this quarterly is a benefit of membership in the society.

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
US and international membership: $35

Newsmagazine Submissions
To submit material to this publication, contact the Editor by email (clive_keen@hotmail.com). Photographs should be in mid-resolution jpg (preferably 1–4 MB, and articles must be in plain text, either as the content of an email, or as an attachment (preferably Word). Illustrations should be sent as separate attachments, not embedded in text.

Topics may include birding experiences, casual observations about bird behaviour, site guides, birding equipment, trip reports, and other subjects of broad interest to 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. Submissions will be edited for style and length. Note also that this is a newsmagazine rather than an academic journal, and thus formal reference lists are in most cases not suitable.

Deadlines (i.e. final dates for submission of material) are as follows. Material received after the deadline will be held over to the subsequent edition.

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

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Quarter page: $40 per issue or $36 each for four or more issues.

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

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

Contents

2020 Conference

Next year's Conference will be held at the Prestige Hudson Bay Lodge and Conference Centre in Smithers from June 26 to 28, with a pre-conference trip based out of Terrace from June 23 to 25.

Christmas Bird Counts 2019 – 2020

The 120th CBC takes place this year between December 14, 2019 and January 5, 2020. Information on dates and contacts for the BC counts, as well as the Bird Counts4Kids, are available at bcfo.ca by clicking on the CBC's tab.

Front cover photograph

John Gordon

On a Friday afternoon I was heading out of Vancouver toward Squamish when an ABA Code 4 MEGA was found by Victoria birders Jeff Gaskin and Geoffrey Newell. The bird, a Yellow-browed Warbler, is a relatively common native of Asia but very rare in North America – so rare it even drew a bemused TV crew and journalists to a muddy Victoria hillside. The bird drew a steady stream of birders from across Canada and the US, some travelling thousands of kilometres just to catch a glimpse.

On Saturday morning, determined not to miss a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I drove (mostly at the speed of sound/limit) from Squamish through Vancouver to Tsawwassen to catch the 1:00 PM ferry to Vancouver Island. At 3:05 I arrived at Panama Flats where a small flock of assorted birders were on site. At dusk the bird still hadn't shown and as the sun set I made my way back to the ferry and Vancouver, disappointed and tired from the long day, a feeling I am sure every birder can sympathize with. I decided then and there to return next day. I just didn't want to spend my life's savings again so I texted Birdergirl Mel Hafting and asked her help to find me others who would share the cost of the ferry. Ten minutes later I had four takers for Monday morning.

Monday morning the alarm went off at 4:45 AM. It was dark and raining. Soon I was on the way back to Vancouver Island but this time with a carload of birders. Onboard was one Larry, two Marilyns and one Mike.

When we arrived, there were fifteen or more birders on site including one of the original finders – Geoffrey Newell – who was kindly pointing out the bird to anyone interested. The tiny warbler was travelling with a Yellow-rumped Warbler and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. The kinglet being the same shape and size added to the fun of trying to figure out which one to photograph. Despite the overcast skies and rain I was able to get a few shots through the foliage. I cranked up the ISO to 1250 and overexposed a stop and a half, and was able to get a couple of frames before it was time to return to the ferry and make it home to vote. Mission accomplished.

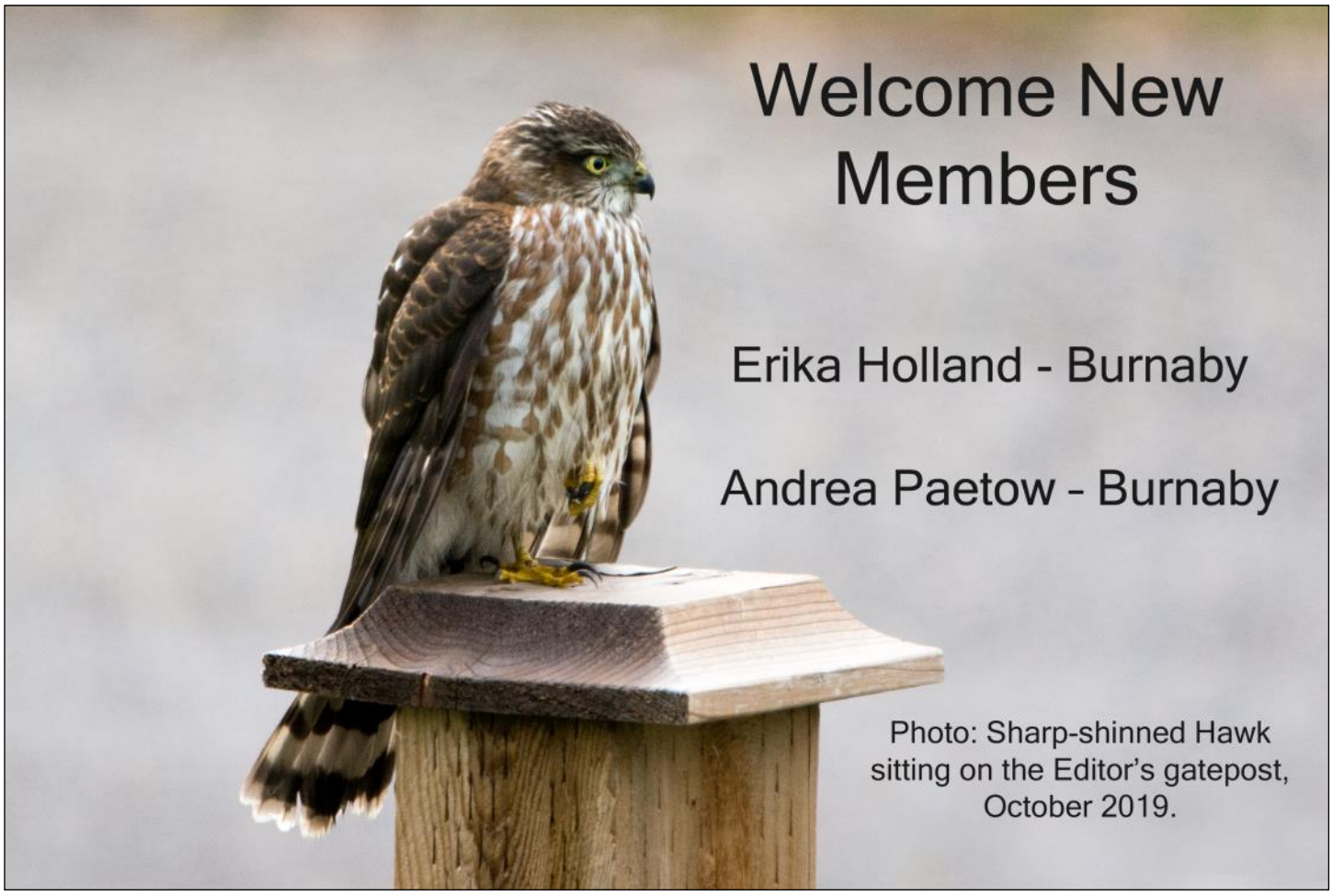
President's Message

Marian Porter, Salt Spring Island

A pontoon boat trip on the calm waters of Laguna Madre in South Padre Island, Texas took an unexpected turn as the engines roared to overtake a Brown Booby that made a sudden appearance near a nearby shrimp boat. Instead of flying away, it matched our course and speed with exhilarating swoops that brought the wingtips almost to the water's surface before flying high above us and repeating the display again. This was one of the exciting highlights I had on a recent field trip during the Rio Grande Valley 26th Annual Birding Festival November 6–10. It had been difficult choosing from the forty-plus field trip possibilities offered to accommodate the 550 or so festival delegates, but I had been lucky with this choice. The guides knew these waters and their wildlife inhabitants intimately, and with a strong conservation ethic monitored wildlife and fisher conflicts, and when necessary had rescued birds, dolphins and sea turtles entangled in fishing lines. A small pod of Bottlenose Dolphins repeatedly circled the boat, feeding and displaying to the delight of guides and the birders with a previously rescued individual following the boat closely.

During the festival week I was surprised at how close I came to birds and wildlife in the Rio Grande Valley World Birding Center, a birding trail of nine sites developed by Texas Parks and Wildlife, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Rio Grande Valley communities. Many had visitor centres with observation decks and towers, trails and boardwalks that maximized the accessibility of the site to birders. Bird blinds overlooking feeding stations with water features brought birds and wildlife very close for observation and identification. Collared Peccaries that had been elusive in Central America wandered calmly among feeding Plain Chachalacas and Green Jays. I had never had a more accommodating environment to find some of the 529 bird species of the valley to add to my life list, and meet other birders from Texas and other areas of the US.

Native habitat is limited in this region of Texas, considered the third-fastest growing urban area in the United States. Watching raptors such as Crested Caracaras, White-tailed Hawks and Harris`s Hawks competing for prey in burned sugar-cane fields was interesting but gave me the same nagging feeling I had at feeder stations that I was seeing the birds but not really experiencing them in their natural environments. The Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival was a great experience that I would repeat again, but is a completely different type of birding from the years I spent chasing birds through wilderness areas of British Columbia. We are very fortunate to live in a province where we may still preserve large tracts of native habitat necessary for the survival of our bird populations. BCFO conference field trips and extension trips have often occurred in wilderness areas in spectacular landscapes. Birds are seen in their native habitats exhibiting natural behaviours, and there is still a sense of the unknown, with the possibility of discovering a range extension (continued)



for a species or just getting a glimpse at birds that are rarely seen near urban areas. The 2020 BCFO Conference in Smithers promises to deliver a birding adventure, with a pre-conference extension in the Terrace and Kitimat area. Join us at the Prestige Hudson Bay Lodge and Conference Centre in Smithers from June 26 to 28, with the pre-conference trip based out of Terrace from June 23 to 25. Smithers field trips will include wetlands and trails through higher elevations at Hudson Bay Mountain and Babine Mountain Park. I had the great privilege of kayaking and rafting the Babine and Skeena Rivers many years ago, and highly recommend exploring this fascinating area.

– Marian Porter

Notes & Notices

BCFO Board

Some notes from BCFO Board of Directors discussions:

- After web-based consultation with the membership, the 2020 Conference would be held in Smithers, with a pre-conference trip based out of Terrace.
- The Golden conference ran a deficit of approximately $2,550. The extension trip, however, had a surplus of about $550.
- The BCFO code of ethics would be summarized and included with the liability form for future conference and extension attendees.
- George Clulow and Melissa Hafting participated in the filming of a documentary about young birders which will be broadcast by the CBC in 2020.
- Some papers have been received for the 2020 issue of the BCFO Journal, *British Columbia Birds*, but additional submissions are still needed.

Vi Lambie at the start of this year's banding season. The hatch-year Blackpoll Warbler she is holding was the 70,000th bird banded by the station.

Vi Lambie

Vi Lambie, a long-time BCFO member, died on September 1, 2019. Though she played many roles in conservation, she will always be remembered by birders for co-founding the bird-banding station at Mugaha Marsh near Mackenzie.

Vi had a master bird-banding permit, but in more recent years was the driving force behind the station in other ways. As the secretary/treasurer she applied for the grants that allowed the station to operate, she lured banders and volunteers to the station, and ensured the success of the project through numerous actions in the background, even applying her dress-making skills to mist-net repairs.

The early days of the banding station were in fairly primitive conditions, but since the year 2000, when a permanent station was built, visiting the station has been comfortable and a great pleasure. One of Vi's most-lasting influences will have been her role in public education, as, for twenty-five years, she welcomed a stream of children and adults to the station, building their enthusiasm about the world of nature and instilling a desire to learn more. A life well lived.

BCFO Membership

Membership Secretary Larry Cowan reports that as of November 14, BCFO had 266 regular members, including 29 new members, 16 honourary Junior Birders Award winners, three life-time

honourary members, 4 complimentary memberships, and 6 institutional members, for a total membership of 295. Regular membership is down 17 (-6%) from 2018. This is the second consecutive year we have experienced a decline in members and equates to the year 2015 at 267. This is still well over our average of 218 for the period 2010 to 2014.

The Vancouver Coast and Mountain region now represents 38% of the membership, Vancouver Island 22%, Thompson/Okanagan 15%, Kootenay Rockies 9%, Northern BC 7%, and Cariboo/Chilcotin/Coast 4%. The remainder are scattered from other provinces, the US & Finland.

82 members opted to pay the surcharge to receive this publication via printed, mailed copy. 88 members opted to receive *BC Birds* via the website.

The membership gender split is male 60%, female 29% and couples 11%.

Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey Concludes

The five-year Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey project, coordinated by Rachel Darvill, has wrapped up, with the final survey completed on October 15. Over the five years, 230 volunteers have counted some 380,000 birds, giving an excellent chance of inducting the Columbia Wetlands into the Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) program. The data will be also used in a number of ways to help improve management and conservation of Columbia Wetlands habitat.

This fall 41,043 individual birds were observed by 98 volunteers over three dates at 102 survey stations. With the exception of 2015, which had fewer survey stations and fewer volunteers, this was the lowest fall count that the project has experienced. The fall count in 2018 was 57,057 birds; and the fall 2017 count was 50,938 individuals. Reasons for the decline in total number of birds seen in 2019 are unknown. This year, the highest count for an individual bird species was on October 5 with 3,577 American Coots. On the same day, 3,405 American Wigeons were spotted. Also of note from that day was the project's highest count for the red-listed Western Grebe, with 295 individuals reported at 13 survey stations.

Other sightings included ten Greater White-fronted Geese, Snow Geese on all dates, and an American White Pelican that was badly injured and (sadly) ended up being euthanized at a veterinary clinic. Two species of owl were seen – Great Gray Owl and Northern Pygmy Owl – and nine at-risk bird species were recorded: Western Grebe, Eared Grebe, Horned Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Tundra Swan, California Gull, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron and Rough-legged Hawk. More details can be found at:

wildsight.ca/branches/golden/columbiawetlandswaterbirdsurvey

Birdwatchers as Whale Citizen Scientists

Sarah Patton & Aaron Purdy

There is an urgent need to protect BC's vulnerable whale, dolphin and porpoise (collectively, cetacean) species. Twelve of the 23 species of cetaceans that call BC waters home are currently listed as *at risk.* Birders supply a wealth of knowledge and data to many projects, through eBird, Christmas bird counts, bird-banding projects and other community science initiatives. Ocean Wise's BC Cetacean Sightings Network (BCCSN) is hoping that the birding community will also lend its expertise to protecting the giants that live beneath the waves.

The BCCSN is one of Canada's longest running and most successful citizen science programs. It collects and analyzes sightings of cetaceans and sea turtles provided by a network of nearly 7,000 citizen scientists to inform a variety of important conservation efforts in BC.

Historically, the BCCSN has received sightings reports via email, phone call, and logbook. While these methods provided us with valuable information, in 2015 technological advances led us to develop the WhaleReport smartphone application, a real-time cetacean reporting tool. Flowing from that, in partnership with the Ports of Vancouver and Prince Rupert and in consultation with all major sectors of the commercial maritime industry, Ocean Wise has launched the WhaleReport Alert System. Now, cetacean reports submitted in real time via the WhaleReport App are sent directly to the bridges of commercial vessels such as ferries, piloted ocean-going vessels, and tugs that are within ten nautical miles of a reported cetacean's location. The captains and pilots of the alerted commercial vessels are then empowered to slow down or alter course, significantly reducing some of the key human-caused threats these imperiled species face, including physical disturbance, underwater noise, and vessel strike.

Many pristine birding sites are perfectly suited for spotting whales – whether on cliffside hikes, paddling through island chains, or on pelagic birding trips, members of the birding community have eyes on the water and skills to spot and report cetaceans in the wild. Before you head out on your next birdwatching adventure, please download the BCCSN's free WhaleReport App from the Apple Store or Google Play and if you spot a blow, fin or fluke, please report your cetacean sighting. If there are ships nearby, you may even notice them slow down or alter course in response to your report! In addition to reporting by smartphone, you can also call in sightings at 1-800-I-SAW-ONE or email them to us at sightings@ocean.org.

To learn more about the BCCSN and how your sightings are used, visit www.wildwhales.org.

PG Curlews

The peregrinations of the Prince George Curlews, fitted earlier this year with transmitters, continue to fascinate local birders. Jack Bowling has given regular reports on their movements, and David Bradley of Bird Studies Canada, who oversees the monitoring project, has been providing background information.

A motionless transmitter had given fears that the PG Curlew named Jean might have met her end, and anxious days followed as birders hoped to see some movement via (continued)

the satellite map at:

birdscanada.org/research/speciesatrisk/index.jsp?targetpg=lbcu&targetpg=lbcu

After a few days it turned out that the immobile transmitter was in fact that of Pine, who had been trapped in the East Kootenay in May 2017. David Bradley pointed out that the transmitter might simply have been detached from the bird, but equally, Pine might have met a predator, or, since she was an older bird, might have met her natural mortality date. After everyone digested that sombre news, another theory offered itself: that the transmitter had temporarily stopped operating – more recent satellite pings indicated that Pine could be moving around in a small area near Riverdae, California. We hope for the best. And Jean? On her way to join Jack and Martha.

Jack had been hanging out with Martha south of Sacramento, but then winged off without her 100 km northwest. Just as it seemed divorce was on the cards, Martha decided that she couldn't do without Jack and headed off to the same location.

David Bradley let us know that the birds had gone to the Willow Creek–Lurline Wildlife Management Area, which he said "consists of a mosaic of managed seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands and native uplands surrounded by rice agriculture." The area, he added, "supports tens of thousands of wintering waterfowl including a significant portion of the tule greater White-fronted Goose population … and breeding Tricolored Blackbirds … so Martha and Jack are in a safe place with lots of other birds."

Birds of The Creston Valley

After two decades of dedicated field work and writing, *Birds of The Creston Valley* is slated for publication in early 2020. The region's extensive wetlands, which will have been visited by many BCFO members, have been recognized as an international RAMSAR site and provincial Important Bird Area.

The Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies partnered with Linda Van Damme to produce the publication. Hundreds of individuals have contributed to the book's 500-plus full-colour pages.

Further details will no doubt appear in future editions of *BC Birding*, but meanwhile, ongoing information can be found at www.wildlifebc.org.

Bald Eagle Counts

Amidst the gloomy news of declining bird numbers (see page 25), there is continuing evidence of an explosion in the population of Bald Eagles. The Bald Eagle count by Reba and Allan Dupilka on the spawning section of the Upper South Thompson River had previously, over the past 15 years, seen a record of 301 birds. This October's tally was 417.

Fifty years ago there'd be ecstasy about such news. Today, some people wonder if they should be careful what they wish for.

Below: a pair of Great Horned Owl youngsters, photographed in the Creston Valley by Linda Van Damme.

Fall 2019 – Rarities Galore

George Clulow

What a memorable fall it's been this year. From early September to the time of writing, many observant, and in many cases very excited, BC birders have seen a stunning array of rare birds throughout the province. Many others have eagerly twitched the rarities, and many smiles have lit up many faces over the past number of weeks. And 2019 is not over yet!

Not all the birds were twitchable, and not all were relocated from first sightings, but many were, and there are photographs too. The Bird Records Committee is looking forward to a few busy review sessions coming up.

All the birds mentioned below have yet to be reviewed by the BRC, which always appreciates reports of rare birds in the province based on the provincial review list (see bcfo.ca/review-list/).

The Ash-throated Flycatcher first found by Keith Walker near Burns Lake on October 30. The late date and northerly location led local birders to worry that it could be in severe trouble. Jeff Dyck, however, who took the above photograph, said "it was very active, doing laps of the yard, hawking insects and at one point even stopped for a bath in a dog's water dish – it looked pretty healthy."

September

September started off with a number of SCRIPPS'S MURRELETS being reported offshore, and CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLERS were seen at a number of locations on the Island and in the Interior. A SNOWY PLOVER was seen and photographed near Tofino.

And then the rarer birds started to show up, beginning with Chris Charlesworth and Ryan Tomlinson finding a female GARGANEY (ABA Code 4) in the SE corner of Alki Lake, near Kelowna. (September 17–18)

A BROWN BOOBY was seen a photographed by Roger Stone offshore Haida Gwaii (September 21).

Tom Davies' yard in Fraser Lake was graced by a male SUMMER TANAGER on September 25 and stayed around until October 1.

Two, count them, two ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHERS were in Tofino along Long Beach on September 26.

Another BROWN BOOBY was photographed off the tip of the Iona South Jetty by Rick Zapf on September 29, likely the same bird reported by Dan Pontalti and Grant Edwards on September 21, but not photographed. (This same bird was seen again on November 8 in Victoria.)

Below: The Common Crane being followed by a Sandhill, also photographed by Jeff Dyck.

October

Another ABA Code 4 bird, a BROWN SHRIKE, was caught and banded by David Bell at the Rocky Point Bird Observatory. If accepted by the BRC, this will be a BC first confirmed record. (October 1–3)

On October 4, Scott Thomson found a GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE in Lumby. (October 4–5)

Another ABA Code 4 bird and the second "mega" for the season was a COMMON CRANE found by Jeannie Smith and identified by Mark Phinney in Peace River country (continued) near Doe River. (October 7).

The Rocky Point Bird Observatory was the location of a sighting by David Bell of a RED-SHOULDERED HAWK. Unfortunately, no photos were obtained. (October 6)

The third "Mega" for the season, and perhaps the crown jewel of this incredible fall, was a YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER (ABA Code

4) found in Victoria at Panama Flats by Jeff Gaskin and Geoffrey Newell. The bird stayed around, and was enjoyed by hundreds of birders from the province and further afield. (October 18 – 24). If accepted by the BRC, this will be a first record for BC, and likely lead to its acceptance as a first record for Canada. Pretty good for a tiny bird from Asia!

WHITE-FACED IBISES were found and photographed at Deroche in the Fraser Valley on October 19.

More ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHERS were reported at Delta (October 19 –22), and Burns Lake (October 30– November 3).

November

A tailless BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER turned up at Maplewood Flats in North Vancouver (November 5–9). On November 11, a BLACK-THROATED SPARROW appeared in Revelstoke. And then Prince Rupert was honoured by the appearance of a WHITE WAGTAIL (November 10–13).

While few of us were lucky to see many of these rarities up close, we can still enjoy some of the excitement by just reading about them, and maybe by getting out there finding our own rarities.

If you'd like to have up-to-the-minute reporting BC's rare birds, check out the BC Bird Alert which was the source for all the information above.

bcbirdalert.blogspot.com

Subspecies Too!

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

On October 23, 2019, while birding on Long Beach I came across what looked like the Siberian subspecies of the American Pipit, *Anthus r. japonicus*, in the company of two birds of the North American population. The bird was very shy and difficult to get close to, but I succeeded in getting a few photos, thanks largely to the exceptional technology inherent in today's cameras (in this case a mirrorless camera with a built-in 600 mm lens).

Checking Sibley upon arriving home, I found a close match in an illustration of what Sibley calls a "dark adult nonbreeding" bird of the North American variety. I posted two photos of the bird online, labeled simply as American Pipit, and soon got a congratulatory message from Melissa Hafting on finding a japonicus. Consulting Sibley again, I noted this time that the pale legs on my bird matched that of the japonicus illustration in the guide. Additionally, the darker streaking on the back and upper breast were also a close match for the Siberian subspecies. I had seen a very similar bird in the 1980s that I believed to be japonicus but that bird's breast was pure white between the bold, black streaking.

Melissa sent the photo to two expert birders familiar with japonicus on its Siberian home range, and both concurred that the bird in the photo appeared to be the Siberian subspecies.

American Pipit Japonicus photographed on Long Beach, Tofino, by Adrian Dorst.

ABA Codes

For readers wondering about the meaning of "ABA Code 4," the following should solve the puzzle. All references, of course, apply to birds seen in the ABA checklist area.

- Code 1. Widespread, numerous and regularly occurring.
- Code 2. Regular, but tougher to find (e,g, Yellow Rail).
- Code 3. Rare, occurring annually in very low numbers (e.g. Ruff).
- Code 4. Casual, not recorded annually, but with six or more total records.
- Code 5. Accidental, recorded five or fewer times.
- Code 6: Forget it. Think Eskimo Curlew.

You can see a complete list of ABA birds with their rarity codes at:

www.aba.org/listing.aba.org/public/checklist/ABA_Checklist-8.0.5.pdf

Below: A relatively rare sight: a Sora seen swimming by Lee Harding near Nakusp.

Bird Listers' Corner

Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows

The March 2020 edition of this newsmagazine will once again include listing tables. To take part, please report your life list totals as of December 31, 2019 for any of the areas listed below. Most areas listed are those with published checklists. The number after each area is the threshold level, which in most cases represents 50% of the species on the checklist for that area. You may report levels below the threshold. Space permitted they will be included. You may also submit specialized lists such as birds seen above 1,500 metres in BC etc. or areas not previously listed.

- The ABA list will have two listings, one as ABA Continental and a second ABA incl. Hawaii. Totals will only be listed for the area given i.e. only an ABA Continental then it will only appear in the ABA Continental listing.
- North Pacific Pelagic Waters include all species seen more than 3.2 km (2 miles) from shore off Alaska, BC, Washington, Oregon and California.
- Non-motorized Transportation (NMT) consists of species seen/ heard using self-powered locomotion (walk, run, bicycle, canoe etc.) from your home location.
- ATAPT comprises the totalling of all your Canadian Province & Territory lists to create a "total ticks" list.

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

Special Note
A reminder to those keeping track of their numbers through eBird. More than a few "reporting areas" differ from eBird to the historical listing boundaries: Vancouver Checklist – eBird does not include Point Roberts or all of Golden Ears PP; Fraser Valley – eBird does not include most of Manning Park; Okanagan Valley – eBird includes most of Manning Park.

Submission
Email your list to lawrencecowan@shaw.ca or mail the form below to Larry Cowan #45, 12268 – 189A St, Pitt Meadows, BC V3Y 2M7.

Deadline
Deadline for submitting listing totals is February 1, 2020.

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

BCFO LISTING REPORT FORM
December 2019

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

….. British Columbia (250)
….. Canada (340)
….. ABA Continental (400)
….. ABA incl Hawaii (450)
….. World (900)
….. Word 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)

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BCFO Short Trips

Three Days: Bella Coola Valley & Anahim Lake, May 16–18, 2020

Leader
Local expertise plus Adrian Leather.

Registration
Adrian Leather, 250-249-5561, q-birds@xplornet.com.

Itinerary
Saturday: (Lower Valley) Estuary, Clayton Falls, sloughs, airport, Snooka Trail, Nusatsum, Noosgulch.

Sunday: (Upper Valley) Burnt Bridge, Fisheries Pool, Stuie, Tote Rd, Atnarko and/or Talchako, to the plateau.

Monday: Anahim Lake area.

Accommodation

- Bella Coola Mountain Lodge & Brockton Bistro, Hagensborg (nights of May 15 & 16). 1-866-982-2298, Pete & Jayme.
- Eagle's Nest Resort, Anahim Lake (nights of May 17 & 18). 1-800-742-9055, Tim & Tena.

Participants are encouraged to book early as there is a range of suites, rooms, and cabins to select from, space might be limited at one location, and we want to keep the group together at single sites.

Description
Bella Coola claims to be "the real BC" and offers spectacular scenery. A local birder will lead us around a good variety of habitat, and altitude, starting at the oceanfront and working along the valley up The Hill to the tundra-like plateau, and exploring the Anahim Lake area.

The valley has Black-throated Gray Warbler and Sooty Grouse, among many others. Anahim Lake often has American White Pelican, and has hosted breeding American Bittern, Least Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Yellow Rail. The folks at Eagle's Nest Resort maintain bird feeders, and the resort is situated on a small peninsula which attracts numerous species. Great Gray Owl and Great Horned Owl have been recorded. Birders might choose to continue birding across the Chilcotin Plateau, where vast lakes attract coastal species, and Eagle Lake holds breeding Arctic Tern and Semipalmated Plover. Of course, some species will have returned, others not. Who knows what we will find on this exciting mid-migration foray?

Transport

- Bella Coola and Anahim Lake have airports.
- BC Ferries offers service from Port Hardy to Bella Coola (check for availability.
- Hwy 20 from Williams Lake is a beautiful drive.

Party Size
The trip is limited to a maximum of 15 birders.

How the Short Trips Work

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

The first day is all-day birding followed by an evening get-together at a restaurant to recap the day and tally species. On three-day trips, the second day is similar.

The final day is morning birding, with optional birding in the afternoon.

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

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

Cost: No cost to members; fee to non-members: $30, which covers BCFO membership.

If you have ideas for a short trip, Adrian Leather would be pleased to hear from you at q-birds@xplornet.com.

Trip Report: Port Alberni, Sept 14–15, 2019

Daryl Henderson, Port Alberni

…and if it's wet and stormy, well, one just has to go out to see what the storm blew in."
Adrian Dorst

Saturday September 14
We departed rain-drenched Port Alberni at 7:00 AM, bound for Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and Tofino. As there were only five of us hardy souls – Annette Bailey, Val George, Daryl Henderson, Clive Keen, and local birder Sandy McRuer – we all travelled merrily in one car. Target birds for Clive and Val were two recently reported rarities, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Snowy Plover, respectively.

Morning birding stops were Kwisitis Visitor Centre/Wickaninnish Beach, Incinerator Rock at the north end of Long Beach, and Chesterman Beach in Tofino. With the rain and wind increasing and no sign of our target species, we retired for a hot fireside lunch at the aptly named Shelter Restaurant in Tofino.

Rewarmed and replete, we returned to Incinerator Rock for a longer look, and then travelled to Comber's Beach as our final coastal birding destination.

We identified a total of 29 species on the West Coast. Some highlights included Semipalmated Plover, Whimbrel, Baird's Sandpiper and other peeps, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs standing side by side, and American Pipit. Alas, we did not see the Buff-breasted Sandpiper or Snowy Plover on this trip.

Our Saturday concluded with dinner and grog at the Starboard Grill at Harbour Quay in Port Alberni.

Sunday, September 15
In slightly better weather, we were joined by two more locals, Nicole Beaulac and Penny Hall, for birding at the Somass Estuary in Port Alberni, a top eBird hotspot in Alberni–Clayoquot Regional District. During our three-kilometre walk of part of the estuary, we recorded 43 species. Some highlights were dozens of Black Swift up high, a low-altitude flypast of coastal Sandhill Cranes, late-season warblers (Orange-crowned, Yellow, Black-

throated Gray, Townsend's) and a surprise Black-headed Grosbeak.

We then went up to Stamp River Provincial Park to view migrating salmon and a quartet of Black Bears (but no American Dipper) at the spectacular falls before arriving back in Port Alberni by noon, as our two out-of-town guests had travel plans to keep.

Note

If you're ever in the area for birding, please visit our new website, Bird Alberni (www.birdalberni.ca). This is a project spearheaded by Daryl and Annette to raise awareness about birds and birding opportunities in the Alberni Valley. The site was designed and constructed by Daryl's brother, Mark Henderson. Many of the photos were provided by Penny Hall. We will be adding new birding locations and other features in the months ahead.

A highspot of the Port Alberni trip was the excellent sighting of a large group of Whimbrels, which first posed for long nearby views, and then performed a fly-by. (Clive Keen photo of an earlier sighting.)

Briefing 1

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Neonics: Guilty Again

Neonicotinoid pesticides have been widely used since the 1990s to protect agricultural crops from the ravages of insect pests. That they also adversely affect desirable species – in particular, bees – has been well established. They are neurotoxins, but they have been thought to bind more strongly to nerve receptors in insects than in vertebrates and to pose a low risk for vertebrates. Within the last couple of years, however, it has emerged that they can affect behaviour and, ultimately, survival in small birds, who are among the smallest of vertebrate animals. Now a team of Canadian researchers has shown that a neonicotinoid can cause disruptive behaviour during migration that might affect survival.

Small migrants travelling north across the heavily cropped lands of eastern North America might ingest a neonicotinoid by consuming neonic-coated seeds, or from contact with contaminated soil, or directly from insecticide spraying. To study these effects, the researchers captured 36 White-crowned Sparrows in spring migration across Ontario, on their way from wintering in the middle and southern United States to breeding grounds in the northern boreal forest and low arctic tundra. Twelve birds were fed a very low dose of Imidacloprid (a common neonicotinoid insecticide) via coated seeds. Twelve more were given a "high" dose: 3.9 mg per kg body weight. These quantities represent about 3 to 10 percent of the predicted median lethal dose for these birds and fall well within the range of doses they might encounter in the field. The lucky remaining 12 were experimental controls; they received unadulterated grub. After receiving the dose, the birds were observed in captivity for six hours, then each fitted with a radio transmitter and released. Their subsequent movements were tracked via a network of radio telemetry receivers that is distributed over much of southern Ontario.

Confirming some recent studies of neonic effects in captive birds, the sparrows lost a significant fraction of body mass in the six-hour observation period prior to release: 3.0% and 5.9% in the low- and high-dosed birds respectively. The control birds also lost mass, but not to a significant degree. So it appears that the stress of captivity may have contributed to reduced feeding, but that the main effect was a neonic-induced suppression of appetite. The neonic exposure also was associated with an increased delay in onward migration: for low-dose birds three days on average (range 0–8 days), and for high-dosed birds four days (range 0–9). In comparison, the delay for control birds was mostly half a day (range 0–4). On the other hand, the orientation of onward migration, once the birds flew, was not apparently affected by the pesticide. All the birds eventually departed directly northeast with a very narrow range of variation.

The earlier captive-bird studies demonstrated that body mass loss was concentrated in fatty tissue, the fuel for the grueling experience of migration flight. The overall effect of field doses of neonicotinoids is to delay onward migration of affected birds because they require longer periods to recover the energy store necessary to support onward flight. This effect delays arrival on breeding grounds, hence the chance to claim a superior breeding territory and, in many cases, ultimate breeding success. Individual fitness may also be compromised if migration delays desynchronize the birds' arrival on their summer range with the time of optimum availability there of preferred foods. Birds that continue to feed in fields sown with contaminated seed may even face a direct survival threat due to cumulative toxicity or due to reduced alertness to avoid predators. Ultimately, migrant birds that use neonicotinoid-laced arable fields for refueling face an incremental threat to the population.

Reference

Eng, M.L., Stutchbury, B.J.M. and Morrissey, C.A. 2019. "Neonicotinoid insecticide reduces fueling and delays migration in songbirds." *Science* 365: 1177-1180.

Upcoming Meetings & Events

Compiled by Wayne C. Weber

The following meetings and other events are those that take place in BC and immediately adjacent areas or that potentially include information on birds that occur in BC.

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

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

2019 EVENTS

Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 (2020) – CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS. For information on dates of counts and contact information for count organizers, check the BCFO website in November and December.

2020 EVENTS

Feb. 12-15 – PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP, 47th ANNUAL MEETING, Portland, Oregon. For information and to register, visit the conference website at www.pacificseabirdgroup.org/annual-meeting .

Feb. 13-16 – WINTER WINGS BIRDING FESTIVAL, Klamath Falls, OR. For information and to register, please check the festival website at winterwingsfest.org .

Feb. 14-17 – The GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and Bird Studies Canada. For information and to participate, check the GBBC website at gbbc.birdcount.org.

Mar. (date to be announced) – First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the year from Westport, WA. Westport Seabirds operates about 20 trips per year from March through October. A detailed schedule of trips for 2020 should be posted by December 1 on the Westport Seabirds website (westportseabirds.com).

Mar. 20-22 – 18th ANNUAL WINGS OVER WATER NORTHWEST BIRDING FESTIVAL, Blaine, WA. For information, please check the website at www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com or contact Debbie Harger (phone, (360) 332-8311; email, dharger@cityofblaine.com).

Mar. 20-22 – 23rd ANNUAL OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL, Othello, WA. For information, check the festival website at www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org, or phone (509) 989-5606.

Apr. 15-21 – 25th ANNUAL GODWIT DAYS birding festival, Arcata, California. This is one of the premier birding festivals in North America, with dozens of field trips to various places. For information or to sign up, visit the festival website at www.godwitdays.org.

Apr. 17-19 – OLYMPIC BIRD FESTIVAL, Sequim, WA. For information, visit the festival website at http://www.olympicbirdfest.org , or contact the Dungeness River Audubon Center by phone (360-681-4076) or by e-mail (info@olympicbirdfest.org).

Apr. 24-26 – GRAYS HARBOR SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL, Aberdeen, WA. For information, contact the festival office at PO Box 470, Montesano, WA 98563 (phone 360-289-5048) or check the website at http://www.shorebirdfestival.com.

Apr. 28-29 – ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL BIOLOGISTS OF BC annual conference, Nita Lake Lodge, Whistler, BC. For further information and to register, visit the APBBC website at professionalbiology.com.

Apr. 28-May 1 – Annual meeting of the SOCIETY FOR NORTHWEST VERTEBRATE BIOLOGY at the Doubletree Inn in Spokane, Washington. This is a joint meeting with The Wildlife Society (Washington Chapter) and NW Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation. For information and to register, check the SNWVB website at a later date at thesnvb.org/annual-meeting.

May 11-17 – WINGS OVER THE ROCKIES FESTIVAL (23rd annual), Invermere, BC. For information, contact the Pynelogs Cultural Centre, PO Box 2633, Invermere, BC V0A 1K0, phone 1-855-342-2473, e-mail info@wingsovertherockies.org , or check the website at www.wingsovertherockies.org .

May 14-17 – LEAVENWORTH SPRING BIRD FEST, Leavenworth, WA. For information, email info@leavenworthspringbirdfest.com or check the festival website at www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com.

May 14-18 – 23rd Annual MEADOWLARK NATURE FESTIVAL, Penticton, BC. The schedule of events and registration may not be available for awhile, but please check the festival website at meadowlarkfestival.ca.

June 1-July7 – NORTH AMERICAN BREEDING BIRD SURVEY. This long-established program, supervised by the Canadian Wildlife Service and US Fish & Wildlife Service, is for experienced birders who are skilled at identifying birds by songs and calls as well as by sight. It involves running a roadside survey route once every year during June or very early July. There are several "vacant" (i.e., unassigned) routes in various parts of BC. If you are interested, check the Canadian Wildlife Service website at www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/bird-surveys/landbird/north-american-breeding/overview.html , which includes further

details and has contact information for the CWS staff in charge of the program.

June 26-28 – BC FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, in Smithers, BC. Watch for future announcements on the BCFO webpage and in this publication.

Aug. 10-15 – Seventh NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONFERENCE, San Juan, Puerto Rico. This joint meeting of the American Ornithological Society, Wilson Ornithological Society, and Association of Field Ornithologists takes place once every four years. For details, please check the AOS website at a later date at americanornithology.org/meetings/annual-meeting.

Sep. 11-14 – First joint meeting of WASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY and OREGON BIRDING ASSOCIATION, Astoria, OR. For information and to register, check either the WOS website at wos.org/annual-conference or the OBA website at https://oregonbirding.org next spring.

Arctic Award for Young Birder

BC Young Birder Toby Theriault from Tofino won a $14,000 scholarship for this year's Students on Ice Arctic Expedition. This expedition brings together 130 young naturalists from around the world to go to Nunavut for 16 days, to explore nature and learn about the Inuit culture. While there they also learned first-hand about the effects of climate change on this fragile landscape and why the area needs to be conserved.

You can read more about this remarkable program at https://studentsonice.com.

Toby reports an amazing experience on the expedition, seeing walruses and polar bears, and – a major delight for a birder – the Ivory Gull shown below.

Toby can be seen talking about the trip at:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=90rFx5RPcfE

Young Birder Program

Melissa Hafting

Pemberton Trip, July 20

We drove up on a gorgeous sunny day and made our first stop at beautiful One Mile Lake. We admired the strange lily pads growing here. We also watched an Osprey and Turkey Vulture fly overhead and then a Merlin went rip-roaring by in hot pursuit of a dragonfly. The Merlin won. It perched above us and ate the head off of one dragonfly after another. It was nice to see this little falcon so close.

We also got some nice views of Warbling and Red-eyed Vireo, but other than that it was quiet, though we could admire the glacial blue look of the creek.

Next we were off to Mount Currie to look for Alder Flycatcher. The last reports came from here in 2017. Unfortunately we didn't hear any but did find a Gray Catbird. We drove up to Joffre Lakes Provincial Park but it was so crowded with tour buses and people we could not get a parking spot and left. With that amount of people we figured we wouldn't see many birds anyway.

We drove to Pemberton Meadows and found a family of eight Kestrels flying near us as we ate lunch. We also found some Willow Flycatchers, Lazuli Buntings, Western Kingbirds and Eastern Kingbirds. While we were eating lunch a man stopped his car and let us know there is a large bear that lived where we were eating and suggested we move along, which we did. On the forest service roads we saw several signs saying "You are in Grizzly Bear Country" and that it was illegal to shoot them. We did not see a Grizzly but did run into a beautiful Black Bear that gave us great views.

On South Creek Forest Service Rd we found a flock of warblers. We got to see American Redstarts in all different plumages and sexes. We also had a Nashville Warbler that Bridget found and a MacGillivray's that Katya found. The most abundant warblers by far were Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats. We photographed a silent Least Flycatcher that was actively flycatching. We saw a Red-breasted Sapsucker, Black-capped Chickadees, Lazuli Buntings, fighting Eastern Kingbirds, Vaux's Swifts, Western Kingbirds, Hairy and Downy Woodpecker and Veery. For July it was a lot of activity! We unfortunately did not find any breeding Northern Waterthrushes that were recently found on the breeding bird surveys.

We had fun watching dozens and dozens of paragliders flying high over Pemberton Meadows and landing on the road near to us.

"We did not see a Grizzly but did run into a beautiful Black Bear that gave us great views." Photo by Bridget Spencer.

We then went to Fulton Marsh and found an Alder/Willow that never called nor answered to playback. Here we got great looks at several Veery, which was a lifer for Sasha. We also had a Steller's Jay, Cedar Waxwings, a beautiful Western Tanager and great looks again at another Red-eyed Vireo.

On our way out after driving Airport Road we saw a Pileated Woodpecker and Great Blue Heron fly over the road. Unfortunately the surprise I had planned for the youth had flown off, as birds do, but we still had a great time in the Pemberton area.

We stopped at Whytecliff Park on our way home but could not find any Surfbirds. We did see some Black Turnstones though. What really caught our attention was the colour of the sea. It looked like the sea was full of blood as the water was full of red tide. Katya saw a Pygmy-Owl perched on a tree near the highway in West Van but none of the rest of us were able to see it, as I could not stop on the highway.

Another nice trip and day out with the young birders. We finished the evening with lots of laughs having dinner at Five Guys restaurant in West Van before traveling back home to Vancouver.

Pelagic Trip, July 29–30

On this overnight pelagic trip to Tofino we all got to meet young birder Gaelen from Nelson for the first time. He was an awesome kid and birder and fit right into our group. On the ferry ride over Gaelen got his lifer Pelagic Cormorant but we didn't see much else. We drove straight from Departure Bay to Tofino as we wanted to have time to bird the beaches.

Young birder Toby's dad thought he might have found a Spotted Redshank the day before, so we looked, but didn't find it, spotting instead a Purple Martin, which is quite uncommon. Here we also got Gaelen his lifer Black Turnstone.

The beaches were really quiet. We stopped at Wick, Long Beach and Mackenzie. Mackenzie was good though, because the youth had fun tide-pooling. They caught and released sculpins and crabs, looked at sea anemones, and watched Black Oystercatchers and an Osprey. We were disturbed when we watched an adult illegally harvesting starfishes. We have three vegetarians in

our group and it was horrifying to know these animals would die a slow death when the offenders told us they were going to dry out the live sea stars.

We had a heck of a time finding a place to eat. Tofino was so crowded! We ended up getting in at Shed restaurant after an hour wait. I never saw the youth eat so fast as they did that night!

We went to bed at the hostel (which is sadly now pricing their private rooms at the cost of a 4-star hotel) and were up at 5:50 AM for the pelagic. The weather was gorgeous the day before but this morning it was raining and the forecast didn't look great. Seven people on the pelagic bailed out and would not be refunded but the youth and I were eager to go. The captain said it would be wet but safe so off we went in our orange warm survival suits.

We went in a Boston whaler from The Whale Centre with Captain John Forde. He was very kind and helpful and we first drove by Cleland Island where we saw three Tufted Puffins, another lifer for Gaelen. We didn't see any of the Brown Pelicans reported a few days prior, but saw a cute Sea Otter and some Harbour Porpoises, and the island had many nesting Pigeon Guillemots, a few Harlequin Ducks and quite a few Common Murres, Rhinos and Marbled Murrelets.

Nearby we got great looks at our first Cassin's Auklet. We ended up seeing 40 of these little guys that ate so much they couldn't fly.

We saw at least 90 Red-necked Phalaropes and a handful of Red Phalaropes. We could really see the differences in size and plumage. We did have a few Northern Fulmars fly by as well. The most numerous pelagic bird was Sooty Shearwater – 300 – and we had very low numbers of Pink-footed Shearwaters.

When we got out to the Continental Shelf we started to see Albatrosses. All were Black-footed but they never fail to disappoint. When we were out by the shelf we came upon some cute Northern Fur Seals and a Humpback Whale! The whale was huge and right in front of us.

We also ended up seeing not one but three Mola Mola! These weird-looking fish swam right by our boat, and may have been the highlight for some of the youth. Cole spotted an Arctic Tern in the distance and then two more were spotted closer to the boat. Bridget was able to get some nice photos.

Arctic Tern (above) and Clark's Nutcracker (below), by Bridget Spencer.

By now we were getting soaked, even though we had our water-resistant survival suits on and our rain gear, and it was kind of miserable and cold. But, no pain no gain.

We were rewarded with a flock of Fork-tailed and Leach's Storm-Petrels, giving lifers for most. At one point I was sure I saw a small flock of distant Sabine's Gulls but my bins were so rainy and fogged up and the birds too distant to confirm this. To counter this small disappointment we had an adult Long-tailed Jaeger fly right over.

It may have been a wet pelagic with low numbers and diversity for this time of year but this was mostly due to the fact that we were unsuccessful in finding a fishing boat. It is active fishing boats (since we aren't allowed to chum on BC pelagic charters) that make or break your pelagic.

We were drenched when we got back so we all changed into dry clothes and made it back as the last car on the 5:45 PM ferry.

A Brown Pelican had been seen in Point Roberts while we were in Tofino and also spotted from the Tsawwassen ferry jetty, so we checked out the area but couldn't find it. We did see many Oystercatchers, seven Marbled Godwits and a Whimbrel (another lifer for Gaelen).

I treated the kids to some hot chocolate at Starbucks and then said goodbye, which was a bit sad as it was the last young-birder trip that Cole would be on – he was soon off to university.

I asked Gaelen if he wanted to get up early and bird before his flight and he said yes and listed off a few lifers he needed in Vancouver. We would get three of them (Hutton's Vireo, Purple Finch and Bewick's Wren) at the Richmond Nature Park. As we were admiring the very high number of American Goldfinches and fledglings present we turned and saw a male Black-chinned Hummingbird coming to a nearby feeder! I couldn't believe my eyes. Gaelen was surprised they were considered rare here, as they are common in Nelson. But this was a new Vancouver bird for me and the 4th record for Metro Vancouver. Many people got to see the bird throughout the day, making the find all the more special.

It was a great way for Gaelen to end his trip. I took him to the airport and closed off a great weekend with some fabulous young birders.

Manning Park, August 24

We met up in Langley and it was our first time meeting awesome young birder Justin. On the way in to the park, just before the lodge, Katya spotted a Band-tailed Pigeon, a new bird for me for the park and quite uncommon here. We then drove up the road to Cascade Lookout where we enjoyed feeding the Clark's Nutcrackers and Canada Jays. We never tire of having these birds land on our hands and heads. We also had fun feeding the Ravens, the Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels and the Yellow-pine Chipmunks. We had a Pika calling here, too.

After this we went up to the Heather

Trail and enjoyed the wildflowers and saw a Fox Sparrow, Hermit Thrush and Columbian Ground Squirrel. The youth also had fun with a few Canada Jays we got to feed that kept landing on all of our heads.

We had our lunch at Lightning Lake but were surprised the Columbian Ground Squirrels we love so much were nowhere to be seen. The squirrels begin hibernating in July but this thoroughly disappointed the kids who love to feed them. At the lodge we had Northern Rough-winged and Barn Swallows but no hummers. We did see a few Steller's Jays though.

Next we were off to Strawberry Flats where Katya spotted a family of Spruce Grouse – a hen and two chicks. Spruce Grouse is the most uncommon grouse in the park so we were thrilled to see them. The mom clucked and was protective over her chicks but allowed us great views. It was a real special interaction.

I spotted a Sooty Grouse by the side of the road and we went into the woods and found her with her older chick posing nicely.

At the parking lot at Strawberry Flats as soon as we got out of our car Bridget spotted a male American Three-toed Woodpecker. Usually they aren't right at the parking lot. We joked "we could go home now" but decided to continue on our hike. We ended up seeing many Mountain Chickadees, a Red-breasted Nuthatch harassing a Red-tailed Hawk and another female American Three-toed Woodpecker tapping away.

We enjoyed a leisurely walk around Lightning Lake and Twenty-Minute Lake and had an Olive-sided Flycatcher and some Townsend's and Yellow-rumped Warblers but it was not too birdy and there were lots of noisy people. We heard someone had seen a cougar there recently but we were not so lucky (or unlucky). We did end up seeing a Mule Deer but no bears as in past visits together.

It was our final trip for the year and a great way to end our summer. Thanks also to Ilya for volunteering to help

Photos: Black-backed Woodpecker and Sooty Grouse photographed by Melissa Hafting.

during this trip.

It was hard to say goodbye to the young birders especially to Bridget who will be heading off for university soon in California. She will be thoroughly missed by all but we know great things await for her ahead.

Thanks to everyone for a great year and taking part in the young birder program.

A New Era for Young Birders in BC

We are all getting older and so are the young birders. I founded the young birder field program in 2014. I saw all these young birders that were birding alone locally in Metro Vancouver and wanted to bring them together. The program took off with a bang. It attracted many youth and we started taking field trips in the city and outside of it. The goal was to show them birds they don't normally get a chance to see at home. We were quite successful at this.

In 2016, George Clulow and Carlo Giovanella asked me to run the program under the BCFO, and I happily did so. We would combine the young birder award program they designed with my field trip program. This worked very well. BCFO helped subsidize the gas and car rental fees by 20%. I used to pay it all out of my own pocket, so I was very grateful.

BCFO also helped me to connect with young birders across the province. The Young Birder Program now has over 20 members from as far away as Nelson and Fort St. James, Vancouver Island, Pender Island, Kelowna and Kamloops.

I loved connecting youth from across the province, and took them on field trips in the Southern Interior and Vancouver Island, including overnight trips and pelagics.

We had the time of our lives. We learned so much from each other. I feel I learned way more from them than they did from me. They made me laugh, gave me joy in my life and became my friends and family.

However, many are now aged out of the program. They are attending university now, as the program ends at age 18. Locally, there are now only three kids in the correct age group. The others are scattered across the province and can only do about one trip a year with me due to travel costs. Therefore, I've decided to step down from the position of the young birder program leader.

I want to thank all the volunteers who helped me so much in this program especially to Ilya Povalyaev who helped me on many field trips. I also want to thank other parents and volunteers who have helped me on field trips: Cathy Reader and Warren Lee, Quentin Brown, Rob Lyske, Jeremiah Kennedy, Peter Candido, Ren Ferguson, Dick Cannings and John Reynolds. All of your time and energy and kindness and knowledge shared with the youth meant a lot to them and to myself. I want to also thank Krista De Groot and Michelle Lamberson for providing kind and gracious financial donations.

I also want to thank Rob Butler, Bob Elner and Krista De Groot for getting the youth involved in the International Ornithological Congress in 2018. I want to thank Monica Nugent and many others who have come out and supported young birder events when I've put out the call. I also would like to thank Cameron Eckert, Liana and Monica Nugent, John Gordon, Alan Moat, Guy Pambrun and Michael Ashbee who have donated books, binoculars, optics, games and more to the program. Thanks also to Mike Fung and Josh Inman for the treasury work they provided.

I want to thank all the parents who have allowed their kids to take part in this program and for all their support.

Special thanks go to George Clulow who has been available to help and give guidance and for so deeply supporting the young birders in BC. Thanks also go to Carlo Giovanella for being another champion and supporter of young birders in BC, and to Larry Cowan for making the Young Birder hats and checklists. The hats have really made the youth feel part of a club and community and we love them.

Most of all I want to thank the young birders of BC. All of you are special to me. All of you make me proud and all of you have and are going to make BC and this world a better place. You care so much about the environment and birds and are so intelligent. I watch the older ones of you mentor the younger ones in the program and I can tell you are going to be great leaders. As many of you now prepare for careers in ornithology, biology and environmental science and even other non-related fields I have full confidence you are bringing much-needed hope to a difficult world and society. It has been an honour being a mentor and teacher to you all.

– Melissa Hafting

Melissa Hafting with some of the young birders on the Ucluelet pelagic trip. Photo by Warren Lee.

Avian Encounters

Unexpected Fall Cheer

The fall around Prince George had been remarkably gloomy. Soggy rain seemed to have prevailed for months. But then this note via the ncenbird listserv cheered everyone's spirits.

Lee Foster, Prince George

A Robin this morning burst into a beautiful springtime melody, which was music to the ears on this somewhat dreary fall day. Since I have a few minutes to spare I thought I would put a few lines to paper about what was going through his mind.

As the mist from the early morning rain lifted slowly from the Prince George landscape of College Heights, a young male Robin sat contemplating the myriad of emotions he was feeling. He was pretty convinced it was actually fall but here he was a little confused. The current moon phase, the daylight hours, the temperature, the weather conditions all led him to believe he could be wrong. In fact this was very much like a cool spring day near the end of March. If so there was no time to waste: he needed to be the first one on the block to serenade the ladies. With that he broke out into his most melodious song. All was going well, and in fact he was actually attracting some much-needed attention, when to his dismay a particularly pert orange-breasted female voiced her opinion, saying that despite his melodic voice and extremely attractive plumage her companions were concerned about his mental faculties considering snow was expected in the not-too-distant future.

This juvenile Bittern was photographed by Lee Harding (Coquitlam) at Colony Farm, indicating breeding in the area. Lee had seen adults flying back and forth in late spring/early summer between the pond and the ditch along the west side of the river, evidently feeding young in the pond, and he scooped numerous photographs, including a Bittern swimming.

He admitted that his hormones and the conditions that mimicked spring had fooled his emotions. Then to cover his awkwardness he stated it sure felt good to use his voice to brighten the neighborhood. His new acquaintance then chirped in "Well the ladies and I are heading for a nice green golf course in Palm Springs and you are welcome to join us." With that, the long arduous journey down south did not seem quite so bad.

To be continued spring 2020.

Odd Bedchamber

Andrea Paetow, Burnaby

As a kid I always wondered where birds sleep at night. Last year in June, I observed one scruffy-looking Black-capped Chickadee flying in at dusk to settle on top of the frame of my bathroom window for the night. The bird

returned the next night, and the next night, and many nights after that (with few exceptions), for over a month Eventually, the bird did not come back, and I can just hope it found a more comfortable place to spend the night.

How to Stumble on a Good Bird

John Gordon

November 5, 2019, Maplewood Flats North Vancouver

Carlo Giovanella and I had just spent a fruitless couple of hours enveloped in fog on Seymour Mountain. We had the crazy idea that there might be some good birds to see up there. We were mistaken. After a few hours in thick fog my extremities were frozen and I felt really grumpy; likewise Carlo was sore from a pulled muscle. Our Seymour count was precisely two Dark-eyed Juncos. Slim pickings indeed.

We decided to head down the mountain and pop into North Vancouver's Maplewood Flats on our way home. Along the trails the autumn colours were breathtaking, but again we came up with no birds – not even a Song Sparrow.

We were almost back to our car when we spotted a mixed flock feeding next to the wooden bridge over the creek. A couple of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, three Yellow-rumped Warblers and couple of Black-capped Chickadees. The warblers were hawking insects and the others gleaning insects from the shrubs. At first the warblers drew our attention. Perhaps an elusive Palm Warbler? But alas none were present. The kinglets looked a lot like kinglets but…

...One bird stood out. Small and grey, a little like a Bushtit but the posture looked odd and the bill was long. Could it be a gnatcatcher? Before we could get an ID it flew off to a nearby tree. I managed to get a quick pic, showed it to Carlo and he agreed – it was indeed a Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, perhaps, as I found out later, just the sixth time one has been seen in Metro Vancouver.

The bird was my 239nd 2019 Metro Vancouver bird and a whole new bird for BC. So what started out as a day to forget became one for the record books. Suddenly my frozen parts were as warm as toast and the ride home was filled with satisfaction of another day well spent.

Above: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher by John Gordon.
Below: A Spruce Grouse chick spotted by Melissa Hafting at Manning Park (see page 17).

A Week at Spurn Bird Observatory

Joshua Brown, North Vancouver

Over most of the second half of 2019 I have been in Europe as part of my gap year, spending time volunteering, travelling, visiting family, and, of course, birding. Whilst travelling in the UK in early September I came across Spurn Bird Observatory in East Yorkshire and was able to stay for a few days. Spurn is a spit that juts out over five kilometres into the River Humber as it meets the North Sea on the east coast of England. Beautiful dunes and beaches are met by the small village to the north, in which the observatory is based, which becomes a migrant trap every fall with its few stands of trees and bushes. The area is well-known for visible migration, particularly of Common Swift, pipits, and thrushes in the tens of thousands. Within a couple of days I managed to see such excellent birds as Dotterel, Mediterranean and Caspian Gulls, and even a White-rumped Sandpiper and I quickly fell in love with the area. I enjoyed my few days of introduction to Spurn so much that I organized to return at the end of October to volunteer for a week.

I arrived at noon on October 28, excited for the week to come and looking forward to watching the amazing spectacle of migration. Many of the locals seemed excited, too, as easterly winds were forecast with the potential of bringing migrants and rarities across the North Sea from the European continent. Immediately upon my arrival a report of a Great Grey Shrike came over the radio bird news system, and so dropping my bags I raced off through the village, over a few dunes, and across a beach along the spit. The Great Grey Shrike was exactly as reported, showing very nicely along the pebbled beach on the side of a dune. Such a fantastic start was an indication of the week to come; I had scarcely been at Spurn for an hour and I had already seen a lifer!

On my way back to the observatory to settle in I was surprised to see a Eurasian Woodcock fly over the path in front of me and into one of the mist nets that were set up as part of the banding operation (or 'ringing' as it is known in Europe), and so I was afforded stunning close-up views of this usually secretive bird. The rest of the day involved meeting some of the many birders staying at the observatory, as well as the two other fantastic volunteers with whom I would be spending the week. Each evening finished with the observatory log of all of that day's sightings and a chance to share stories and photos from the day's adventures. The birding community at Spurn is very welcoming and sociable and it was excellent to meet so many nice people.

The following day included another incredible bird caught in the nets: Long-eared Owl. A large contingent of birders came to watch it being released before dispersing to search for migrants and rarities once again. Over the course of the day Fieldfare, Redwing, a Yellow-browed Warbler, Brambling, Common Scoter, eight more Woodcocks, and a Short-eared Owl were all seen well. The river mudflats held hundreds of Common Redshank, Red Knot, Common Shelducks, and a smattering of Brant, Bar-tailed Godwits, and Little Egrets. From the seawatching hide during the fading evening light two Dovekies (or Little Auks) flew past heading north, likely blown closer to shore by the steadily strengthening onshore winds.

The next morning, an animated cry of "Isabelline Wheatear" came over the radio, immediately sending all the birders in the area to a partly ploughed dirt field. A pale flash darting out of the field margin revealed the presence of the rare Asian vagrant, and as the wheatear foraged it steadily ventured closer to the pleased and rapidly growing group of onlookers. In the afternoon, another brilliant migrant turned up near the beach in a small patch of low vegetation. As soon as the news came out, I grabbed a borrowed bike and hurried out to the dunes as fast as I

All photographs by Joshua Brown. Below: Long-eared Owl.

could. I wasn't the only one with that idea, as when I arrived at the spot I was greeted by a group of about ten other birders and bikes strewn all over the path as if strewn about by a storm. Behind me more birders were peddling and running madly, cameras and binoculars bouncing all over the place. Soon, a group of more than fifty had amassed, yet the bird was still laying low in the shrubbery and I had not yet caught a glimpse.

Slowly, the group formed a wide circle around the location of its last sighting, and as people shuffled slowly about, from out of the bush came the weary traveller: a stunning male Bluethroat. With a fleeting view for a few seconds in flight I was compelled to stay and try to get a better look at such a brilliant Siberian rarity. Hours longer that afternoon produced only a few more brief glimpses, but they were enough to tell undoubtedly what I had seen. Fortunately, the Bluethroat stayed around in the exact same patch of scrub by the beach for the next four days, becoming bolder by the day and providing incredible views with more patience.

Of course, birding is never just about the unusual highlights or rarities, but also equally as much about appreciating and enjoying the more common species, too. Most evenings were spent on a purpose-built viewing tower (shorter but similar to the west field tower at Reifel) watching and counting the hundreds of Eurasian Blackbirds and Curlews flying over at dusk. In the mornings, point counts were witness to healthy numbers of wood-pigeons, starlings, and chiffchaffs.

The once-elusive Bluethroat.

My final few days continued with more amazing finds, including a Firecrest amongst a large group of Goldcrests (very similar to our kinglets), a few more Woodcocks, and plenty more shorebirds like Common Redshank and Dunlin congregating on the river mudflats. The weather was wet and dreary on my last day, which seemed fitting for a goodbye, but one more exciting find lay in store. A Pallas's Leaf Warbler turned up in the village and proved a brilliant last bird for me to see at Spurn.

Special thanks to Jonnie, Paul, and the other volunteers Ellis and Emma for being so friendly and helpful to me during my stay, and to all of the rest of the wonderful birding community at Spurn. I could not recommend a visit to Spurn more highly, and I hope to return again soon.

Briefing 2

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Landing on a Thin Perch

Imagine you are Superman. You have leaped over a tall building in a single bound. Now you have to land on a cable stretched over the road. How can you possibly do it? Ask a bird – they do it all the time. Researchers have now closely studied how birds grasp thin perches such as a twig by filming the grasping action of their feet and claws as they approach the perch. They also separated the front and rear portions of the perch and attached load cells to them so they could measure the strength of grip of the birds' fore and rear claws. The subject birds were Pacific Parrotlets, a small tree-dwelling South American species (Ecuador and northern Peru) common in the pet trade and also known as Lesson's Parrotlet.

First, the researchers noted that birds' feet are adapted to their normal behaviour. A ground-dwelling bird's rear toe is longer and straighter than the rear toe of perching and climbing birds, presumably to improve their balance on the ground. The curved toes and claws of perching birds facilitate grasping the perch as they land. In experiments conducted in an aviary the parrotlets were observed always to approach the landing with the same trajectory and attitude – presumably, on a final flight path that will best facilitate the necessary extinguishing of momentum on contact. On the approach the toes are extended; on contact they curl about the perch as the toe slides on the surface, using friction to improve grasp and kill momentum. The claws are pressed into the surface of the perch to assure a stable hold. Once stable, the bird relaxes its grip.

While the approach is apparently determined consciously by the bird using visual clues, the actual gripping action on landing is thought to occur so quickly that it must be autonomously programmed by the bird's nervous system. The stimulus for the gripping actions is thought to be the initial friction between branch and toe: slippery surfaces were observed to stimulate stronger squeezing action by the bird.

The researchers note that the birds' body attitude and wing position is always the same on approach. They do not elaborate further. Obviously the wing, fully extended in vertical position is also designed to eliminate lift and momentum; the body position (nearly vertical, as compared with the near horizontal attitude of the body in flight) facilitates the wing action. Altogether, landing motions are one of the more specialized and remarkable adaptations of birds for life that includes flight. Not even Superman could emulate them.

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Birding South Chicago

Larry Joseph, Hazelton

In late July, the Forest Stewardship Council International (FSC) had invited me to an international meeting in Chicago. The FSC International North America Regional Membership Meeting was to take place on November 5–6. The venue would be a hotel on the Magnificent Mile of the Windy City.

Chicagoland, the informal name for the metropolitan area of Chicago, is the third largest metropolitan area in America. Its population is almost 10 million.

After my work was done, my main personal interest was to go birding. But where should I go for a self-guided tour to find the early winter?

Naturally, eBird could indicate the best places to find birds close to my hotel. A report for August 20 caught my eye. In it, a birder named Jacob Cooper had submitted a nice report. His profile invited birders to contact him by email about birding should they visit Chicago.

So, I sent him an email right away to tell him that I would be there soon. We began an exchange of emails and text messages. Jacob indicated that some graduate students and staff would like to join us for a morning of birding.

The week before my departure for Chicago we had a telephone conversation. Jacob indicated that he had read my profile on eBird. "You are doing cool work! Could you speak to a group of graduate students and researchers at the Field Museum and the University of Chicago?" "Yes!" I replied immediately.

Consequently, we agreed to a plan for a birding trip to the southside of Chicago. The late folk and rock singer-songwriter Jim Croce immortalized the area for me when he sang in a ballad "Well the south side of Chicago is the baddest part of town." Gosh, I thought, this is going to be an adventure!

After we saw some birds we would visit the Field Museum of Natural History. My speaking engagement at the museum was at 10:00 AM. Afterwards, Jacob generously offered to show me around the museum and to go behind the scenes to the scientific collection of bird specimens.

Top Birders and Ornithologists

The long days of intense meetings had shortened my sleep for three nights. As a consequence, I had to struggle out of my bed at 5:00 AM on November 7.

A few minutes before 6:00 AM, I stepped out to the sidewalk at the main entrance of the Warwick Allerton Hotel. It was still dark. A cold wind swirled down the street past the 1920s hotel. So, I stepped back into the vestibule at the entrance. Right at 6:00 AM, Dr John Bates walked up to me.

Then we began the drive to our first birding location. We introduced our-

Left to right: Jacob Cooper, Josh Engel, and John Bates observe waterfowl behind a breakwater at Rainbow Beach Park. The Chicago skyline is in the background. Photo by Larry Joseph.

selves to each other as John steered his sub-compact hybrid vehicle southwards near the lakeshore.

One of the first things John Bates told me was that he had married a Canadian woman from Trail, BC! His son plays NCAA hockey at a college in Wisconsin. So, we immediately hit it off really well as we both love hockey, birds, and our connections to Canada!

John Bates is an ornithologist. Currently, he has an important position at the Field Museum of Natural History: Curator and Section Head, Life Sciences, Integrative Research Center, Field Museum. What is more, he is supervisor for Jacob Cooper while Jacob does doctoral research about the biogeography of Afromontane birds for his PhD at the University of Chicago. The Mongabay website indicates that the Afromontane are widely scattered "sky islands" of Africa with similar vegetation and rich in endemic bird species.

Jacob Cooper, doctoral candidate, Field Museum and The University of Chicago.

At sunrise, we met up with Jacob C. Cooper and Josh Engel near Park No. 566. It was minus one Celsius, sunny, and windy. So the north wind chilled us fast. We began birding at 6:40 am.

Jacob Cooper has been an avid birder since he was eight years of age. Currently, he is an eBird Regional Reviewer for 17 Regions in Africa and an eBird Hotspot Editor for 8 Regions in Africa! At present, his main work is an ornithologist, research affiliate and Graduate Student, at the Field Museum and The University of Chicago.

Josh Engel grew up birding in the suburbs of Chicago. He has birded and done bird research around the world. Josh Engel was recently an ornithologist at the Field Museum. Community. Outreach has been important to Josh. He "appears regularly in the local media and he helps run the Illinois Young Birders" according to his website. In 2016, Josh founded Red Hill Birding which does local and international tours (see https://www.redhillbirding.com/about). Amazingly, Josh has observed about half of the bird species on our planet!

So, in my mind, I went birding with the top birders and ornithologists at Chicagoland.

Birding Hotspots

Cook County was the general area for our birding adventure. We visited three hotspots at the shore of Lake Michigan. They extended northwards from the Illinois-Indiana border to Soldier Field, the home of the NFL Chicago Bears.

Park Number 566

Park Number 566, Chicago's most remote park, was our first stop. It's habitat was mainly grassy. Many of the birds were hiding on the ground in the thick, tall grass. It was an escape from the cold north wind.

As we walked, some birds were flushed. They only flew a short distance above the grass to a new location. The Snow Bunting, however, flew high in the wind to another location, calling all the way.

For me, the bird highlights at this location were Vesper Sparrow, Snow Bunting, and Lapland Longspur (for hotspot details, see https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3934103 , and our checklist at https://ebird.org/checklist/S61255433).

The four amigos walked for one hour covering a distance of 2.74 km. We observed 14 species (plus one taxa) among 126 individual birds.

Josh had told me at the start of our walk that the park was the site of a former steel mill. This location has a long history of steel manufacture. The industrial age began close around Park No.566 right after the Civil War. And steel factories in the area were to manufacture steel rails for railroads during America's move westward into Indian Country.

Recently, Park No. 566 has been in the news about a potential massive housing development. However, fears of soil contamination forced the European developers to put a potential $2 billion dollar development on hold according to a recent *Chicago Tribune* article.

Nonetheless, Park No. 566 has had eBird reports for 232 bird species. This area could be an important place for research about the impact of the highly industrialized river system on birds.

Rainbow Beach Park

Our next visit was to nearby Rainbow Beach Park. Small sand dunes and tall grass are the main features of the park. Our interest was waterfowl. They gather behind the Breakwater for Eugene Sawyer Water Purification Plant.

In our party, we had binoculars and two spotting scopes. So, we were able to see the birds amongst the waves. In total we observed 20 species amongst 524 individuals. The sight of Horned Grebes in winter garb was wonderful! The Redheads were a treat as I had previously only seen a few. The highlight for me was the coyote. It was amazing to see this healthy animal loping through the waving golden grass with Lake Michigan in the background.

Burnham Park

Our third birding location was the McCormick nature area. We began our 30 minute tour of Burnham Park at 8:52 AM. It is near the south side of Soldiers Field. We observed 17 species and 107 individuals. The Vesper Sparrow was a rarity at the location. Jacob exclaimed, "That was the second time ever seeing a Vesper Sparrow in Chicago!" A second highlight for me was the Red-tailed Hawk (borealis).

Concluding Thoughts

To sum up, we observed a total of 757 birds over three hours. There were 37 species of birds at the three hotspots in the greenway along the shoreline of Lake Michigan in Chicago.

The Field Museum Guides, doctoral candidates Jacob Cooper, and Natalia Piland, Josh Engels, and Dr. Bates, had treated me like an honorary guest. Their incredible knowledge, generosity, humility, and hospitality, were outstanding. I had an experience of a lifetime!

I was a stranger but they took me in. And we are all the richer for it!

Book Review

Nathan Hentze, Victoria

The Peterson Reference Guide to Sparrows of North America, by Rick Wright, 2019. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 434 pages, $50 hardcover.

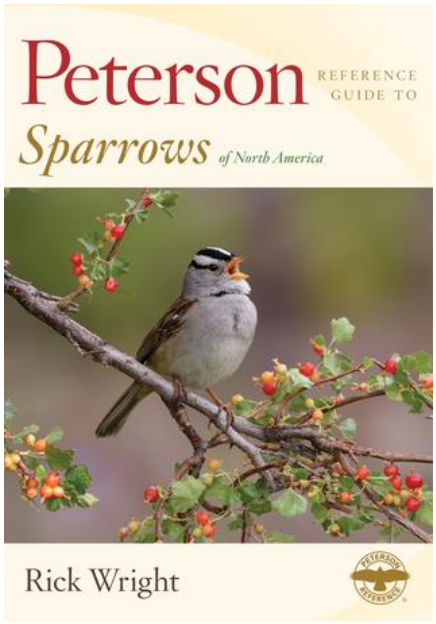
"A prominent politician once said, 'It depends upon what the meaning of the word *is* is.'" So starts the section on Cassiar Junco in Rick Wright's new book. And what this guide is, is not your average bird book. In this volume, Wright delves into the tales (and tails) of 76 "species" of Passerellidae (the New World, or American, Sparrows). But like a flushed Savannah Sparrow, flying away with "extravagant, almost larklike swooping," Wright makes a few twists and turns of his own.

For starters, while ostensibly an identification guide, each species account begins with a "human history" of the species. And I say "a" human history and not "the" human history, because as Wright expounds on the first page of the introduction, "Virtually every sparrow taxon's human history could fill a book of its own." These histories provide such details as the place, time, and circumstances surrounding the species' discovery, taxonomic debates, naming priorities, drama, mistakes and intrigue to the present day. I found these histories both novel for a guide book and informative.

Following the histories are just two sections for each species entry: "Field Identification", and "Range and Geographic Variation." These two sections make up the bulk of the species entries.

The Field Identification sections are highly detailed, providing information on appearance of adults and juveniles, general moult, behaviour, similar species, and for most species, vocalizations. Descriptions in this section are among the most detailed one can find in print; however, there are no subheadings, so if you want to know something specific you may have to read the entire section to find it. Wright does a good job of not being too repetitive between species accounts, such that reading about how Song Sparrow differs from Swamp Sparrow reinforced but did not directly copy how Swamp Sparrow differs from Song Sparrow. If you are purchasing this book as an identification tool, this is the section you'll want to refer to most often.

After "Field Identification" comes "Range and Geographic Variation." This section contains one of the strongest features of the guide, but also one of the biggest omissions. The strength here lies in the detail of the range descriptions, which seem well researched and up-to-date. But the biggest omission is the lack of any species range maps. There is one map in this entire book, a small inset of the geographic scope of the book, easily missed within the leaf litter of an otherwise two-page photo spread of a towhee.



A closer look at that inset map reveals that this guide covers the region to roughly central Mexico. However, it is not until the section titled "The Genera and Species of North American Sparrows" well into the introduction that we find out that this region is "zoogeographic North America, or the Nearctic region, from arctic America south to the volcanic belt that crosses Mexico from Jalisco in the west to Veracruz in the east," excluding Caribbean islands. This inclusivity beyond the southern US border will give many readers their first introduction to some of the more tropical members of the family, such as the brush finches, and is a welcome addition.

The introduction is also where we are informed of the other quirks of this book. The first is that Wright has decided to buck convention by following the phylogeny of a paper published by Klicka et al, not the American Ornithological Society (AOS) checklist. The resulting presentation as species of many taxa more widely regarded as subspecies (e.g., Red Fox Sparrow, Large-billed Sparrow, Timberline Sparrow) is an approach that Wright describes as "decidedly eclectic." Many readers will already be aware of the existence of these forms, if not the detailed identification of them. The second is that Wright abandons the use of the possessive in patronymic bird names. For example, Lincoln's Sparrow and Brewer's Sparrow become Lincoln Sparrow and Brewer Sparrow. While this may be justified based on the "signification of the Latin genitive," I don't buy his argument that mentioning a species name could otherwise be confused with specimen ownership (as in, "that is a Baird's Sparrow" rather than "that sparrow belongs to Baird"). As the AOS rejected a proposal to officially adopt just such a change, this naming decision becomes one more situation where this book will differ from your standard field guide in naming, though makes no practical difference to the information presented.

The remainder of the introduction includes an excellent discussion on general approaches to sparrow identification, a thorough survey of potential look-alikes (e.g., House Sparrows, finches, longspurs), and an overview of all the species described in the book. At the other end of the book, following the species accounts, are the acknowledgments, notes on sources/citations, and separate indices to people names and bird names.

What you won't find in the book is a figure of sparrow topography. This may be an issue for newer birders, or those of us who can't keep the confused history straight about what the proper term is for the head-feather markings. In this book Wright appears to be in favour of the term "jaw stripe" for what others call the submoustachial or malar stripe. To give you a sense of his head-parts naming scheme, the Lark Sparrow is described as having a "combination of lateral throat stripes, jaw stripes, whisker stripes, eye lines, supercilia, lateral crown stripes, and median crown stripe." The terms *jaw stripe* and *whisker* are not yet in standard usage, and any confusion about these could have easily been negated by adding a single topographic illustration.

Photographs throughout the book

are copious and mostly excellent. While this is a guide with photos, it is not a photographic guide – though photographs support points made in the text, they are independent of it, not referenced within the descriptions. In addition, they do not aim to capture the extent of the age, sex, or racial variation discussed in the text. For example, while three subspecies of Swamp Sparrow are discussed, all four photographs of adults are from Maine, and only one photo (of a juvenile) was taken elsewhere. No illustrations are present.

Naturally in a tome such as this there are occasional errors or inconsistencies, but these are the exception to an otherwise excellent, highly researched and refined compendium.

Much like birders pondering the status of Cassiar Junco, I am brought back to the task of trying to define what exactly this book is. It is perhaps an easier task to define what it is not. It is not a field guide; the book's size and lack of standardized plate presentation and range maps ensure that. It is also not a monograph. This book contains no tables of data, no measurements, and, when present, only broad and general indications of habitat, behaviour, and voice. It could be argued that such information is readily available from other easily obtained sources, and the inclusion of such would have greatly enlarged what is already a 434-page book. Nonetheless, I would have liked to have seen more natural history in addition to the human history.

Overall, Wright does a commendable job of presenting a bird book unlike any other. Because of the text-heavy details, and lack of true plates, this book may be a bit much to digest for all but the keenest beginners. But intermediate to advanced birders looking to learn about the human history of these remarkable species, and those looking for detailed and up-to-date descriptions on identification, geographic variation, and range, will be well served.

Ornithology Rules

No. 2: Gause's Law

Complete competitors cannot coexist

Gause's Law, AKA Gause's Exclusion Principle, tells us that if two species have identical ecological requirements, they can't live for long side by side. This makes intuitive sense. If two species are competing for the same resources, one of them, even if it has only a slight competitive advantage, will eventually out-compete the other. If the loser can't evolve into something non-competitive, it will disappear. A corollary of Gause's Law is that each species occupies a distinct niche.

An example of the law often given is the demise of Crested Mynahs in Vancouver. Introduced in the 1890s from Asia, it bred successfully, and by 1920 there were 20,000 in the city. There were fears that the birds could spread beyond the lower mainland and become a plague, but in 1950 European Starlings began to arrive. Starlings use the same nest sites, eat the same food, and – unfortunately for Mynahs – are rather better at breeding in the Vancouver climate. The species could not co-exist, and by 2002, the last Vancouver Mynah was gone.

Birders see Gause's Law in action more often than we'd like. Spotted Owls, which are out-competed by Barred Owls, might be used as an exemplar of the law at some time in the future. Wherever a species is introduced, or extends its range, the demise of a resident species could follow, to the dismay of the birding world.

Gause's Law is named after Russian biologist Georgii Frantsevich Gause (1910–1986).

Next time: *Gloger's Rule*, which gives an unexpected reason why birds in the tropics can be much more heavily pigmented than birds in northern climes.

Still to come are Foster's Rule and Lack's Principle, which exhaust the Editor's knowledge of biological rules. If any reader knows of another principle relevant to birdlife, please get in touch so this series does not come to an untimely end.

Gone Pishing

Chris Siddle, Vernon

Birding the Dog Parks

March 2, 2018 – We adopted a dog, a pug-Boston terrier cross (aka a "bug") named Frankie by previous owners, a couple now divorced. Frankie is our first dog in over twenty years. She is a small, glossy, black, short-haired muscular bundle with bulgy chestnut eyes and a little nose like a black ju-jube. When she walks in an exciting, smelly environment, she hoovers along, nose to ground, hind hips slightly higher than her shoulders, a walking wedge followed by a curly tail. She's energetic and has to be walked and that's where the birds come into the picture.

The closest off-leash Vernon dog parks are BX Dog Park and Mutrie Dog Park, only a few kilometres from home. Sonja and I have become very familiar with both. They are fenced fields, a bit stony, pock marked in places by the diggings of Northern Pocket Gophers. Dogs and owners have worn informal paths around the outer edges of each park.

Mutrie is simple, the bald top of a hill on the outskirts of Vernon's populous East Hill neighbourhood. Look west and you'll see streets of houses. Look east down the other side of the hill and you'll see a broad expanse of hayfields in a swale to Vernon Mountain with a view up the BX Creek drainage to Silver Star Mountain.

Bare as it is, the appeal of Mutrie, birdwise, for the slightly disengaged dogwalker includes Ring-necked Pheasants and raptors. The pheasants seem abundant in the hay fields and are always doing something new, or at least new to me. For example, yesterday six hens perched side by side atop a fence presumably to take in warmth of the rising sun. Meanwhile a crowd of a dozen more trailed through the long grass below the perch. Eighteen pheasants in one spot! Clearly I have many things to learn about pheasants. However, pheasants aside, it's raptors that are the stars of Mutrie. A pair of Red-tailed Hawks are resident and Northern Harriers may breed somewhere not too distant. Certainly, deep orange and chocolate brown juvenal harriers are present from late summer

to late autumn quartering in their characteristic zigzag ways across the fields to the east, learning to hunt. Last winter a young Rough-legged Hawk took up residence south of the park, spending long afternoons on one of two favoured perches, the tallest Douglas-fir along Black Rock Road or on a pole along Mutrie Road which not surprisingly leads to the park. One of the resident Red-tails sometimes took exception to the Roughie and scraps, mostly verbal and fluttery, would occur, especially as the Red-tails' territoriality increased in the early spring. Year round a dog walker is liable to see 1–2 raptors per walk here. However, Mutrie is most interesting during the autumn, especially when the winds creating updrafts that enable passing hawks and others an almost effortless ride.

Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks are the most common migrants. In late September on special weather days with air currents just right, the passage of Red-tails can be of one bird after the other, not spectacular like Cape May or Hawk Mountain, but enough for the watcher to know that he's seeing definite raptor movement. Most of the Red-tails are Western types but among them are occasional Harlan's types and many birds unassignable to group or subspecies. Dark, light, and intermediate morphs, immatures and adults, phases and ages add to the mix.

From late April to late September Swainson's Hawks are not uncommon summer residents. The lucky dogwalker-birder may see an adult with a juvenile hunting the newly harvested hayfields east of Mutrie in the later half of August. After Thanksgiving Rough-legged Hawks may pass by, though the species is much less frequent than it was in the 1990s.

BX Dog Park occupies part of a more complex landscape than Mutrie does, though it too is graced with a resident pair of Red-tailed Hawks. In 2018 the pair occupied a nest near the top of an isolated Ponderosa Pine in the middle of the park. Everything else is a grassy flat. Before the area was settled the field was the flood plain of BX Creek, its native cover a mixed forest of Douglas fir, Ponderosa Pine, and Western Red Cedar. This location was the farthest west the shade, moisture, and cool loving red cedars could advance along the deep mountain folds to the flat sun-blasted valley bottom. Remnants of the coniferous riparian remain at the eastern end of the park and beyond for the person who wants to take his dog on a longer-than-usual walk.

Frankie appears to find the dog parks much more fascinating than we do. It's her twice daily opportunity to pee and poop and witness by nose and eye what other canines have done, or are doing. Also it's clear to me that though both dogs and humans are social animals, the average dog is much more social than the average human. Dogs at least sniff each other in passing whereas it's not that rare that a human will pass another human as if he weren't there. This is just an observation; I don't have a problem with privacy in public places. However, one can keep one's privacy and still watch fellow humans. Mutrie attracts lots of young mothers, retirees, and neighbourhood children walking the dog after school. BX, on the other hand, is favoured by boys (of all ages) with their big dogs that require exercise.

With a creek on one side, a brushy hillside on the opposite side, a former farm at one end and a red cedar riparian woodland at the other, BX Dog Park has three times as many bird species as hilltop Mutrie does. So far in 2019 I have seen 29 species at Mutrie but 89 at BX. While buteos, vultures and eagles soar over Mutrie, they also appear over BX, along with bird-hunting accipiters and falcons. Snags in the forest attract Cooper's Hawks, Merlins, and even the occasional Peregrine Falcon. The Merlin is the most frequent. I missed Merlins this spring but with the passing of July, a little male appeared, chasing passerines in exciting aerobatics overhead.

BX Dog Park has resident flickers, chickadees, nuthatches (including Pygmy Nuthatches), House Wrens, Bullock's Orioles, and Song Sparrows that treeless Mutrie lacks. Summer residents include Western Wood Pewees, Violet-green Swallows, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, and Belted Kingfishers, these last two nesting in exposed face of a road cut. Also common in summer are Gray Catbirds and Spotted Towhees. Spring brings migrants in the creekside woods like Hammond's Flycatchers, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Cassin's Finches, Nashville Warblers, and Yellow Warblers. Late summer and early autumn bring the wild fruit eaters to the berry thickets like Cedar Waxwings, Warbling Vireos, Swainson's Thrushes, White-throated Sparrows, Orange-crowned Warblers, and others.

Finally winter, that grim season of packed yellow snow and grey ceiling of valley cloud, is the time for flocks of Bohemian Waxwings, House Finches, wandering flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds, California Quail huddled in the bushes and perhaps a raptor or two.

I make no special efforts to hide my binoculars when I'm walking Frankie in either of these parks. People routinely ask me what I am looking for and when I answer that I am "just" watching birds, some of the chatty ones will trot out their bird stories. But that's not news to you, is it? You've been told much the same stories, some of you while you were walking your own dog, your beloved Bella, Kingsley, Loki, or Muffin. However, I find that even after spending almost all of my life being a birder, I am still self-conscious about pishing in public. And pishing is required almost daily, especially in BX Park where birds must be drawn out of the thickets and woodland edges. I walk close to the shrubby edge, I look around to see of the coast is clear of other dog walkers and I pish, but as soon as a walker is within what I consider to be hearing range, I stop pishing and try to look silent, innocent and sane.

For those of you who consider yourself liberated from society's restraints and the tyranny of self-consciousness, I dare you to pish in public, alone, not with some group, but as a solitary figure in a landscape where your only emotional support is the family dog. Let me know how you do.

Briefing 3

Summary by M. Church

In Case You Haven't Heard

The October 4 issue of the authoritative journal *Science* published an article reporting the loss of 2.9±0.4 billion birds from North America over the 48-year period 1970–2017. The report was preceded by news summaries claiming, in rounded numbers, that 3 billion birds have disappeared over the past 50 years. That's close to 30% of the esti-

mated total number of birds formerly on the continent (considered for this study to consist of the continental United States, Canada and Alaska). The news was widely picked up – even the BBC reported it – but not, generally, any details.

The study, led from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, considered 529 breeding species, about three-quarters of North American breeding birds. Data were derived from the annual breeding bird surveys, Audubon Christmas bird counts and the International Shore Bird Survey. Some direct surveys of waterways and marshes supplemented the data. The considered species are estimated to comprise about 90% of the total bird population. In finer detail, 419 native migratory species suffered a 2.5 billion loss, while 100 resident species showed an apparent gain of 26 million individuals. Ten introduced species surprisingly lost 0.4 billion individuals.

Fifty-seven percent (303/529) of species have declined significantly over the 48-year period. Families that have apparently lost more than their share (30 to 40% decline) include American sparrows, wood warblers, blackbirds, finches, and a group consisting of swallows, swifts and nightjars (obligate aerial insectivores). Surprisingly, two of the species hardest hit are the two most common invasives: European Starling (50% loss) and European House Sparrow (80%). Only larks (67%) are in the same league. These birds, along with tyrant flycatchers and thrushes, account for more than 90% of the total loss. Species that overwinter in temperate latitudes suffered the largest absolute loss (1.4 billion), but the greatest proportional losses (40–42%) occurred among birds wintering on coasts and in the arid southwest, and in South America.

It's not all doom and gloom. Raptors increased by 200% in the period (DDT was banned in 1972). Grouse and turkeys have expanded by about 25%, probably as the result of abandonment of marginal agricultural land, and perhaps better regulation of hunting. But the figure masks a known decline of grassland grouse and chickens. Vireos (!) and ducks and geese have also increased by about 50%, the latter no doubt benefiting from the propensity of governments to designate wetlands as reserve areas much more frequently than any other habitat type, and from the activities of organizations like Ducks Unlimited, but also perhaps because of the proliferation of urban Mallards and Canada Geese.

The major driving factor is habitat loss. Grassland birds have apparently declined by more than 50% as agriculture has intensified, boreal and western forest birds by about 30% as forestry activity has expanded, and coastal birds by 15% – a consequence of coastal development both in North America and on far-flung wintering grounds. But there are other drivers: breeders in the tundra have declined by more than 20%, probably in large part an effect of climate change on the optimum timing of breeding cycles and on food chains. The spread and intensification of agriculture with its pesticides and the human war on urban insects represent chemical causes for the loss of birds. Styles of urban architecture, particularly the explosion of highrise construction and the increasingly pervasive use of glass, make the urban environment increasingly hazardous for birds. And then there are cats! The lone environmental success story appears to be wetlands, with an apparent 12% gain in bird numbers. This result seems to run counter to the known loss of wetlands on the continent, but much of that – with consequent losses of migratory waterfowl – probably predates the period of survey.

The numbers are surprising and the statistics surely incomplete. But a measure of qualitative corroboration of the evident trends is provided by NEXRAD radar observations of the biomass of nocturnally migrating birds. (from 143 stations scattered around the continental United States; see 'Tracking migrants', *BC Birding*, December, 2018). From 2007 to 2017, a reduction of 13.6 ± 9.1% (2007 – 2017) in migrating bird biomass was observed. (The radar signals can be interpreted in terms of bird and insect mass, but cannot image individuals.) The Atlantic and Mississippi flyways, dominated by temperate and boreal breeding songbirds, account for the loss, the Central and Pacific flyways having maintained numbers.

To add to the gloom, the Audubon Society has announced (10 October) that they expect, under a global mean temperature rise of 3.0°C (currently a seemingly much more likely prospect than 1.5°C), North America stands to lose up to two-thirds of its present species (specifically 389 of the 604 species considered). They don't say what we might gain from the tropics.

Technical note: The ± figures given with the loss estimates quoted above indicate that in 95 out of 100 resamplings (if they could be carried out), the estimated total would fall within the quoted range. The other 5 samplings might return numbers outside those limits. This is a measure of the statistical uncertainty of the numbers. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that total loss is approximately 3 billion birds.

Reference

Rosenberg, K.V. + 10 others. 2019. "Decline of the North American avifauna," *Science* 366: 120-124.

On a much happier note: Young Birder Bridget Spencer with Canada's national bird-to-be – see page 13. Photo by Melissa Hafting.

Featured Species, No. 8

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

Harlequin Duck
(*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Status
Common in spring, summer, and fall. Uncommon in winter. Breeds.

The Harlequin Duck is named for its bold-patterned plumage reminiscent of a clown or jester. This little duck of fast-moving streams and turbulent marine waters breeds throughout northern Siberia, Iceland, Greenland, and both coasts of North America. The eastern population breeds from eastern Quebec and Labrador to southern Baffin Island. In the west, it breeds from the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands throughout much of interior Alaska, the Yukon, most of British Columbia, including Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii, and western Alberta. In the United States, it breeds in the northern Rocky Mountains and in the Cascades of Washington and Oregon. The species winters along the Pacific coast from the Alaska Peninsula to northern California. Nonbreeders spend summers feeding and roosting on rocky islands along the entire BC coast.

In our west coast region, this handsome little duck is seen most often in summer. We have records from the entire length of the coast, from Port Renfrew to Triangle Island. In April or May, birds depart for breeding territories on fast-flowing streams and rivers. After breeding, males return to the ocean, where food is abundant, leaving more food available for the females and young. Males gather on the outside coast to take advantage of the abundance of molluscs and crustaceans, and to go through a moult that results in an eclipse plumage that looks similar to that of females but with the addition of white tertials, which females lack. Flocks consist primarily of postnuptial and nonbreeding males, but a small percentage of nonbreeding females can also be found in the mix.

A major moulting site on the west coast is found on the seaward side of Vargas Island in Clayoquot Sound. It consist of two archipelagos made up of reefs and islets known as Wilf Rocks and the La Croix Group. Harlequin Ducks move freely anywhere within this area and also to Cleland Island to the northwest. In 1969 moulting birds (3) arrived on Cleland Island on 15 May, increased to 19 birds (16♂, 3♀) between 31 May and 2 June, and peaked at 20 birds on 25 June. The latest record was a lone female on 22 August. In 1970, the first moulting Harlequins arrived on 11 May; increased to 29 birds (28♂, 1♀) on 15 May, 59 birds (54♂, 4♀) on 16 June, and 91 birds on 22 June; peaked at 115 birds on 26 June; and decreased steadily to 4 birds on 20 August, when records ceased (BCFWS). Although the size of moulting populations varies along the entire west coast, patterns are similar. For example, 180 km north, 156 Harlequin Ducks (139♂, 17♀) were present during August 1981, in the vicinity of Brooks Peninsula.

Usually they are scattered in small groups throughout this area, but occasionally they will all gather in a very large flock. Eighty-five birds were counted from Medallion Beach, Vargas Island, on 22 July 1988, and 75 at that location on 2 July 2001. On 27 May 2003, there were 200 birds at Cleland Island, and 200 birds again a year later, on 29 May 2004. On 10 June, 150 were still at Cleland Island, and on 27 June, what was probably the entire population in the area, an estimated 250 birds, congregated in a marine pool at Medallion Beach. A few days later, on 1 July, 200 birds were back at Cleland Island. Those were the largest numbers ever recorded here. More modest numbers were found in 2011, with 45 birds recorded on 9 June.

Not much is known about winter numbers for the simple reason that sea conditions in most years discourage travel on the outer coast. Harlequin Ducks avoid protected inside waters, though they do seek out quieter waters on the outer coast, for example, in the lee of islands. Birds have also been seen at Sea Lion Rocks and in the semi-sheltered waters at the south end of Long Beach, near the park interpretive centre. On 12 December 2016, eight males were observed there. During the 1970s, birds could often be found in Florencia Bay, but rarely since then. Very occasionally, birds may be seen in Tofino harbour and at Stubbs Island.

Harlequin Ducks breed on some of the streams and rivers that empty into the sea between Pachena Bay and Port San Juan. The distribution map in The Birds of British Columbia shows two other breeding records for our region, one in the Barkley Sound area and one in Kyuquot Sound. Two birds recorded on the Tahsis River on 17 April 1979 were probably there as breeding birds. It is likely that they breed on other rivers throughout the region as well. The source of moulting birds on our west coast is unknown.

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.*

Female and Male Harlequin Ducks photographed by Adrian Dorst.

The Reflective Birder

Clive Keen, Prince George

Good Enough!

Birding reflections had been in short supply of late, but that changed when I picked up a library copy of *Good Enough* by Daniel S. Milo. Though it is not a book about birds, it should be of great interest to all birders of the thoughtful variety, such as readers of this column. Milo's contention is that a deep cultural assumption about evolution, which drives so much of our thinking, is just plain wrong and seriously misleading. Heady stuff.

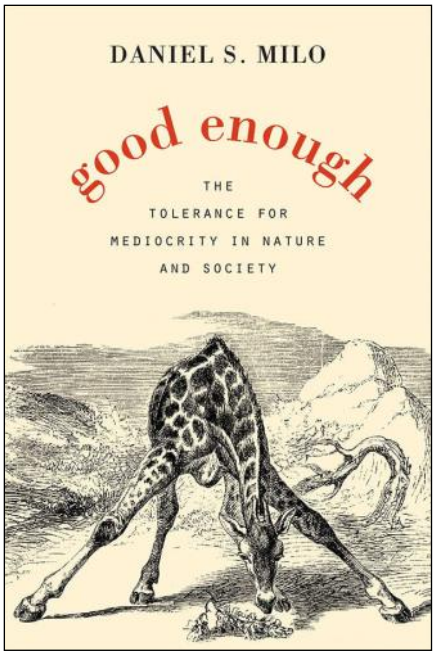
Don't worry, I've not been giving time to a creationist. Milo has something much more interesting to say. While natural selection is of course real – he speaks of it as "biology's greatest intellectual contribution" – he argues that we are now expecting far, far, too much from it. The viewpoint he opposes might be called "hard selectionism." Hard selectionism sees nature as constantly optimizing organisms, ruthlessly excising the inadequate and moving each organism closer to perfection. Richard Dawkin's words in *The God Delusion* sum up that position: Nature is seen as "a miserly accountant grudging the pennies, watching the clock, punishing the smallest extravagance. Unrelentingly and unceasingly."

We have come across so many excellent examples of natural selection at work that we have come to treat it as all -pervasive, explaining everything about the genotype and phenotype of organisms. But Milo argues that Pareto's 80:20 rule leads us closer to the truth. Some traits, he says, are indeed "honed to perfection lest their hosts die off." Where traits are essential to survival, nature can be adamant. But a lot of traits "are not essential, meaning that they have missed selection's purview." *These represent the 80%, not the 20%. And yet we have got into the habit of treating the 20% as if it is 100%.*

Most readers, like me, will resist this analysis at first. The explanatory power of natural selection is so good, doing such a wonderful job on finch beaks, Galapagos tortoises, etc, that we automatically default to it. Giraffe necks? No problem, we think. And why does that giraffe have that particular pattern on its coat? Well, there must be another selectionist reason, we assume, if we look hard enough. But in fact, there are lots of different patterns on giraffe subspecies, and they all coexist and work, simply because each is *good enough*. That's all. Why should we assume there has to be a reason why each sub-species has its specific coat pattern? Luck and chance are everywhere in the natural world. Just one particular flavour of Northern Elephant Seal exists now simply because hunters didn't get to the ones on Guadalupe Island, but hunted the others to extinction.

Mediocrity, like luck, is everywhere in nature. The notion that each organism is perfectly adapted is rather nicely rebuffed by the illustration on the front cover of Milo's book. Giraffes have a really tough time drinking. Human women have a really tough time giving birth. Elderly men have a really tough time with their plumbing. In each of these cases, and in thousands of others, the organism is far from optimised, containing faults that would have scandalized an intelligent designer – but the flawed body design is still not bad enough to cause extinction.

Milo reminds us that there are plenty of reasons other than natural selection why organisms can change over time: genetic drift, geographic isolation and the founder effect are three that are well known to biologists, who have been aware for decades that hard selectionism is false but have not disabused the rest of us. Specialists have stopped speaking of survival of the fittest because they know that "natural selection does not cull every useless, exaggerated, and inefficient mutation, preserving only the best." Rather than survival of the fittest, they know that survival is really for the good enough and lucky.



Milo points out that the survival-of-the-fittest mindset, being assumed as a law of nature, also misleads us in our social, political and ethical thinking. If it has nature's imprimatur, surely there is no point fighting against it: like Adam Smith's invisible hand of the market, it will inevitably shape our world, come what may. But recognizing the falsity of hard selectionism can liberate us from the spectre of Social Darwinism, with all its inhumanity.

Surprisingly, Milo does not seem to appreciate just how much naturalists, also, are liberated. His vocabulary covers waste, mediocracy and excess in nature; if he'd spoken instead of the flamboyance and ebullience made possible by a tolerant nature, he'd have understood the naturalists' epiphany his book makes possible.

Once we reject hard selectionism, we can turn a far more human eye to the world of nature. Selectionism gives us tunnel vision. We perceive the play of young animals as "practicing the skills they need in adult life," rather than youngsters having fun. The monomania of selectionism makes it impossible to see a group of birds as simply hanging out together, some serenely dozing, others nattering, others picking a squabble, some fed up with their neighbours. Instead we have to see them as "grouping together because it increases their chance of spotting and avoiding a predator." And that group of birds mobbing an owl, we are earnestly told, could only be doing it because ejection of the owl would increase the likelihood of their, or their relatives, genes persisting. The selectionist just can't see that perhaps some of those birds are in the mood for a rumble, some are showing off, and some have come along to watch the spectacle.

Now that the single-mindedness of selectionism is thrown off, the natural world, with all its extravagance, flamboyance and imperfection can become for the guiltless observer so much more captivating, and so much more *natural.* So thank you very much, Daniel S. Milo, for stirring my reflections again.