BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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First spotted in Powell River on October 20, and identified as a Red-backed Shrike. See pages 9 and 27. John Gordon photo.

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

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

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

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

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

Annual Membership Dues
General Membership (Canada): $30
Junior Membership (Canada): $20
U.S. and International Membership: $35

Newsmagazine Submissions
To submit material to this publication, contact the Editor by email (clive_keen@hotmail.com). Books for review should be sent to 10790 Grassland Road, Prince George, BC V2K 5E8.

Topics may include birding experiences, casual observations about bird behaviour, bird project reports, site guides, birding equipment, bird photography, trip reports (including overseas trips), and other subjects of broad interest to BC birders. Brief items are always welcome, but average submissions tend to be in the 400–600 word range. For longer submissions the normal maximum length is 1,500 words. Note that this is a newsmagazine rather than an academic journal, so formal reference lists etc are inappropriate.

Articles should be in plain text, either as the content of an email, or as an attachment (preferably Word). Photographs should be in mid-resolution jpg (preferably 1–4 MB, and sent as separate attachments, not embedded in text.

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

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

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

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

Contents

BCFO Event Dates

January 13, 2021, 7:00 pm

Zoom illustrated presentation by Gary Davidson on his exploration of the eastern coast of Australia from Cape York to Tasmania.

February 2021, TBA

Zoom presentation by Larry Cowan (audio, video and photographic) on his Peruvian birding adventure. Check the website (bcfo.ca) for finalized date and time.

June 25–27, 2021

Conference & AGM, Smithers

Back Page Photo

Pileated Woodpeckers are sufficiently common in Cottonwood Park, Prince George, that a whole family of them, just feet away, could be ignored by passers-by (September 5, 2020). British Columbians are remarkably lucky to live where such magnificent creatures can count as everyday sightings. Photo by Editor.

Photo right: Male Osprey heads off for food for his chick, by Gordon Brown. See page 15.

President's Message

Marian Porter, Salt Spring Island

December brings the eagerly anticipated and busy Christmas Bird Count season, and despite the pandemic many counts are proceeding with guidelines to ensure a safe bird count. Birds Canada sponsors the Canadian portion of the North American CBC and advises small birding groups, social distancing, wearing masks, avoiding carpooling and using virtual communication for count wrap-ups and celebrations. Some counts are postponed until next year but you may check the 2020–21 season dates on the BCFO website through the CBC tracking page to find a count operating in your area. The restrictions of the pandemic cannot diminish the enjoyment of counting birds, hoping for a rarity, and connecting even in a limited way with fellow birders after months of isolation.

Through isolation a new appreciation is developing for watching birds in backyards and neighbourhoods, recruiting new people into the world of birding and increasing knowledge in areas previously overlooked. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology October Big Day created a new world record for the most species of birds recorded on a single day on eBird. Thirty-two thousand people worldwide entered 7,097 species, observed primarily in their yards or nearby "local patch." Project Feeder Watch is a citizen science program run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada to enable scientists to study changes in the winter distribution and abundance of feeder birds over time. Anyone may participate with a Birds Canada membership and feeding stations from which they may record their observations.

More time spent at home may also inspire people to enhance their properties and make them more bird friendly with native plants providing important food and cover. Plants providing late-season berries, seeds and nectar have kept my yard very active over the past few months and hopefully throughout the winter.

Attracting birds to your home may be hazardous if feeders are too close to windows. According to *BirdWatching* magazine birds are killed most frequently when feeders are fifteen to thirty feet from a window, but seem to be safe when feeders are less than three feet away. The American Bird Conservancy and the Fatal Light Awareness Program endorses window markers for residential glass surfaces such as Feather Friendly Bird Deterrent Technology (featherfriendly.com). Tempera paint may also be used on the outside of glass in various designs to combat the problem of approximately one billion birds dying from window collisions each year in North America. The organization Global Bird Rescue at globalbirdrescue.org provides detailed instructions on the installation of bird protection screens for windows.

Avoiding garden pesticides, especially neonicotinoids that are lethal to birds and the insects they feed on, as well as banning deadly rodenticides that poison raptors through secondary poisoning from their prey will make your property safer for birds. Keep your cat indoors or construct an outdoor enclosed "catio." An improved yard habitat providing food and cover for birds will engage you with the natural environment during reduced social interaction and reward you throughout the seasons.

The BCFO Board of Directors has decided to schedule several Zoom birding presentations early in the New Year

Below: Rough-legged Hawks migrate through the province in some numbers during October. The one below was spotted at Salmon Valley. CNK photo.

due to the uncertainty of travel for birding field trips over the next few months. Gary Davidson will give an illustrated talk on his exploration of the eastern coast of Australia from Cape York to Tasmania at 7:00 pm Pacific Time on Wednesday January 13. The Eclectus and Red-cheeked Parrots, Palm Cockatoo and Yellow-billed Kingfisher are featured in the York Peninsula. The endangered Southern Cassowary, a little over a metre tall, and considered dangerous, was encountered in Queensland.

Larry Cowan will give an audio, video and photographic presentation of his Peruvian Birding Adventure in February, with a date to be posted on the BCFO website as soon as it is finalized. The desert and seashore birding areas near Lima are followed by an eleven-day journey from Cajamarca over the Andes to Tarapoto, then an exploration of the Amazon from Iquitos to the Napo River. Many unique bird species are featured from The Humboldt`s Penguin south of Lima to the diminutive but spectacular Marvelous Spatuletail Hummingbird in Northern Peru.

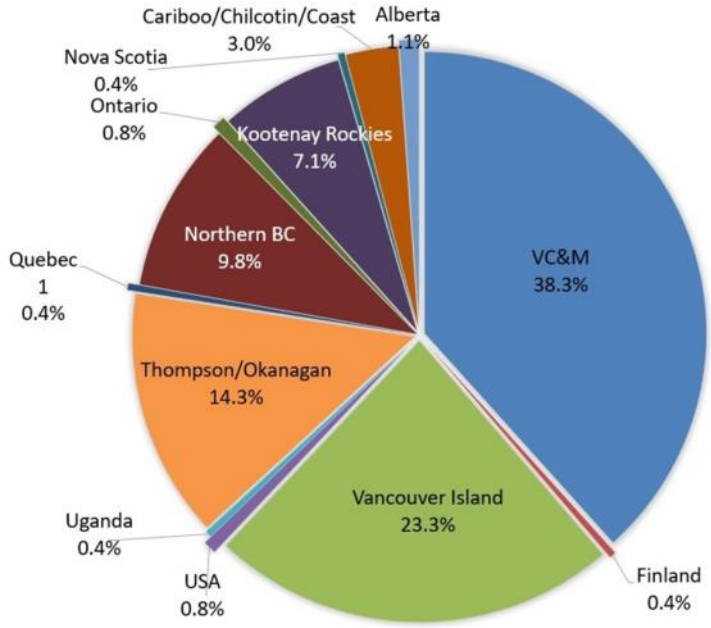
Please join us for these special presentations which will transport you from the cold reality of our winter climate and inspire you to plan for your own post-COVID adventure.

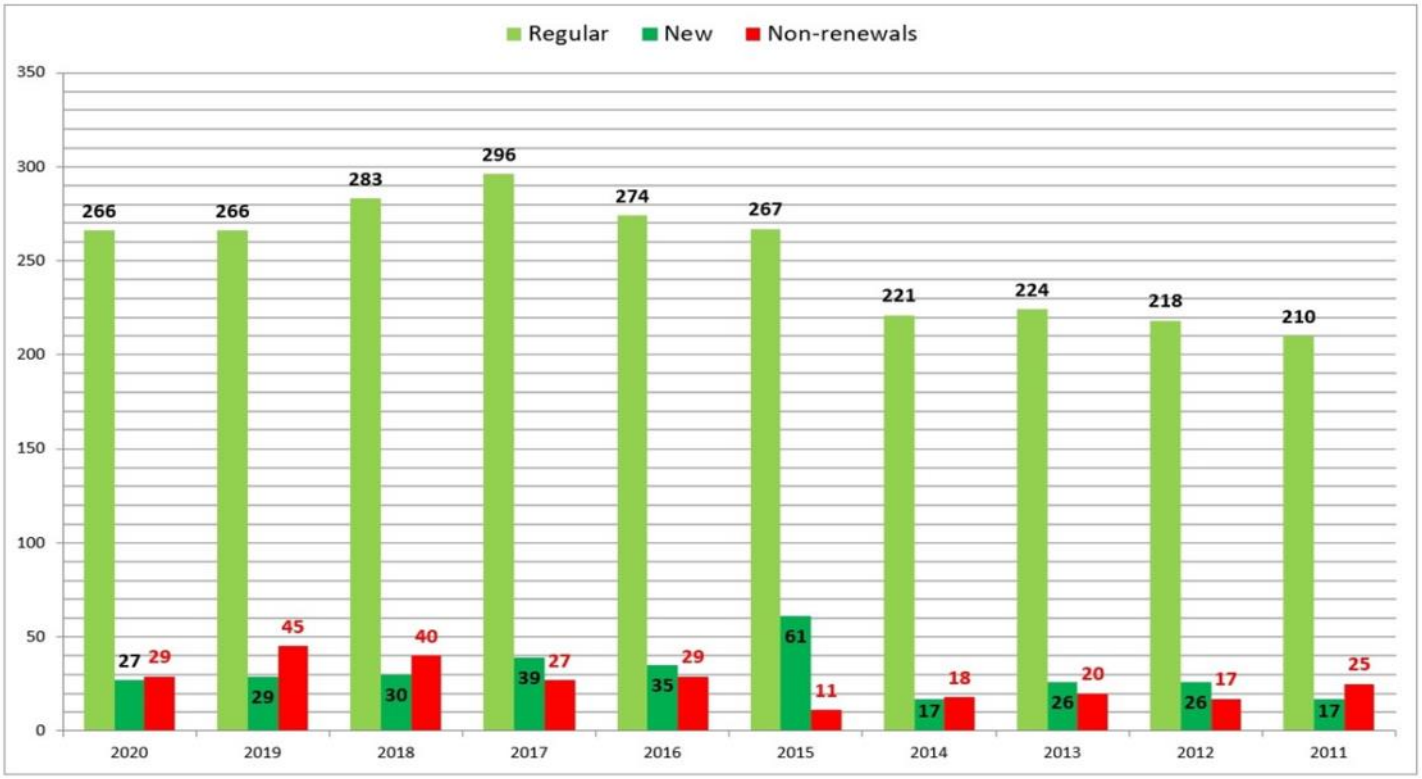
Membership Report

Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows

The following statistics are as of September 9, 2020.

	2020	2019
Total	294	295
Regular	266	266
Honourary	3	3
Junior Award	16	16
Institutional	6	6
Complimentary	3	4
New	27	29
Non-renew	11	8
BC Birding printed	81	82
BC Birds, website only	88	88
Male (%)	60	60
Female (%)	27	29
Couples (%)	13	11





Bird Listers' Corner

Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows

The March 2021 edition of *BC Birding* will once again include listing tables. To take part, please report your life list totals as of *December 31, 2020* 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 permitting 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.

BIG YEAR totals for 2020: I have had requests to include "year list totals." We'll give it a go for this year's Listers' Corner and see how it goes.

The ABA list will have two listings, one as ABA Continental and a second ABA includes 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.

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

Areas listed are those having three or more members providing totals for 2019. If more than one family member is submitting a list, individual forms need to be submitted.

Special Notes

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.

Email your list to lawrencecowan@shaw.ca or mail the form to:

Larry Cowan #45, 12268 – 189A St.
Pitt Meadows, BC V3Y 2M7.

Deadline

Deadline for submitting listing totals is February 1, 2021.

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 2020

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)

….. ……
….. ……
….. ……
….. ……
….. ……
….. ……

Upcoming Meetings & Events

Compiled by Wayne C. Weber, Delta

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

NOTE: Because of the COVID-19 epidemic, many scheduled meetings and events for the next few months have been cancelled, gone virtual, or been postponed. Events that have not yet been cancelled could still be cancelled at a later date. Please be sure to check event websites before you plan to attend or register for any events. Also, note that you will not be able to attend events in the USA until the international border is reopened.

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.

2020 EVENTS

Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 (2021). CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS. For information on dates of counts and contact information for count organizers, check the BCFO website in November and December.

2021 EVENTS

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

Feb. 23–27. PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP, 49th ANNUAL MEETING. This will be a virtual conference. Visit the conference website at pacificseabirdgroup.org/annual-meeting.

Mar. (date to be announced). First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the year from Westport, WA. Westport Seabirds operates about 20 trips per year from March through October. A detailed schedule of trips for 2021 should be posted by December 1 on the Westport Seabirds website (westportseabirds.com).

Mar. 19–21. 20th ANNUAL WINGS OVER WATER NORTHWEST BIRDING FESTIVAL, Blaine, WA. Check www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com or contact Debbie Harger, 360-332-8311, dharger@cityofblaine.com.

Apr. 15–18. OLYMPIC BIRD FESTIVAL, Sequim, WA. For information, visit www.olympicbirdfest.org, or contact the Dungeness River Audubon Center by phone (360-681-4076) or by email (info@olympicbirdfest.org).

Apr. 15–18. Joint conference of WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY and ASSOCIATION OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS. This will be held as a virtual event. For further information, visit the following website: www.eaglehill.us/NENHC_2021/NENHC2021.shtml.

Apr. 22–25. HARNEY COUNTY MIGRATORY BIRD FESTIVAL, Burns, Oregon, focused on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Visit the festival website at www.migratorybirdfestival.com. Information is also available from the Harney County Chamber of Commerce at 541-573-2636, or at info@harneycounty.com.

May 7–9. 8th annual CRESTON VALLEY BIRD FEST, Creston, BC. For information, visit the festival website at www.crestonvalleybirds.ca; the schedule and registration information should be posted early in 2020. In the meantime, send requests for information to info@crestonvalleybirds.ca.

May 20–24. 23rd Annual MEADOWLARK NATURE FESTIVAL, Penticton, BC. Check the website at meadowlarkfestival.ca.

June 1–July 7. NORTH AMERICAN BREEDING BIRD SURVEY. This long-established program, supervised by the Canadian Wildlife Service and US Fish & Wildlife Service, is for experienced birders who are skilled at identifying birds by songs and calls as well as 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 25–27. BC FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. Watch for future announcements on the BCFO webpage and in this newsletter.

Aug. 9–14. AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY annual meeting. This will be a virtual event. For further information and to register, visit the meeting website at americanornithology.org/meetings/annual-meeting.

Aug. 25–29. 45th Annual Conference, WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS, Reno, Nevada. For information and to register, visit the WFO website at westernfieldornithologists.org/conference.

Sept. (date to be announced). First joint meeting of WASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY and OREGON BIRDING ASSOCIATION, Astoria, OR. Check either the WOS website at wos.org/annual-conference or the OBA website at oregonbirding.org.

NOTE: The following annual events, normally scheduled between March and May, have not yet announced dates for 2021. These events may not take place in 2021 because of COVID-19 concerns, but it is likely that those scheduled for late spring and summer will take place if the outbreak is controlled by then. They are listed under their expected month of scheduling.

March. OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL, Othello, WA. check www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org, or phone 509-989-5606.

April. 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. Visit www.godwitdays.org.

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

April. ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL BIOLOGISTS OF BC annual conference. For information, visit professionalbiology.com.

May. Annual meeting of the SOCIETY FOR NORTHWEST VERTEBRATE BIOLOGY. Check snvb.org/annual-meeting.

May. WINGS OVER THE ROCKIES FESTIVAL Invermere, BC. For information, contact the Pynelogs Cultural Centre, PO Box 2633, Invermere, BC V0A 1K0, phone 855-342-2473, info@wingsovertherockies.org, or www.wingsovertherockies.org.

May. LEAVENWORTH SPRING BIRD FEST, Leavenworth, WA. For information, email info@leavenworthspringbirdfest.com or check www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com.

BCFO Short Trips

The following trip is currently planned, but is subject to future COVID restrictions. Readers are encouraged to suggest other trips, either to places you would like to go, or to spots in your area that would be of interest to other members. Ideas can be sent to any member of the executive, using addresses given on page 2.

Two Days: Nakusp
June 5–6, 2021

Leader: Gary Davidson.

Registration: Marian Porter: 250-653-2043, marianmporter@gmail.com.

Accommodation
The Lodge at Arrow Lakes: 1-800-663-0100. Accommodation should be booked for the nights of June 4 and 5.

Itinerary
Participants on this trip need to be willing to walk four to five km on level, even ground each morning. Three major locations will be visited plus others as appropriate at the time:

Brouse Loop Road
Saturday morning. Brouse Loop is a four-km loop walk through farms, along forest edge, and across two creeks producing a good mix of habitats including coniferous, deciduous, riparian and open hayfields. Bobolinks and Lazuli Buntings are quite common, with Mountain Bluebird a possibility.

Summit Lake
This is a one-to-two km walk through riparian and marshy habitat, depending on the activity of local beavers and the willingness of participants to get their feet wet. You will be rewarded with a rich variety of warblers, particularly American Redstart, Yellow Warbler and Northern Waterthrush. Veery can be found at this site and although Magnolia Warbler occurs here it cannot always be located.

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, Marian Porter would be pleased to hear from you at marianmporter@gmail.com .

Ferret Road Loop
Sunday morning. The Needles ferry crossing leads to the Ferret Road Loop on the west side of Upper Arrow Lake near the town of Edgewood. It is about a one-hour drive from Nakusp so an early start will be necessary. Similar but more productive than the Brouse Loop walk, more Bobolinks and Lazuli Buntings occur at this location with meadowlarks, Eastern Kingbird and possibly Clay-colored Sparrow, Lewis's Woodpecker, and Bullock's Oriole, plus many others. Those heading back to the coast can continue to drive directly from this location for about 90 minutes to Vernon.

Below: Steller's and Canada Jays photographed on Cypress Mountain, West Vancouver, by Joshua Brown.

Rare Birds Alerts

The Red-backed Shrike

On October 22 Iwan Van Veen found in Powell River what a number of experts have determined to be a first-year male Red-backed Shrike. This is an ABA Code 5 bird: a Mega, a bird that breeds in Europe and Western Asia and winters in Africa (see cover).

If confirmed by the BCFO Bird Records Committee this would be the first record for BC and Canada, and only the second for the ABA area, the first being in an Alaskan Island near Siberia.

As word got around, birders began to descend on Powell River from Victoria, Nanaimo, the Lower Mainland and further away, including the Okanagan and Ontario. If it were not for COVID, there would no doubt have been a major rush from the U.S. Not all twitchers went away satisfied: it took John Gordon two days to get his video and photographs, and some people, with less time available, left disconsolate.

A local news story can be found at:

www.prpeak.com/community/red-backed-shrike-spotted-in-powell-river-neighbourhood-1.24228095

Other Rare Birds

The BC Rare Bird Alert has continued to be busy, giving plenty of work to the Bird Records Committee. A Common Pochard was reported on November 14, which would count as the first record for BC if approved. Duck records can be tricky, as there are a number of escapees from collections, but there is no initial indication that this bird is domestic. The Tufted Duck seen in Duncan on November 8 is likely to be less problematic, as are recent sightings of Black Phoebe near Brentwood Bay, Chestnut–sided Warbler in Ucluelet, Prairie Warbler in Vernon, and Little Blue Heron in Fraser Valley, since all, while great birds, have been recorded a number of times in the province.

The Red-legged Kittiwake seen in Deep Bay, however, would represent just the second record for BC, so will no doubt receive careful attention.

For regular updates on BC rare birds, visit the BC Rare Bird Alert site often:

bcbirdalert. blogspot.com

The Prince George Curlews

The location of the transmitter-equipped Prince George curlews continued to be monitored through the summer and early fall. Satellite tracking is expensive, however ($100 per month per bird), so Birds Canada has ended live tracking for the moment, leaving just two birds being tracked by the Smithsonian Institute. But we already have, according to project leader Graham Sorensen, “an incredible set of data on these birds, including two breeding seasons, two southward migrations, one northward migration, and really interesting wintering movement data.”

Graham goes on to say, “Next year, one of our goals will be to recapture the returning satellite birds to remove the transmitters, and to band and attach new leg flags to more birds. For this, we will need re-sight information on the existing leg-flagged birds.”

Prince George birders can hardly wait for next April. Birding is vastly more fun when the quarry is carrying flags or transmitters, and when the whole local birding community is on the lookout to win the first-sighting stakes. After that first flurry of excitement, when enough birds will have materialized among the snow drifts, more patient work will begin on monitoring breeding and habitat use. It’s a great time and place to be a birder.

When the snows begin to melt in late March, Prince George birders will be on tenterhooks waiting for the first curlews. CNK photo.

More information can be found at:

www.birdscanada.org/a-curlew-conservation-community-that-cares

Creston Valley Bird Festival

May 7–9, 2021
The 2020 festival had to be cancelled due to COVID, but with luck 2021 will be a better year for those of us hungry for birding trips. The organizers of the Creston Valley Bird Festival are optimistic, and are putting together plans for a three-day event in one of BC's most impressive birding areas.

The Event
This ninth-annual Bird Fest is planned to include guided birding tours by foot, kayak, canoe, car, and safari bus, along with social events, displays, workshops, and a keynote presentation.

Keynote Presentation
John Acorn, who many may know from his TV programs *Acorn the Nature Nut* and *Twits and Pishers* will give a talk on his personal experiences as a birder.

If you've not come across John Acorn, you can access some of his television programs on YouTube. Strongly recommended is his program on the Edmonton grain-terminal Gyrfalcons. Take a look at the following: you will be impressed.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzs3Fq-yYWw

The Location
Any birder driving through Creston for the first time is likely to make an emergency stop when they spot the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area. This is a 17,000-acre wetland with 32 kilometres of trail. It is a RAMSAR site, a Wetland of International Importance, hosting, among much else, 100,000 waterfowl.

Registration etc
For details, contact Ulrike Sliworsky at info@crestonvalleybirds.ca or head to:

www.crestonvalleybirds.ca

Ornithological Rules

No. 6: Lack's Principle

> *The clutch size of each species of bird has been adapted by natural selection to correspond with the largest number of young for which the parents can, on average, provide enough food.*

This principle, proposed by David Lack in 1954, has been generalized to organisms in general, including plants, and led to an improved mathematical understanding of population biology.

The principle might seem too obvious to be worth naming. Wouldn't it be daft to produce more offspring than could be fed, and equally daft to produce too few, since the species would not prosper? But the worth of the principle lies in the fact that Lack explained the evolution of avian clutch sizes in terms of individual selection as opposed to the competing idea that they had evolved for the benefit of the species, known as *group selection*. There is a trade-off between the long-term survival of the parents and their immediate-term reproductive success. Producing more offspring that can normally be fed would be a bad reproductive strategy, as the short-term risk to struggling parents could lead to higher mortality, and thus lower their reproduction over the longer term.

David Lack (1910–1973) was a long-time director of the ornithology institute at Oxford University. His popular books *Darwin's Finches, Life of the Robin*, and *Swifts in a Tower* were considered landmark works, helping change ornithology from a collection-based field to a study of the living bird.

Timely Rescue

Anna's Hummingbirds might be common enough in the Lower Mainland, but in northern BC they are practically never seen – except in October. It seems that each year the migratory compasses on a few Anna's go 180 degrees out of alignment.

This year, reports were being received in October of an Anna's in the Pine Pass, 194 km north of Prince George. Since the temperature there at the time was nine degrees below, a rescue was deemed essential. Karen Jungnitsch refined her capturing techniques, and on October 19 her husband, Doug Thompson drove the bird, still healthy, all the way to the Fraser Valley. Well done all.

Web Moments

If you see any items on the internet interesting to BC birders, send them in. Here are a few that caught the attention of members.

Grammy Winner Also Avid Birdwatcher

www.newportthisweek.com/articles/grammy-winner-also-avid-bird-watcher

And so are Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney, we are told.

Godwit World Record Distance Flight

www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/oct/13/jet-fighter-godwit-breaks-world-record-for-non-stop-bird-flight

A Bar-tailed Godwit flew non-stop more than 12,000 kilometres from Alaska to New Zealand in 11 days.

Finch Research Help Needed

finchnetwork.org

There are about ten different types of Red Crossbill, which differ in calls and bill size and shape. This crossbill complex needs more study, and birders are asked to help.

Knot Numbers Hit Record Level

www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-norfolk-54592215

A record 140,000 Red Knots were recorded at a reserve on the east coast of England.

Eagle Attacking Goat

www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBx1EoJpWNQ

This juvenile Golden Eagle might want to tackle something smaller next time. Ouch.

Owl Cam Highlights

www.youtube.com/watch?v=RngqjZC2l_Y

Highlights of the 2020 season of Wild Birds Unlimited's Barred Owl webcam

Six New Species Found in South America

www.sci-news.com/biology/six-new-antpitta-species-08945.html

A team of ornithologists found six new species of antpitta in montane forests.

Helpful Hudwit

Hudsonian Godwits are not-often-seen fall migrants in Metro Vancouver. The one below was originally found by Ilya Povalyaev at the pilings between 96th and 104th on Boundary Bay. It was hard to see on the mudflats, but on one particular afternoon a good flood tide pushed the bird onto the pilings in front of twenty lucky birders. This photograph was taken by John Gordon using a Nikon P1000 on October 25, 2020.

Avian Encounter 1

Bagging a Rarity

John Gordon, Surrey

The Quest

A few months ago, fellow birder Colin Classen and I were chatting about finding rarities: the ones that turn up once or twice a year or in extreme cases once in a decade. As it turned out, a few weeks later Colin found and photographed an Ash-throated Flycatcher (ATFL) while on one of his regular walks at Colony Farm. He couldn't have been happier to share his find with others in the birding community. I and others tried for Colin's bird but we all dipped. It wouldn't be the first bird I would miss, but that's just one of the many aspects that makes birding so fascinating.

In birding parlance the ATFL was a "really, really good bird," occurring in the Lower Mainland perhaps once or twice every couple of years. Over the last ten years I have only seen two, including one a few nights ago at Brunswick Point. That bird was found by Grant Edwards who shared his find via the BC Rare Bird Alert, allowing numerous other birders to get on the bird. For many, the Brunswick Point ATFL was a lifer.

Most often when a rare species is found word spreads quickly. That's what happened to me a few weeks ago during a visit to Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary in Delta. Due to COVID-19 I and others had to book visits beforehand. Prior to mid-March one could just turn up at the sanctuary and bird away. Fortunately I just happened to be booked in on Tuesday, September 8. I chose that date as the migration of shorebirds would be in full swing and the tides high enough to force the flocks off the foreshore into Reifel's ponds. That's the theory anyway.

I found myself at the West Field where many of the smaller sandpipers find suitable habitat in the shallows. Other sandpipers present included Long-billed Dowitchers, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, a few Pectoral and a flock of Western Sandpipers. The longer-legged birds can feed in deeper water. The diminutive Westerns, however, prefer the shallows where they are continuously on the move, probing for food, re-fuelling for the next leg of an epic southern migration.

It was time to scan the flock again. Flushed earlier by a Merlin, the small flock of Westerns were agitated and rarely stayed in one spot. Eventually they settled down to feed. Birders are always hoping for something different, scanning the flock over and over in the hope of finding the proverbial diamond in the rough. Perhaps there would be an early Sharp-tailed or even a Stilt Sandpiper.

The Oddity

The Westerns were on the move again, now barely visible even with a scope. Once again they flew closer which gave excellent views. Scanning through the flock of 30 or so I found one bird which looked quite different in size, somewhat larger and with a long decurved bill. What I needed was a picture to help identify the bird. If it flew off, what proof would there be – believe me I have been stung before with an odd-looking hummingbird a few years back. No picture, no proof, no kudos. This time I shot off a few frames with my Nikon P1000 but the distance and reeds blocking the view made it difficult to get a clear image. Finally I managed three frames, but being nervous and shot at 3000mm handheld, the results were far from perfect – in fact they were terrible, but proof nevertheless.

Looking at the images I came to the conclusion that it was a Curlew Sandpiper, a bird I had photographed in the UK but never in Canada. I needed back-up confirmation, but noone close by could help. I sent a picture via text to Mel Hafting who does an invaluable job running the BC Rare Bird Alert. The fuzzy picture impressed her enough to have her immediately make her way to Reifel to confirm the sighting. Once she had put the word out, other birders began to converge on Reifel.

The Buzz

The buzz of finding a rare bird is something only a birder can fully appreciate. It's not that common an experience, but when it happens it's really gratifying. Being Johnny-on-the-spot means waiting for others to arrive to get them on the bird, but at least there is no need to battle traffic, drive like a bat out of hell or slip away from work for a fictitious doctor's appointment.

Thirty minutes later and out of breath, Mel arrived, but the curlew had taken off. Every birder knows that sinking feeling. It's not nice. Mel decided to stay put in case the bird flew back and I went to scout the other end of the pond. Five minutes later I was on the bird again by which time other twitchers were arriving. I texted Mel who joined us; there were smiles all around. For many the bird was lifer.

More birders arrived and there was much back-slapping and high fives which reminded me of my conversation with Colin a few weeks earlier. ♦

Curlew Sandpiper found and photographed at the Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary by John Gordon using a Nikon P1000.

Avian Encounter 2

Swallows Making a Summer

Clive Keen, Prince George

One of the great joys of my recent summers has been playing host to Violet-green and Tree Swallows, and the most poignant moments have been their mid-July departure. Sure enough, on July 14, 2020, great squadrons – the parents and their young – were swooping around my land, and, sure enough, on July 15, the sky had emptied. As usual, I'm feeling bereft.

But it's July 17. Has a pair returned? No, the flight pattern is all wrong. Trees and Violet-greens will flash around like Spitfires and Hurricanes, but this pair has zoomed in like a pair of jet fighters, elegant, fast and determined. Barn Swallows!

I'd left my barn door open, and the pair darted inside. They're mistaken, I thought: breeding season is surely over. But we'd experienced the wettest spring and summer in decades, and reports of delayed breeding were rife. Perhaps the newcomers were making a last attempt?

On July 20 I see signs of mud, daubed apparently at random, on one of the strip lights at the back of the barn. Then on July 23, one of the daubs had grown larger than the others; the pair had stopped arguing and agreed where to put the nest. The daub grew steadily in subsequent days, and soon was large enough for a swallow to be seen sitting atop the structure.

Eyes just opening, August 13.

At this point I'm both thrilled and concerned. Barn Swallows become rare in Prince George after the first week in September. Would my pair have time to raise a brood?

I don't, of course, get close enough to inspect the nest to see if or when eggs are laid. Being a thoughtful landlord, willing to leave his barn door open for the duration, I just set up a tripod at the other end of the barn. With a 600 mm lens I can keep distant tabs on what is going on.

Nest getting a bit cramped, August 21.

My first surprise concerns how much time the swallows spend just hanging around on my various tools and hooks. Keeping out of the rain made plenty of sense, but these guys would stay close to the nest even when the sun was shining. Were they just loafing, or protecting their territory? Certainly I'd be the recipient of loud squeaks and fly-bys as I entered or left the barn. In fact they'd squeak loudly at me and fly around my head when I was quite some way away, building a new driveway. What were they saying? Thanks for lending us the barn? More likely: "Watch it, mister!"

And then, on August 8, I see some movement in the nest when the parents are off roaming. I suspect that an egg has just hatched, and as much as I'd love to check, I can't do anything that might discourage my tenants, so am left at a distance, uncertain.

But then on August 9 I see four small and very wobbly heads come up and beg when mum (or perhaps dad) delivers some breakfast and deals with the laundry. For such tiny creatures, it's amazing just how much laundry service is required. Over the next few days, I discover that mum and dad usually aren't around to deal with all the domestic issues, so the concrete floor will need a great deal of scrubbing when the guests have left.

"Haven't you grown!" when uttered to grandchildren is nothing compared to statements about nestling Barn Swallows. Those wobbly heads, on top of necks barely able to support them, soon sported observant pairs of eyes and forcefully demanding bills. The parents, who took quite a lot of rest when the kids were tiny, would then zoom in, stuff food into whichever mouth seemed most insistent, and turn straight round. I noticed that they'd squeak when entering the barn, as if to say "Open wide!" so the mouths would be ready, and the adults could waste no time in returning to the sky.

On August 24, just fifteen days after

Loafing around, July 30.

the first signs of hatching, I find that four fledglings have wandered out of the very cramped nest, and have found more room elsewhere on the light fitting. The day after, to my complete surprise, all four take off and fly, very competently, out of the barn, but soon to return.

On August 26 I re-enter the barn, and three youngsters fly out past me, but the fourth, perhaps the dimwit of the family, has tried a short cut, and is now fluttering at a window. This gives me a moral issue. Do I help the youngster find the right way out? The obvious distress of the little fellow forces me into action, and I pick him up – there's no weight at all that I can gauge – and take him to the door. No harm seems to be caused, as the whole family first enjoy a long flight, and then all head back, unruffled, to their spot in the barn.

The family hung around till the first days of September. The adults, like the Violet-greens and Trees, knew all along exactly what they were doing. As Pete Dunne tells us, birds are professionals.

Preparing for a first flight, August 25. All photos by author.

Briefing 1

Summary and additional comments by M. Church, Vancouver

Losing It

. . . The ability to fly, that is.

There are four species of steamer duck (genus *Tachyeres*), residents of southernmost South America. Three of them, the Flightless Steamer Duck (*T. pteneres*; Spanish: Quetro austral), Falkland Steamer Duck (*T. brachypterus*; Spanish: Quetro malvinero) and White-headed Steamer Duck (*T. leucocephalus*, Spanish: Quetro de cabeza blanca) have lost the ability to fly: their wings provide insufficient lift to launch themselves into the air. The fourth species, the Flying Steamer Duck (*T. patachonicus*, Spanish: Quetro volador) can fly, although some individuals are too heavy to take off.

Found on the coasts of the southernmost two Argentine provinces and in the Falkland Islands, the Flying Steamer is the only one of the quartet also found on freshwater lakes and rivers inland – probably because flying is the only way to get there at a reasonable energetic cost.

All four have very similar plumage, save the distinctive white head of well-marked White-headed Steamers, implying close relation. The group is thought to have evolved only within the last two million years (not a long time in evolution). Indeed the White-headed Steamer was recognized to be a full species distinct from the Flightless Steamer only about 30 years ago.

Steamers are named for their practice of "steaming" – the action of running over the water surface using both their feet and wings for locomotion. The wings beat the water in a rapid paddling motion. Other waterbirds also can "steam" on the water, and do it mainly as an escape behaviour. Since most can fly, while most of the steamer ducks cannot, the behaviour is comparatively less common in other species. But flying away from danger, or simply to get from A to B in a hurry, is far more efficient than steaming. So why have steamer ducks lost the ability to fly?

Steamer ducks feed by diving for molluscs and crustaceans (think of our scoters), though they also dabble and even forage on land. Like other diving birds (penguins, puffins), they use their wings for locomotion under water. For this activity, in a medium much more dense than air, shorter, more compact wings are favoured. The chief adjustment in steamers is shorter wing length, as it is in other flightless birds (except the ratites – ostriches to kiwis – that exhibit far more radical changes and have only vestigial wings). To casual view, the steamer wing appears to remain perfectly normal. But reduced wing length means reduced lift in air and, ultimately, loss of the ability to fly.

Flightlessness in these ducks appears, then, to be an evolutionary adjustment – controlled basically by one gene that encodes limb length – for these marine birds to have an efficient submarine foraging strategy. Harris's Cormorant (a.k.a. Galapagos Flightless Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax harrisi*) is another diving seabird in which evolution seems to have dictated a similar adjustment, in this case to greater anatomical effect: the wings are much more obviously reduced. Steamer ducks may still be actively evolving.

Reference

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Avian Encounter 3

Osprey Nest at Kootenay Lake

Gordon Brown, Kaslo

It may have been that the prime nesting sites at the north end of Kootenay Lake were all taken, or perhaps it was just a case of first-time parents not quite up to speed. But for whatever reason, an Osprey pair decided to use a neighbour-built platform on one of the remaining dolphins (a group of pilings lashed together) at the old Shutty Bench sternwheeler wharf. The platform had been there for twenty years but was never built on; birds occasionally considered it, and perhaps added a stick or two, but a viable nest had never been constructed.

This year, however, a few weeks after other nesting pairs were well established at the Woodbury and Kaslo wharves, a new couple decided to give Shutty Bench a go. I'm almost certain the birds didn't have me in mind, but that old wharf is at the bottom of the road, two minutes from my house, and over the course of the summer I spent many happy hours observing and photographing them.

Initial observation was not terribly encouraging: two eggs were laid, but only one chick hatched. None of the neighbours who were also monitoring the nest knew the fate of the second egg, but Raven predation is certainly a possibility. Bald Eagle visits became more frequent once the chick had hatched, but the Osprey parents were convincing in defence. The chick's early development remained typical and thankfully uneventful, with its mother remaining on the nest to feed, shelter, and protect while its father was out searching food and nesting materials.

When the male did return to the nest with a fish, usually after first having eaten the head (highest nutrient per unit volume), he gave it to the female, who in turn fed the chick and herself. It was she who called the shots, and often also called him, especially when she felt he'd been away too long and the nestling had become hungry.

The chick grew rapidly, and things quickly became a lot more interesting; school was definitely in. The parents performed behaviours I could only interpret as instructional because they didn't otherwise seem relevant. The male incurred incredulous stares from both mother and daughter (as it turned out) when he returned to the nest bearing either a stick or clump of moss, instead of food. The nest seemed in no further need of either, and on most occasions little effort was made to incorporate the new stick, other than to get it out of the way, although the moss was apparently used. One has to assume these actions were educational and meant to show the chick that materials had to be acquired, and the nest constructed. Similarly, while the male was absent, on three occasions the female made dives directly from the edge of the nest. She never did come up with a fish, whether near-miss or feint, but seemed to be showing the chick where food lived and how it was acquired.

When the chick had grown to the point at which serious wing exercise had begun, education became decidedly post-secondary. Stationary wing exercises, facing into the wind, progressed to brief lift-offs and then actual flights from one side of the nest to the other. The next stage was remarkable, and something I'm grateful to have witnessed. The male returned to the nest with a relatively small fish which he promptly gave to his partner as usual. This time, however, she did not tear portions off, but instead handed the

Below: Mother and young chick. All Photos by Gordon Brown.

whole fish to the chick who took it in one foot and immediately resumed cross-nest flights, but now load-bearing. It was an amazing thing to witness, to realize the birds had all read the script and were on the same page.

Although the chick was now very near full stature, it had never been left alone on the nest. But now, with the male away fishing, the female began making short flights, initially within sight of the chick. Gradually, these lengthened and eventually became actual fishing trips during which the chick was left for extended periods. When both parents were back at the nest location, they took turns making circumnavigational flights accompanied by a lot of vocal encouragement. This fledging process seemed to take longer than the parents might have wished, but she did finally depart the nest. The maiden voyage brought her up onto Shutty Bench and a perch in the top of a big Douglas Fir very near our house, where she was immediately joined by her mother who needed to assure herself the offspring's first flight had been successful. The fledge had been late, but the family remained in the nest area for another couple of weeks while the juvenile honed her flying skills and learned to fish, prior to an inordinately late migration.

By way of a Kootenay Lake update, reports from the south end near Creston and the "west arm" toward Nelson indicated Osprey success rates lower than normal. The north end of the lake fared better with Woodbury producing three fledglings, Kaslo two, and of course Shutty Bench, one.

Above: Mother and juvenile chick calling dad, who is perhaps tardy with dinner.
Below: Dad looks on while Mum prepares the food.

Tracking Pleistocene Birds

Charles Helm, Tumbler Ridge

In 2000 my eight-year-old son and a friend correctly identified a dinosaur trackway close to my hometown of Tumbler Ridge. This set in motion a series of events that included the formation of a palaeontology museum, the creation of a UNESCO Global Geopark, and the diversification of the local economy. As I began to help my son explore the implications of his discovery, I realized that I was a "tracker," or more formally, an ichnologist. Over the next two decades my colleagues and I found a number of Mesozoic bird tracks in the Tumbler Ridge area, including some of the oldest so far reported globally. We also identified many dozens of dinosaur tracksites.

Returning annually to my stomping ground on the Cape south coast of South Africa, I realized with amazement that it contained a wealth of Pleistocene track-bearing surfaces (in the 35,000 to 400,000 year age range), and that these had received little if any study. Over the past fourteen years our research team has identified more than 250 vertebrate tracksites along a 350 km stretch of coastline, on the cemented remains of ancient dune and beach surfaces. We have found four hominin tracksites, and recognized that our direct ancestors in this region left more than just their tracks: we have identified a "hominin signature" that may indicate foraging, messaging, and the creation of palaeo-art.

We also found 29 avian tracksites. Prior to our work, just a single fossil avian trackway had been reported from South Africa. Some of these were not unexpected: tracks of gulls, terns, geese, and a small passerine (possibly a wagtail). However, what really grabbed our attention was the six sites that contained the tracks of large birds, quite a bit larger than expected.

One trackway appeared to have been made by a crane, but substantially larger than any extant species from this family. At another site, which exhibited exceptional quality of preservation, the tracks had clearly been made by flamingoes, but were 10–15% larger than tracks of the extant Greater Flamingo (Figure 1). At that site we also

Figure 1: Pleistocene flamingo trackway. All photos by author.

documented something for the first time in the global trace fossil record: when flamingoes stir up sediment and algae that they feed on, they perform a distinctive stamping action as they move slowly backwards. This leaves a subaqueous "tramline trackway," and we were able to demonstrate these beside the tracks. At another site we had to excavate sediments from a rather precarious position in high coastal cliffs (Figure 2), so as to expose a recess containing a trackway containing five tracks on its ceiling (Figure 3). Curvature of the outer digits indicated that the trackmaker had had webbed feet. However, the large size, pace length and track morphology did not allow us to attribute the tracks to any extant bird in southern Africa.

These findings in combination raise two possibilities. The first is of Late Pleistocene avian extinctions. The other is that Pleistocene forms were larger than their extant equivalents. Both of these phenomena have been recorded from elsewhere in the world. In southern Africa, neither was suspected from the traditional body fossil record. This illustrates how the track record and body fossil record can complement each other. The extinctions may have been the result of significant Pleistocene climate changes with loss of habitat, and the emerging presence of *Homo sapiens* may have played a role.

When I was a teenager, growing up on this coastline, my uncle introduced me to birds. It didn`t take me long to get hooked. Soon I had joined the South African Ornithological Society and its local offshoot, the Cape Bird Club. Membership benefits included receiving *Bokmakierie*, an easy quarterly read, and *Ostrich*, a much more serious scientific research publication. When our research team was looking for a suitable journal to which we would submit our findings for peer review, I noted that *Ostrich* was still going strong, and it therefore became our target journal of choice, with African birders our target audience. Thankfully the submission was accepted and has been published online.[1] At a personal level this was maybe the most fulfilling paper I have had published, given that I would never have thought as a young birder that I might one day have something published in this august journal.

However, there is something enigmatic about tracking birds. It puzzles me, when I see how much we seem to love every aspect of our birds, that we seem to neglect their tracks, and the identifications that can be made from

Figure 2: Excavating a Pleistocene avian tracksite.

them, as well as the behavioural insights that can be appreciated. There is a delightful North American bird tracking guidebook[2], and if I take my Sibley with me I usually pack in my Elbroch as well.

Furthermore, there is another advantage to living in northern British Columbia if you are a serious tracker: six months a year of snow on the ground. The principles of tracking in snow are transferable to tracking on sand and mud, and fossil tracking on rock surfaces, but are writ large. It is a good principle to learn in the snow, and then apply the knowledge gained to other environments.

And just as birds come and go, so do tracksites. That spectacular flamingo tracksite is no more. It was obliterated during one of the storm-surge events that appear increasingly to pummel the coast. The tracks' ephemeral nature is a call to action, to explore, to discover, and document. At least we were able to perform photogrammetry on it, which means that a digital record has been preserved (Figure 4), and a replica can be created.

Tracking has become a way of life. This year, as a result of COVID-19, I could not return to my university in South Africa for my annual field season. Instead, I enjoyed a wonderfully productive season in the Cretaceous rock layers near Tumbler Ridge. There were no new bird-track discoveries, although every theropod dinosaur track discovery can be regarded as an avian precursor. But I know that further discoveries will come in future years, and there is something extra special about finding an ancient bird trackway. My perspective as both an ornithologist and ichnologist is that to truly understand and love our birds, we need to look for their tracks, both past and present.

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2. Elbroch, M., Marks, E. 2001. *Bird Tracks & Sign: A Guide to North American Species*. Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books.

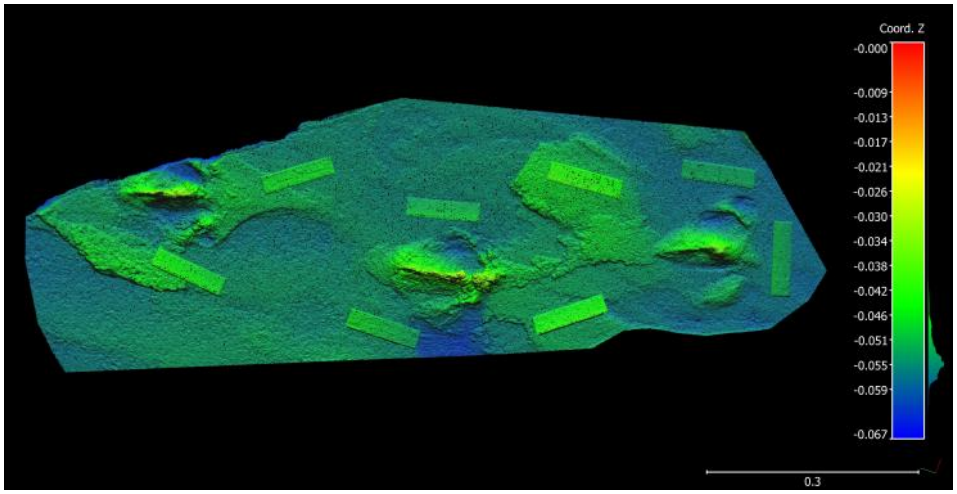
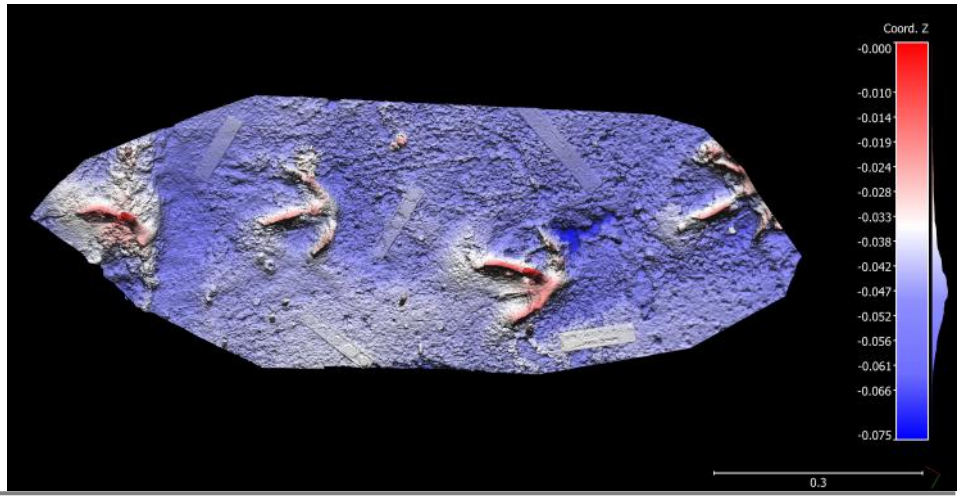


Figure 3 (above): 3D model of large fossil avian trackway; horizontal and vertical scales in metres.
Figure 4 (below): 3D model of fossil flamingo trackway; horizontal and vertical scales in metres.



Birdwatching – Perfect Pastime for Seniors During Pandemic

Dan Ferguson,
Langley Advance Times

(This article appeared in the *Langley Advance Times*' October 2020 edition of its magazine *Living 60+*. It is reprinted with permission.)

When word got out recently that a rarely seen Brown Pelican had been spotted at the Tsawwassen ferry terminal, Langley's John Gordon hopped in his car and headed for Delta.

"The bird was seen at 5:00 in the afternoon, on a dusty, smoggy afternoon," Gordon recalled. He estimated about a dozen birdwatchers from various mainland communities had made the trip, all intent on adding the species to their personal tally for the year.

So far this year, Gordon, a retired newspaper photographer, has recorded 244 different types of bird in the Lower Mainland (which is defined as 264 Street west to the water) tying his total for the previous year. Now, with less than three months to go, he is hoping to increase that to 250 – a tall order since the remaining species are just not that common.

He has company in his quest.

"About a dozen of us (locally) are chasing this magical number of 250," Gordon related.

Gordon, 67, had been what he called a "casual" birdwatcher until his retirement, after which he began to devote more time to what he refers to as a "pastime."

Maybe a little more than that.

"It's a passion which is all-involving," Gordon commented.

He now has a not-for-profit blog "listening to birds," that is devoted to birdwatching, and features his many photos, at thecanadianwarbler.blogspot.com.

"I volunteer my time and expertise in photography, and my growing expertise in birdwatching," Gordon said.

He likes the way birdwatching can lead participants into interesting tangents, specializing in particular areas.

"I'm interested in what birds are eating, the name of the tree they are in, their habitat, and migration," Gordon summarized.

He enjoys the amazed look in the faces of novice birdwatchers when he has taken them to see mass migrations, like a recent arrival in Delta.

"Thousands and thousands and thousands of sandpipers migrating to South America through the lower mainland," Gordon described.

It is about as ideal an avocation as one could hope for in a time of social distancing brought on by the pandemic, he maintains – especially for seniors.

Gordon recently took a group to Derby Regional Park near Fort Langley, and found maintaining a safe distance was not a problem – though showing the images that he shot using the back display screen of his digital camera proved somewhat challenging.

For fellow seniors, he recommends birdwatching as a way to get around the isolation that COVID has imposed on older, more vulnerable, people, and experience social interactions with like-minded souls.

"All you need is a pair of binoculars and a field guide."

While there is a bit of good-natured competition between birdwatchers wanting to spot rare species, vying for numbers is not the point, he stressed.

"The thing about it is the camaraderie," Gordon related. "Just go with the journey."

For instance, one of his goals post-retirement was to visit every park in Metro Vancouver, and birdwatching helped him achieve that goal.

"This gets you out to places you wouldn't normally go."

One high-tech aid Gordon recommends obtaining is the free eBird app, which links amateur birdwatchers to an online database of bird observations operated by Cornell University which provides scientists, researchers and amateur naturalists with real-time data about bird distribution and abundance.

It has provided him with the experience of being a "citizen scientist" working with the university, during a trip to Mexico. Using the app, Gordon was easily able to tally more than 200 bird sightings.

Gordon says the best way to get introduced to birdwatching is to join a local naturalist club, with such groups available in Langley, Surrey, Abbotsford and Vancouver.

In Langley and Aldergrove, that would be the Langley Field Naturalists (LFN), who can be contacted online or emailed at langleyfieldnaturalists@gmail.com.

Bob Puls of the LFN has devoted considerable hours to birdwatching but it isn't his primary interest.

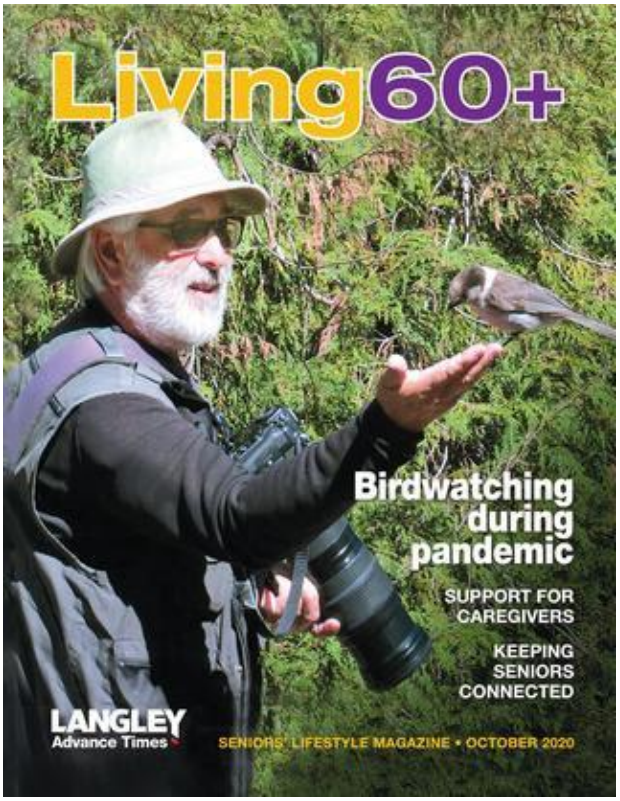
"I don't consider myself a specialist, I consider myself a naturalist," Puls elaborated.

"We take an interest in all forms of nature."

Puls enjoys birdwatching but he is careful to stress that he is not as passionately committed to the extent that John Gordon is.

"We taught John everything he knows and now he is teaching us," Puls laughed. (continued)

The magazine cover. The photo was taken by Carlo Giovanella.



Participating in a non-profit organization that aims to promote enjoyment, understanding and conservation of natural environments, Puls said, offers a way for newcomers to find what "clicks" and what doesn't.

For example, now that the fall rains have begun, Puls will be looking for mushrooms.

"You can look at all sorts of fungi."

By becoming a member of LFN, one can also become a member of BC Nature, the provincial body, Puls said.

LFN members also take part in the annual bird count and are currently involved in doing a bio-inventory of a parcel of Township land that is not open to the public.

As for the Brown Pelican that Gordon was pursuing, despite the less-than-ideal conditions, he was able to spot it and even get a photo.

Briefing 2

Summary by M. Church

News of Fresh Disasters

With a population of 1.4 billion in China and an additional 260 million people in the Koreas and Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand) there is extreme pressure for land use. In this contest birds are losing. A recent single issue of the journal *Science* (vol.369; 20 August, 2020) carried letters of concern for Baer's Pochard (*Aythya baerei*), Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) and Giant Ibis (*Thaaumatibis gigantea*).

The pochard nests in extreme northeast China and eastern Russia and winters along the major rivers of southern China. Once common, its current population is estimated to be between 150 and 700 birds. Its primary wetland habitat was reduced by one-third between 1978 and 2008 and continues to be lost to drainage for agricultural and urban development. Pollution has also contributed to loss of viable habitat, while illegal hunting and egg collection are connected directly to the bird's decline. Despite the dire situation of the population, the bird remains only a class III (lower priority) protected bird in China.

The Giant Ibis of Indochina, by far the largest of the world's ibises and the only member of its genus, is estimated to have a current population of between 200 and 300 birds, almost all in northern Cambodia. It is considered extirpated in Thailand. A wetland feeder, the bird has suffered from wetland drainage for agricultural development. It nests in forest trees and keeps its nest at least four kilometres from human habitation. Logging and incursion of people into the declining forests are therefore sources of pressure on the remaining birds. Further, the ravages of war in Indochina, egg predation by Asian palm civets and yellow-throated martens, and loss of forest pools (formerly excavated by wild water buffalo) are considered to have contributed to the bird's decline. The bird is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN red list and active rescue efforts are under way in Cambodia.

With its frantic pace of development, China is rapidly consuming its wetlands, including coastal wetlands of critical importance to birds migrating from Siberia to warm wintering grounds via the East Asian coastal flyway. Local governments, motivated by economic development, are responsible for making local land-use decisions, rendering difficult the implementation of any national policy that might conserve critical migration stopover places. Between 2012 and 2020 some 250,000 hectares of coastal wetland (an area equivalent to 50 km square) were approved for construction and for shrimp farming. Critically affected birds include the Black-faced Spoonbill, the current population of which is reckoned to be in the order of 1,000 birds. Nesting is restricted to rocky islets off the west coast of North Korea. It winters along the coasts of southern China, Taiwan and Vietnam, where habitat is disappearing. The bird is protected in China, but that does not spare it from habitat loss. Many smaller shorebirds, among them the iconic Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmaea*), share this fate.

Below: Another of the shots taken Great Egret) by Barry Lancaster on his trip to Mexico. See page 23.

Birding During Covid Times – from an East Vancouver perspective

Doug Cooper, East Vancouver

The green spaces in Hastings Park in East Vancouver, and in particular a couple of ponds and surrounding environs at the south end of the park known as the "Sanctuary," have been my local patch for a number of years now. The park is only a few blocks walk from my home and it is my go-to choice, both because of its easy access for me and because of its surprising variety of wildlife. Many Vancouver area parks were put out of bounds when the rapid rise in COVID-19 cases in March resulted in that first severe lockdown. Hastings Park, which is managed by the Pacific National Exhibition and not the Vancouver Parks Board (despite efforts in the past by local residents to have its green spaces put under the auspices of the Board) was of one of the very few parks that remained open. I was very grateful, and remain so, to be able to get out of the confines of my house and get my calming nature fix.

In the past I seldom encountered other birders but I began to run into binoculars-wearing and camera-toting strangers wandering around in the sanctuary, grateful to have discovered an accessible nature area and many surprised to learn of its existence. I noticed also an increase in the number of eBird posts to the Hastings Park Sanctuary hotspot, some of whose names were familiar but most of whose were initially not.

Some of the sightings posted made me jealous, such as the Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers, for which I've looked for more than ten years at the sanctuary without success. The postings seemed to me almost mockingly casual in their lack of details. In my less paranoid moments I acknowledge that old adage that the more eyes on the sky and on the ground the more creatures will be spotted.

A pair of Bald Eagles have nested in or near Hastings Park for a number of years now. Their 2020 nest was in a large poplar tree at the edge of a parking lot at the southeast corner of the busy intersection of Hastings and Renfrew Streets. Two young were hatched and at least one of them fully fledged, before the nest deteriorated, as the nest of this pair has so often in the past with loss of the hatchlings. By May the eagle family had attracted quite a following with there often being a number of people in position around and under the nest, now protected by a blue steel fence. Many with whom I spoke marvelled at the incongruity of these large symbolic birds raising a family above the noise and bustle of Hastings Street.

In somewhat of the spirit of "eat, drink and be merry," early on during the general uncertainty of the lockdown, I upgraded my binoculars and my camera. It has been my habit the last decade to carry both with me as I bird. I enjoy the aesthetic pleasure of getting good photos of what I encounter, and also find that my camera and lens see details that my eyes don't so well anymore.

The lockdown was also when I began to spend time uploading photos to the iNaturalist site. A lot of time. It began with realizing (I'm sure that not everyone has been as slow as I was to discover the wonders of iNaturalist) that the site was a good place to upload the non-bird sightings that I had been accumulating over the years but not really knowing what to do with. That led to the discovery of the amazing AI capabilities of the site. Post a photo and, often before I have completed entering the time and place of whatever was seen (bird, other animal, insect, flower, tree, fish, nut, etc.), the site has come up with a likely species identification.

Let me show you an example of how useful and clever the site is. When I first spotted this individual in September, its greyish head and broken eye

rings made me think it was a faded MacGillivray's Warbler. Only when I posted it to iNaturalist did I learn of its true identify. Those with subtler skills at identification than I possess (the vast majority of the readers of this article) will of course know what it is. But I didn't, and it was only after being schooled by iNaturalist that I learned of the existence of the two "Gray-headed" subspecies, either *orestera* ("Interior Montane") or *celata* ("Taiga") of Orange-crowned Warblers.

I am part of a group who have led monthly nature walks at the sanctuary for a number of years. Under the current circumstances the walks have been suspended for now but I have been posting updates to some of the regular attendees at the walks in an attempt to keep the walks going, at least on a vicarious standing. I attached the photograph and suggested people attempt their own identification. One person replied stating: "I would have ID'd the warbler as Orange-crowned right away. That's because when in doubt with a warbler I ALWAYS say Orange-crowned. (Occasionally I'm even right!)." Not a bad rule of thumb.

The identification of the following was easier to make on the spot. The owl was at the sanctuary sitting out in plain

sight late in September. I waited around for ten or fifteen minutes until someone else came along so I could have the pleasure of pointing out the owl. As I was standing there with my camera trained on the owl, a man went by walking a dog; but his head was down, he had his earbuds in and he went by without even looking at me, much less

the owl. Finally two women came by who seemed properly thrilled to have seen the owl.

As another example of the "you just never know" school of reasons why it's good to get outside, this Peregrine flew directly over my head at an altitude of

10 or 15 metres to land at the top of a tree in Callister Park on the same morning the Barred Owl was on display at the Hastings Park sanctuary. The local squirrels fled in terror from its gaze. I consider Callister Park as an extension of Hastings Park as the two are separated only by Renfrew St.

In June the birding activity significantly slowed down at the Hastings Park sanctuary. I discovered by accident a very birdy section of the Trans-Canada Trail in Burnaby that somewhat ironically is situated in a mature second-growth forest above several petrochemical facilities, including the terminus of the infamous Trans Mountain Pipeline. When the lovely song of the

few Swainson's Thrushes that showed up at Hastings Park could no longer be heard, this area featured a dozen or more songsters as well as a wide variety of other species.

As 2020 has progressed, I have been spending time, when the weather or darkness prevents getting outside, going through my too-large collection of bird photos taken in various places around the world that I have been able to visit and bird. Again with the help of iNaturalist, in doing so I've added a few birds to my life list. And, alas, taken away one or two as well.

Revisiting the photos and reliving the associated places and times have again emphasized that I have been, and continue to be, very fortunate during these worldwide troubled times. I'm suffering no great economic insecurity, I have close family nearby and I've so far escaped direct experience of the COVID-19 virus itself. Many of the places I have visited are heavily dependent on tourists and the income that they bring. I wonder if we ever will travel to exotic places in the same way again. Until then I will count myself blessed to be able to continue to seek solace in the natural places just steps from my front door.

Columbia Valley Swallow Project

Rachel Darvill launched the Columbia Valley Swallow Project in April of this year, and 69 volunteers were recruited to locate swallow nests over the spring and summer. The Columbia Wetlands (the area around Golden, Windermere, Invermere and Radium Hot Springs) are clearly suited to Bank Swallows, since 134 colonies were found in sandy banks, with an estimated 7,578 active burrows. The volunteers also located 17 Barn Swallow nest sites, including two large colonies. Additionally, data was collected on Cliff Swallow nests with the largest colony found in Parson with 69 active nests.

Bank Swallows used to be among the more common of Canada's birds, but have experienced a serious decline over the last 40 years, and are now labelled as Threatened under Canada's Species at Risk Act. Threats to nesting sites, which are often used year after year, are thus of particular concern. Darvill notes that the vertical, glacial, clay-like banks adjacent to the Columbia Wetlands and lakes are perfect for Bank Swallow colonies. They are soft enough to allow the birds to dig nests, but solid enough that the nests don't collapse. Added to that, the nearby grasslands and marshy areas provide an

abundance of food, such as mosquitoes, allowing the swallows to successfully raise their young.

Darvill is hoping to gain funding for a five-year follow-up project, which will include overseeing the installment and monitoring of artificial nesting structures. She also aims to restore degraded breeding sites, monitor existing colonies, and tag Bank Swallows to learn where they go during winter and better understand movement patterns around their breeding colonies.

For further information, head to:

wildsight.ca/branches/golden/columbia-valley-swallow-project

Avian Encounter 4

Small Is Brave

Heather Baines (Whistler) has been observing a number of David and Goliath moments, with the little guy refusing to be intimidated: a Northern Shrike dive-bombing a Bald Eagle, a Muskrat forcing a Trumpeter Swan away from its lodge, and a Hooded Merganser, driven temporarily away by a beaver, turning straight back to the beaver's lodge. You have to admire the pluck.

Migrating to Mexico?

Michael B Lancaster, Oliver

Many members will be aware that for all of the current century I have migrated to the Canary Islands for the winter. I have been visiting there since 1989.

Due to the deaths of my best friend and his wife in 2017, my wife's death in 2018 and a burglary in 2019 (all on Tenerife), the decision, long discussed with my late wife, precipitated the sale of my property in November 2019.

Mexico had been discussed as the place to be in winter. In February this year I flew to Puerto Vallarta from Kelowna, hired a car at the airport and drove to my destination on the Riviera Nayari–San Pancho (San Francisco). It is about 45 minutes drive from the airport as much of the road is 40km speed limit.

The choice of the destination was determined by the presence of a banding station and the fact that members of the Canadian Wildlife Service had spent winters there looking for banded Yellow-breasted Chats. San Pancho is a small town that relatively recently has become a tourist attraction (many Canadians, including from the Okanagan) with commensurate food prices. Hemmed in by forest southerly and northerly, Route 200 easterly and the ocean westerly.

By sheer good fortune, Hotel Casa Palomera, Calle Mexico, was the cheapest at the time I was there (one month). I booked with Hotel.com. The accommodation was good; bedroom plus self-contained shower and toilet in a separate room with a settee. A converted hacienda, the hotel was not the usual style of hotel. No glass windows, just shutters. Lots of woodwork and plants and trees in the small courtyard with a very small pool. A communal kitchen was available for self-catering. The outside road was cobbled, as was the main road through town (which is one way from Calle Mexico to the beach).

The staff were all friendly and most helpful. The manager installed a microwave and bagel toaster at my suggestions (after asking me what improvements could be made). Earplugs (screw-in expanding type and very effective) were supplied after I mentioned that noisy weekend celebrations kept me awake – an offer of changing the room

Above: Vermillion Flycatcher. Below: White Ibis.

to the rear was made but the view (remnant forest), despite a burgeoning hotel at the front, with birdwatching from my bed, was too good to give away. Plenty of restaurants within a short walking distance. Beach 200 metres or so away. A laundry was run by a small family just round the corner and cost very little and was available to be collected neatly folded in a plastic bag the following day.

For a birdwatcher it was the perfect location (at least for me). Less than 200 metres along the street there was a marsh with a saline lagoon bounded by a variable-size sandbar as part of the beach which is about one kilometre from end to end (complete with Turtle nests). Entrance to the beach is about halfway via the town.

Every morning, thirty minutes or so at the end of Calle Mexico would enable a count of thirty or more species to be made. My mornings started there and expanded to the northernmost tip of the beach and back. Or to the Polo Club area, or a circular route through forest surrounding the golf club and various residences.

Every day I walked from the hotel to Route 200 (about one kilometre) as some items of food could be bought most cheaply at the garage situated on the junction with the road through town. Everywhere I went I carried my camera equipment and binoculars using a Cotton carrier vest (absolutely indispensible, I was carrying several kilos in equipment on my chest alone and easily walked several kilometres). Locals initially asked what I was doing. They soon recognised El Ingles to the extent that if I did not have my camera they enquired why.

Above: Yellow-crowned Night- Heron. Below left: Little Blue Heron. All photos were taken by the author during the Mexico trip.

As this was my first visit to Mexico, despite taking Howell and Webb, there were initial misidentifications. Howell and Webb is a very comprehensive book but not all species are illustrated (they are described) and it is far too heavy to carry around. In one case, only black and white illustrations of a very colourful species caused a misidentification. All have I think been sorted out. Since my return I have bought a field guide by Edwards. Both books are somewhat outdated as regards taxonomy. Sibley (cell phone version) also has birds that occur in Mexico as well as North America. I obviously was unable to identify most species by sound although that improved as time went on.

I have a list of 130+ species/sub-species with images of most – all within the boundaries of San Pancho. The two best areas are the beach/saloon/marsh and the road through the polo club grounds. About thirty of the species found I had seen in Canada, the rest were lifers. Most disappointing was the lack of hummingbird species. Only the Cinnamon was seen, but apparently a hike up the hill on the other side of Route 200 into the forest enables more species to be seen.

I met up with Luis Morales, the local birdwatching guru, and spent a couple of mornings one weekend at the banding station. Luis also has his own company giving guided trips around the area. The banding station was interesting in that it was in the jungle and numbers caught per day were similar to those that I have caught in the forest in BC – low! It is always good to see how other banders organize their station and I enjoyed the experience.

The intention was to drive down to Mexico this November and spend until the end of February there in my VW Westfalia camper. Unfortunately COVID -19 has discouraged that idea but a special offer of 20% off prices from WestJet was too good to miss and I have booked 14 days from late January next year when hopefully the Covid situation will have been improved and maybe even vaccinations are available.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first visit. I recommend San Pancho.

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Doves for Israel

Larry Joseph, Hazelton

Introduction

In the Congo Basin, an astonishing biodiversity of wildlife, birds, ecosystems, and cultures thrive in equatorial rainforest and savannah. Mountain gorillas, lowland gorillas, chimpanzees, forest elephants, and a thousand species of birds make it their home.

What is more, the online Global Forest Atlas by the Yale School of the Environment reveals that the Congo Basin is also "home to 75 million people and 150 distinct ethnic groups, many of whom still practice a traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle." Eighty percent of global biodiversity appears on indigenous lands.

My advocacy for the protection of nature through protection of indigenous rights has now consumed more than 30 years of my life. I do it out of love and respect for my culture and for my love of creation. That's how indigenous people like me have contributed to the protection of 80% of global biodiversity.

From 2011 to 2017 I did it as a board member of the Forest Stewardship Council International (FSC). I will briefly share (short on lists of birds but long on the overall experience) how it was for me, a Canadian First Nations senior and a Wet'suwet'en social forester, to travel and to bird between Brazzaville and Oyo, during a 2016 rebellion in the Republic of the Congo (RoC).

Biodiversity Protection

Mbendjele Yaka (Pygmies) possess traditional land between the Sangha and Oubangui Rivers. FSC forest certification could infringe on indigenous rights, so forest companies are required to seek the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of indigenous people to attain certification.

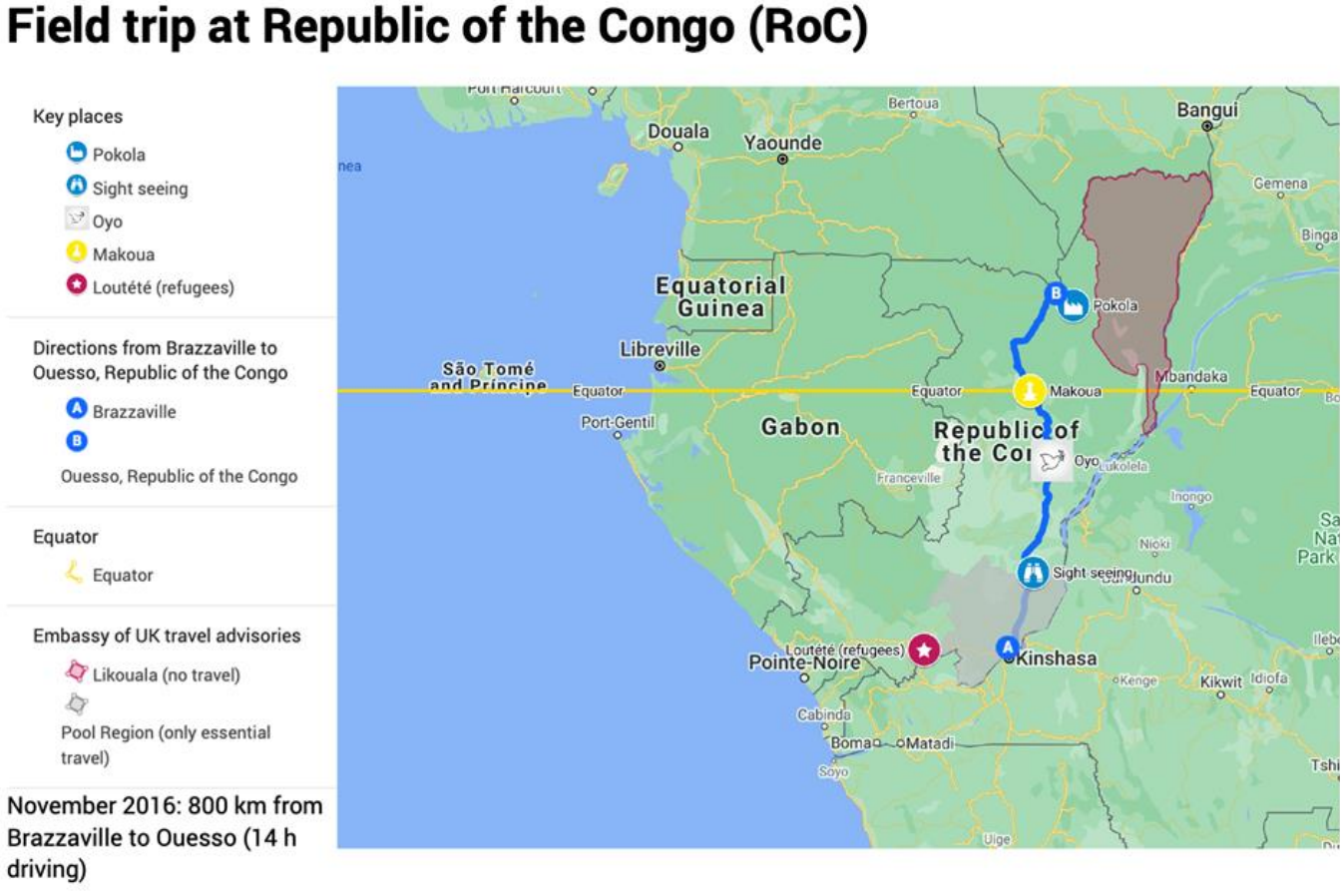
The largest intact forest landscape in Africa engulfs the northern part of the Republic of the Congo. In 2020, over 3 million hectares of forests are FSC certified in the RoC. FSC voluntary certification seeks stronger protection against forest degradation and fragmentation of large, Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs).

Six High Conservation Values (HCVs) require protection. "An HCV is a biological, ecological, social or cultural value of outstanding significance or critical importance." For example, in Costa Rica, the endangered Great Green Macaw requires certain kinds of forest stands for nesting and feeding sites. This is a HCV 1. In the RoC, the Grey Parrot would be a HCV 1. FSC requires its protection through appropriate management actions and controls. Auditors visit such forests to make sure it is done. Thus, during my service on FSC's board from 2011 to 2017, we made a positive contribution to nature conservation and habitat protection for birds and wildlife in the RoC.

The Rebellion

In April 2016, gunfire broke out in the streets of Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo. Young people at the barricades called on their President to step down. More violence broke out in the Pool Region in October.

The Government of Canada, consequently, advised Canadians not to travel to the RoC. So, I questioned why the FSC board should meet and go on a field trip in the RoC. FSC staff in Brazzaville disagreed with Canada's advice. They said diplomats and FSC staff openly walked the streets of Brazza-



ville. So, we relied on advice by the embassies of the United Kingdom and the USA instead.

In mid-October the UK Embassy travel advisory urged only essential travel in the Pool Region which surrounds the capital city, Brazzaville. No British citizen should go to the north-eastern corner of the RoC. Our visit to Ouesso and Pokola was 30 km west of this no-travel zone.

Crossing the RoC

Our delegation of ten officials departed Mikhael's Hotel in central Brazzaville at 7:00 AM on November 10. Two white Ford SUVs and a white Toyota Tacoma pick-up truck were in our motorcade. Ultimately, Ouesso was 14 hours and 800 km away. However, this essay will be restricted to travel to Oyo.

After 30 minutes of travel along a modern expressway, we stopped near the National Stadium built for the 2015 All-Africa Games. The President of the country had built a huge palatial residence next to the National Stadium. The President stayed there just once.

Everyone got out of their vehicles. The drivers readjusted cargo and luggage. I began taking pictures. A member of the delegation quickly warned me, "Don't take pictures of the President's residence! You will be arrested!" So travellers and birders need to learn local laws such as this one.

Réserve de chasse de la Lefini

Military and police checkpoints were every 60 minutes' drive. Roadblocks made progress slow. So, our motorcade drove fast through the savannah and countless villages. Only cities slowed us down.

Few bird guides work in the RoC. Several professional bird guides travel from Gabon, a neighbouring country, to guide visitors. So my birding was self-directed at every possible opportunity including lunch and coffee breaks.

As we drove northwards toward the equator, trees gradually grew thicker on the savannah. Gallery forests appeared along rivers and wetlands at the Réserve de chasse de la Lefini. This protected reserve is thought to be a dangerous part of the country and a seat of rebellion.

At my insistence, our hosts very reluctantly stopped at a summit in the Réserve. The brief stop made birding impossible. Nevertheless, there is amazing birding potential at the rivers, marshes, grasslands, swamp forests, gallery forests, and cliff forests.

The savannah landscape extends from southeast Gabon across central Congo and into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Very little published information exists about birds in the RoC. My FSC colleague from the Congo Basin found an excellent but short overview (60 pages). Tony King had published a guide for the Aspinall Foundation in 2009 called, "Guide photographique des oiseaux des Réserves Lesio-Louna et Lefini, Congo photographic guide to the birds of the Lesio-Louna and Lefini Reserves, Congo." The reserves are 140 km north of Brazzaville.

The guide, written in French and English by Tony King, describes 317 bird species in 63 families at the Lesio-Louna and Lefini Reserves. African Pygmy Kingfisher and Giant Kingfisher were on my short list. King calls the annual migration of Abdim's Storks from February to May a spectacle. For the adventurous, the eastern boundary of the Lesio-Louna reserve has had few visitors, so Tony King explained that "much remains to be discovered" in the reserves.

First Birding Walk

By 2:00 pm, we had travelled 400 km to Oyo. It is a small city of 5,000 people in central RoC with an international airport and a luxury hotel. The President of the RoC and his entourage have houses in this city.

We pulled into a restaurant for lunch. Tables were set out in an open courtyard. Trees surrounded it. When I stepped out of the air-conditioned Ford SUV, the searing heat and humidity stunned me. It was a sauna! Yet, the pain from my shingles disappeared in the heat. It was a miracle! I wanted to stay in Africa!

My colleagues unpacked picnic coolers at the picnic tables. I went bird-watching. A dove was perched high in a tree nearby. An amazing variety of birds appeared during 30 minutes. I saw doves, African Village Weaver birds (*Ploceus cucullatus*) in their globular nests, Grey-headed Sparrow, and some other species. I spent a lot of time watching Weaver birds building their globular nests. I began photographing them in flight.

Then I walked within ten metres of a table of young white men. A loud, threatening voice rang out, "Hey, what are you doing?" I stopped and looked at four men. I shot back, "I'm from Canada! Where are you from?" "Israel!" the rude man with large biceps and a short-sleeved shirt replied. Images of countless Israeli abuses of human rights in the Holy Land flashed through my mind, then I got angry. Instantly, I confronted them, "I'm looking for birds. I'm looking for doves for Israel!"

The young, rude, and aggressive Israeli was stunned! (continued)

I silenced him! Another young white man at the Israeli table looked at me

and smiled widely. I challenged them again, "What are you doing here?" "We are here for an agriculture business!" another Israeli replied.

Were the Israelis military advisors to the RoC during the rebellion but posing as advisors for agriculture? Was the extremely rude Israeli being aggressive with me because of the unpredictable nature of attacks and violence in his war-torn country? For me, this was a racist encounter. This is what happened to me during my first bird walk in the Republic of the Congo.

After I left the Congo, I learned that armed conflict had broken out again when we were there. Fighting between the Congolese army and "Ninja" rebels displaced four thousand people. They sought refuge in Loutété, a town three hours and 197 km directly west of Brazzaville. Loutété is on the N1 National Highway connecting Brazzaville to Pointe Noire, a city on the South Atlantic coast.

In October 2018, the Republic of Congo stopped large agricultural activities in the forests. Activities larger than five hectares would need to use the savannah. The RoC made the decision to fight climate change, and to stop the destruction of high-conservation-value tropical forests.

Bird Photographers' Corner

Size Matters – for Sensors

Readers might have noted that many of the photographs in this magazine have been taken by John Gordon using his Nikon Coolpix P1000 24–3000mm super zoom, sometimes with the lens extended to the full 3000 mm.* Wow! Why would a birder get any other camera? And yet John says that the P1000 is "not really a replacement for a DSLR" (digital single-lens reflex camera, the more traditional choice for wildlife photography). What is going on?

The answer is that it's all a matter of the size of the sensor, and the trade-offs it brings between resolution and magnification. Those of us remembering the days of film will know that the larger the film size, the greater the resolution. Medium format cameras, such as the famous Hasselblad, were the gold standard for studio photography, as the larger negatives gave wonderful detail. There's about four times more surface area in the medium-format film than in 35 mm. Switching to 35 mm meant grabbing a quarter of the potential detail, but it makes possible a camera that is a lot more portable, and, significantly for birders, allows lenses to have much greater apparent magnifying power.

The magnification is "apparent" because it is not the result of more powerful lensing, but of capturing a small image and subsequently enlarging it. The easiest way to understand this is to

John Gordon's video of the Red-backed Shrike (see page 9), taken with the P1000, can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXS1_0TQS6o. The quality is undoubtedly high. But though John took initial stills of the bird with the P1000, he switched to the Nikon D500 with Nikon 200–500 zoom for higher-quality shots, as below.
The light was very poor, and ISO 1000 had to be selected.

see the smaller film format as providing a crop (chopped-out part) of the image that would have appeared on the larger film format. The greater the crop, the more the need of enlargement, and thus the more magnification.

We have much the same situation with sensors. A DSLR such as the Nikon D500 or D7500 has a sensor size of 23.5 x 15.7 mm, i.e. 369 mm^2. This is smaller than the full-frame DSLR sensors (36 x 24 mm), so will give somewhat greater magnification. The P1000, though, has a far smaller sensor, at 6.17 x 4.55 mm, giving a surface area of just 28 mm^2.

Does it mean that it has fifteen times less resolution than a D500? Well, not exactly, because Nikon somehow manages to cram 16 megapixels into this tiny surface area. But it's at a cost. Megapixels are not everything (the reasons are technical). But it does mean that there's a tremendous magnification factor.

A 400 mm lens put into a Nikon D7500 or D500 would produce an image of the same dimensions as a 600 mm lens on a full-frame camera such as the Nikon D780. If it could be put on the P1000 camera, it would act as if it were a 2280 mm lens. In the days before image stabilization, such multiplication would lead to hopelessly blurred images due to camera shake, but it's now 2020.

John Gordon knows that the images from his P1000 are unlikely to win major awards from purists, and they can't be enlarged too much, but it allows him to capture many excellent photographs that grace this magazine, and that would otherwise be missed.

Endnote

*It's of course not really 3000 mm, or the lens would be about ten feet long, but it gives an image equivalent to that which would be produced by a full-frame camera with a hypothetical three-metre lens.

Additional Commentary from John Gordon

The Nikon P1000 is a bridge camera – it bridges the gap between a point-and-shoot pocket camera and a DSLR. Portability is an important plus. Most bridge cameras are lightweight: they travel well as carry-ons and can be carried all day in the field without much effort. For non-photographers, bridge cameras offer many advantages, especially as the cost is a fraction of DSLR or mirrorless options.*

I presently use the Nikon Coolpix P1000 primarily for its 4k video and amazing reach – there is absolutely nothing like it on the market. The 4k video is superb all the way through to 3000mm. In good light and at lesser distances the stills are quite good to very good but not as good as the video. I also use it as a handheld scope. A good example would be a flock of siskins at the top of a distant cedar: it's much quicker to acquire a target than a scope, plus there's no need for a tripod as the camera has top-rate stabilization. I have found this very useful on bird walks with beginners who may have missed seeing one of the birds. The old adage, "a picture is worth a thousand words," is very true.

That said, I can still take stills while recording video, which is a great bonus. If I want to capture a definitive image I'll use my Nikon D500, though it does still have a cropped sensor, as the article above explained. The full-size sensors found in professional cameras are even better in low-light situations and produce cleaner images with less digital noise.

There are many other fine bridge cameras around, the highest resolution being the Sony RXIV. Being a Nikon user, I originally chose Nikon P900 (replaced now by the P950) not just for close-ups but to photograph habitats with the 24mm wide angle. That's something that can't be achieved when using a long telephoto without carrying a second body or changing the lens. It's a huge plus to be able to shoot the habitat, the birds in their surroundings, and the birds themselves, all with one camera and its one zoom lens.

The P1000 also has macro and other nifty features, too many to list here. The camera is large and heavier than other bridge cameras and not for everyone, so I would suggest trying out a few other models at your local camera store. (Avoid buying from outside Canada as there will be no warranty.) The bridge cameras from Canon, Lumix and Sony have also come a long way in the past decade and as camera gear mutates, as it most certainly will, expect further advancements that will make getting the image that much more simpler and leave more time to enjoy the birding experience.

Editor's Endnote

*DSLRs might be replaced in the not-too distant future by mirrorless cameras (DSLRs have a flip-up internal mirror). The jury is currently out on whether this is a true step forward for wildlife photography, but the camera makers seem convinced that it is the future. If you have any thoughts on this issue, you are invited to contribute an episode of Bird Photographers' Corner.

Briefing 3

Summary by M. Church

Vulture Disaster

A case that illustrates cultural complications of bird protection and survival:

Guinea-Bissau is a small nation on the west coast of North Africa. Centred on 12°N, 15°W, it is sandwiched between the larger states of Senegal and Guinea. Here, in the six-month period between September 2019 and March 2020 more than 2,000 Hooded Vultures (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) were killed by poisoning. That is more than one percent of the global population, estimated to be about 197,000 birds, and approaching 5% of the 22,000 birds resident in Guinea-Bissau. The special problem that these figures define is that the birds are killed for cultural purposes; possession of vulture parts – particularly heads – is considered to bring good luck. Hooded Vultures are internationally ranked as critically endangered.

The problem of cultural use of vulture parts – hence of a largely illicit trade – is widespread in West Africa and is estimated to account for 29% of vulture deaths. In West Africa 60% (in parks) to 70% (elsewhere) of the vulture population has disappeared in 30 years. The vultures are key species in the regional ecology inasmuch as their role in organic waste control contributes significantly to disease control. In view of the cultural beliefs involved, the problem is apt to be very difficult to resolve.

Source: A letter in *Science* 370: 304 (16 October, 2020).

Featured Species No. 12

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

Northwestern Crow

Corvus caurinus

Editor's note: This is a particularly interesting entry in the light of the recent lumping of Northwestern Crow with American Crow. Lumpers and splitters still come to blows on such issues, and Adrian reports that a paper is now in preparation disputing the AOS decision.

Status: Common to abundant resident. Breeds.

This crow is adapted to survival on the Pacific coast, from northern Washington to the foot of the Alaska Peninsula. It survives largely by feeding in the intertidal zone. This intelligent bird is very adaptable, however, and also thrives in areas where human habitation dominates.

Its status as a species distinct from the American Crow of the interior of the continent is questioned by some, who regard it merely as a subspecies of the former. Those who know this bird intimately would likely consider that notion invalid. The Northwestern Crow is smaller with a more nasal call than the American. Claims made in two prominent field guides that this bird's calls are lower are in my opinion incorrect, at least in our west coast region. Additionally, this species has unique vocalizations never heard in the American Crow, occasionally astonishing non-residents, who report hearing a crow saying hello. That vocalization, though not remote from the imagined "hello," could more accurately be described as a soft, nasal falsetto "la-la." The Northwestern Crow differs from the American Crow in behaviour as well, with this species being exceedingly bold in the presence of humans.

This ubiquitous species is commonly found along the shore as well as offshore islands throughout the entire west coast region. North of Tofino, it is also present year-round and seasonally gathers in small feeding aggregations such as 62 on Brooks Peninsula on 6 August 1981 and 16 at Hansen Lagoon in Cape Scott Park on 15 May 1974. During the breeding season, Northwestern Crows disperse, but are particularly common along the outer coast and on small vegetated islands, rather than along the inlets. They hide their ground nests as best they can to avoid predation by their mortal enemy the Common Raven, often without success (see under Common Raven). It is estimated that at least 8 pairs nest on Cleland Island, with a maximum of 20 birds counted on 21 May 1969 (BCFWS).

Crows are major scavengers and predators in seabird colonies, where they have been reported to consume the eggs of cormorants and Glaucous-winged Gulls, particularly when the parent birds leave the nest due to disturbance by eagles or human visitors. Crows undoubtedly consume the eggs of other breeding birds as well, such as those of Black Oystercatchers. And when afforded the opportunity, they will also kill and consume the newly hatched chicks of cormorants and the nestlings of storm-petrels as they emerge from their burrows. Such behaviour has been amply documented in a number of scientific papers. Being the opportunists they are, Northwestern Crows also feed on the eggs and chicks of many small birds.

After the breeding season, and particularly in winter, Northwestern Crows gather in flocks late in the day and fly out to a roost, usually located on a small island. It is believed that they do this to avoid predation by Great Horned Owls. In Tofino, they have been known to gather in a flock of more than a thousand birds, which then heads over the water to Lennard Island. On 16 March 2004, several flocks totalling 1,300 birds were tallied from Chesterman Beach. The largest flock contained 900 birds. At dawn they again return to Tofino to disperse in search of food. There may be some movement out of the area in fall. Small flocks have been observed flying in a southeasterly direction in fall on occasion.

Members of this species are extremely clever and versatile when it comes to finding food. Local residents know better than to leave a bag of groceries unattended in the back of a pickup truck. And when the tide is out they feed on a variety of life in the intertidal zone. Crows are occasionally seen flying high in the air to drop a mollusc on rocks, pavement, drift logs, and even a parked car in order to break it open. On sandy beaches, they will dig out red worms, much as sandpipers do. On 20 January 2001, an estimated 350 crows were feeding on red worms near Sandhill Creek, Long Beach. Similarly, when the ground is wet in spring, they will sometimes hunt for earthworms in village parks alongside American Robins, from whom they may well have learned this practice.

Northwestern Crows are also known to feed on a variety of berries, including the fruit of California wax-myrtle (*Myrica californica*). The proliferation of fish farms in Clayoquot Sound has created another food source. At a supply depot and processing facility in Tofino, crows have been seen digging into leaking bags of fish pellets and competing with gulls for any spillage. There is little to fear about the continued survival of this adaptable and resilient little crow.

Note

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

Below: Northwestern Crow photographed by author at Tofino.

Gone Fishing

The Green-winged Teal

Chris Siddle, Vernon

Somewhere in the hills around Armstrong, B.C., a creek runs south, through forest, down rocky outcrops, through a small town and into farmland, across land cleared long ago for pasture and hay fields. After flowing into and out of Otter Lake, it eventually spills into the north arm of long, deep Okanagan Lake. The creek has overcome many attempts to control it. Farmers have dug many steep-walled narrow drainage ditches across their fields; the city of Armstrong has tried narrow canals to divert some of the waters to sewage ponds, but come spring nothing can control the waters of the creek. I am not writing about a raging torrent, but a steady flow of water that drowns the grassy valley bottom, spreads across fields and saturates the earth for enough of the year that ribbons of marsh hem the creek. It has been crucial habitat for hundreds, even occasionally thousands of waterfowl, from the earliest thaw in February until the first serious freezes in November.

I do not have the property owner's permission to visit the Otter Lake marsh so several times a week I drive to a little municipal park founded by one of the pioneer families in the area – the Scotts – and from the parking lot I view the marsh through a spotting scope. There's a large pond where the creek joins Otter Lake. The current keeps the ice thin so that the snowy cover on this pond disappears faster than at most of the other North Okanagan ponds. It's at Otter Lake's marsh pond in March that the Mallards, Canada Geese, Trumpeter and Tundra swans arrive as soon as there's enough open water for them to settle. Most years, after Mallards and a few diving ducks appear at the pond, Green-winged Teal (singular and plural are both "teal") are the next dabbling ducks to arrive.

Of all the dabblers, the Green-winged Teal is my favourite. Neither too tame (like a herd of park ducks) nor too skittish, the Green-wing, keeping to a small group, always retains enough wildness to satisfy, springing into flight upon too close an approach. The metallic green of the inner wing against the sombre browns and whites of a half-frozen marshscape is a flash of sudden promise of better times to come.

The Green-winged Teal is well known to duck hunters for its fast flight. Publications from 1900 com-

Typically, female Green-winged Teal look a little darker overall than female Blue-winged or Cinnamon teal. Birders beware: some immature and/or female Green-wings can show a diffuse pale spot just behind the bill and so can be misidentified as Blue-wings. For drab teal identification, use other field marks like extent of eye-line, darkness of cap, and the always useful presence or absence of a pale line on the side of the stern.
Photo by Chris Siddle. 31 August 2017. Vernon, BC.

monly stated that the Green-wing could fly 100 miles (161 km) per hour. Perhaps because almost no human had experienced travel at 100 miles per hour in 1900, this guess at the duck's flight speed was wildly inaccurate. Followed by radar in their mainly nocturnal migrations, teal were found to travel at 71 km/hour, still a respectable speed, especially when one factors in teal's well-known ability to twist and turn in flight. The Green-wing's speed, agility and small size make it resemble a sizable shorebird in flight, and many a callow birder has had his or her heart leap up in anticipation of the arrival of a godwit or curlew coming in for a landing, when a second later the slim, fast bird's real identity becomes obvious as "just" a Green-wing. There's no such thing as just a Green-wing.

Range

Unlike Cinnamon Teal, which breeds through the western United States and southern B.C. and Alberta, the Green-wing nests right across Alaska, Canada, and much of the contiguous United States from the coast of the Arctic Ocean east across the North West Territories and Nunavut, Quebec, Labrador and Newfoundland and south through the northern United States. It's absent from the Arctic Islands. Unlike other teal species, the Green-wing favours heavy cover for its nesting. Besides nesting around mixtures of sedge and/or grass scattered with shrubs or trees usually near water, the Green-wing is attracted to small ponds, especially those created by North American Beavers because in their early stages beaver ponds are very productive. Flooded plants rot, producing nutrients that promote a sudden increase in food production for teal including aquatic plant seeds and invertebrates.

Nesting

In my experience, Green-winged Teal nests are often very well hidden. Blue-winged Teal and other dabblers often nest in fairly obvious places in BC's Peace River region, for instance, on the grassy berms surrounding inactive gas wells. Green-wings, on the other hand, secrete their nests in thicker cover which the duck pulls over to conceal the down-lined depression holding on average 8–9 eggs. Usually the male teal leaves the female about the time she begins incubation which lasts about 21 days.

The ducklings, especially Stage 1 ducklings (1–7 days old) are cute as the dickens, medium brown on cap, nape back and upper body and dull yellow on underparts, face, back edge of the wing with a yellow bar just aft of the wing and a yellow spot on the side of the rump. The yellow face is crossed by two narrow parallel brown lines, one through the eye and the other directly below it.

Predation

On the breeding grounds Green-wings are frequently the prey of Red Foxes. Eggs are taken by Striped Skunks, American Crows and Black-billed Magpies. In migration and on wintering areas Green-wings are also taken by Northern Harriers and Peregrine Falcons. I vividly recall seeing my life Gyrfalcon knock a Green-winged Teal out of the sky above Martindale Flats way back in 1979. The Green-wings' fast flight doesn't spare it from sportsmen either. The Green-wing is the second most "harvested" duck in the United States after the Mallard.

Behaviour

Green-winged Teal begin courtship behaviour in late-September – November, though the species is typically late to form a pair bond compared to other dabbling ducks. The various displays between males and females have been named by waterfowl experts. A list of displays sounds like a busy bar on a Friday night: the Burp, followed by the Grunt-whistle, Head-up-tail-up, Turn-toward-female, Nod-swimming, Turn-back-of-the-head, Bridling (caution: perform this only when standing on land), Head-shake, Bill-up, Bill-down and Hovering Flight. Aggressive displays by males toward other males that try to horn in include the Jump-flight where a male springs over its competitor to splash down directly in front of the desired female. A female can get the drakes excited by issuing a harsh rattle while moving her bill sideways. If a male harasses her, she might quack loudly to reject him. Once a pair has formed, the male will rigorously guard his mate from the attentions of other males.

Behaviour easiest for a birder to witness include teals' watchful loafing on shore, and foraging. A Green-wing's bill is equipped with lamellae closely spaced like the teeth of a very fine comb. The teal sifts tiny seeds and miniscule organisms out of shallow water and liquidy mud. Drawn to the shallowest edges, teal seem to nibble the margins of a marsh. In deeper water teal may feed in typical dabbler style, with heads submerged or sterns upturned.

Population

Green-winged Teal populations in North American have increased steadily over the past twenty years, in part because the species breeds so widely around little wetlands across the boreal forest. In 2015, waterfowl experts pegged the population at 4.3 million. Thirty years ago 280,000 were estimated to winter in south coastal B.C. Let's hope these numbers reflect the truth. A beaver pond or a marsh without whistling, busy little teal would be a sadder place indeed.

Avian Encounter 5

Unexpected Parishioner

Marianne Werner (Vancouver) got a surprise when a juvenile Pacific Wren flew into her church, and subsequently perched on the shoulder of the custodian. She said it seemed perfectly well, though it was so tame, and finally flew off strongly.