

# BC BIRDING

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*Sage Thrasher, Pitt Meadows, 3 May, 2018 – see page 3. Photo by John Gordon.*

**Publisher**

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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](mailto:clive_keen@hotmail.com)) or by mail at 10790 Grassland Road, Prince George, BC V2K 5E8.

Submissions may include articles about birding experiences, casual observations about bird behaviour, site guides, photographs, and other topics of broad interest to birders, preferably, but not necessarily, in British Columbia. Trip reports by members, both in Canada and overseas, are welcome. Items can be of any length up to a maximum of 2,000 words.

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

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

*Joan Nicholson came across this Greater Roadrunner on a golf course in Palm Springs, April 2018.*

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*Merlin spotted by Sharon Godkin at  
Tanner Ridge, central Saanich..*

## Cover Photos

John Gordon writes:

### Front Cover

"I photographed this Sage Thrasher at Rannie Road and Koerner Rd in Pitt Meadows on May 3, 2018. It was one of two birds that hung around for a few days .... This was probably the fastest twitch I had ever been on. I arrived at the site but there was no one around so I went up on the dyke and the bird was sitting on the bush out in the open. I shot six frames before it moved farther along the dyke. I observed it for a few minutes before it flew off and fed along the pathway...."

### Back Cover

"May 2018 has been an incredible month for Metro Vancouver birders. This beautiful male Lapland Longspur was photographed on Iona's south jetty on May 14, 2018. The bird was found a few days earlier and reported on vanbcbirds and hung around throughout the weekend despite the hundreds of walkers, dogs and cyclists passing close by."



## President's Message

Mike McGrenere, President

The Annual General Meeting and conference in Hope will be underway around the time that this issue of the newsmagazine is released. The AGM is the highlight event of the BCFO calendar providing opportunities to see some great birds on the field trips, reacquaint yourself with birding friends from other parts of the province, meet new members, and enjoy the hospitality offered by the Hope Golf and Country Club.

The previous two AGMs held in Cranbrook and Tumbler Ridge had our largest attendance as well as excellent participation in the extension trips. The locations were about as far east and as far north as we could hold the AGMs. With that in mind,

the choice of Hope for the 2018 AGM seemed like a logical location to hold the event, being closer to the coast and to Vancouver Island. However, at the time of writing this message, registration for the Hope AGM/conference is about half of the attendance at the two previous events. And the extension trip to the Williams Lake area was cancelled because only a few people had signed up for the three-day trip.

There appears to be a correlation with the attendance at our AGMs and the proximity of the AGM location to Vancouver and Victoria. The Parksville AGM in 2005, the Sidney (2013) and Pemberton (2014) AGMs all had low attendance and the Hope AGM is following this pattern. These locations are within a day's trip for Vancouver and/or Victoria members and the familiarity of birds within this distance may not be as attractive to some members as the diversity of birds found in other areas of the province. Although the location of next year's AGM has not

been determined, it definitely appears that Interior BC and more northerly areas are more attractive locations for the AGM for many of our members.

I will be completing a two-year term and stepping down as President at the Hope AGM. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the dedicated volunteers who assist with the operation of the BCFO for their support and participation. These include both the Board and committee members, most of whose names are listed in the front pages of this newsmagazine. Please take the opportunity to recognize and thank them the next time you see them.

I look forward to seeing the conference attendees at this year's AGM and enjoying some quality birding in the Hope area.

*Below: A Black-winged Stilt spotted in the El Rocio area of southern Spain, March 2018. CNK photo.*

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

CLAIRE EBENDINGER –  
BRENTWOOD

BRENT MATSUDA – BURNABY

CLAIRE HOWSE – DELTA

LEZLIE SMITH – SECHLT

RICHARD MARSHALL – VANCOUVER

JOHN BARKER – ETOBICOKE, ON

TIMOTHY VERSPAGEN – VANCOUVER

KATHLEEN McEACHERN –  
MAPLE RIDGE

ANDREW TYRRELL – FORT  
ST. JOHN

DANIELLE ZANDBERGEN –  
SMITHERS



## Notes

### BCFO Directors Meetings

#### BCFO Two-day Trips

Directors have agreed to drop the \$10 charge for members attending BCFO two-day trips. The charge had proved something of an administrative nuisance, it did not serve a clear purpose, and attendance was felt to be a member benefit rather than a money-raiser.

#### Conservation & Education Fund

Directors recognized that most of their meeting time was inevitably taken up with operational matters, which left too little to focus on the best use of the Conservation and Education fund. As a result it was agreed that a proposal would be put to the AGM to create a senior committee whose role would be to promote the existence of the fund, actively seek out suitable funding opportunities, further develop policies for conservation/education expenditures, and ensure that funds are dispensed in an appropriate and timely fashion.

#### Birds Records Committee

The BRC had proposed opening a competition to raise awareness of the correct steps to follow in making a Rare Bird Report. The boards endorsed this: details can be found on pages 6–7.

The sister publication to this newsmagazine, *British Columbia Birds*, Volume 28, has included a fifteen-page report from the Birds Records Committee – the fifth report since the Committee was reinstated in 2013. Decisions were made on 68 records, and 56 were accepted.

### Visiting Arizona?

Thor Manson has written to say that since he has moved to Arizona, he will no longer be able to participate in BCFO activities. However, he is now a volunteer with Tucson Audubon and Birdpal, and has already helped some BC birders on their trips to the area. He says he gets a lot of requests, but will always prioritize BC birders.

If members would like help filling out their ABA lists in SE Arizona, he can be contacted at [thorman-son@live.com](mailto:thorman-son@live.com).



### BC Birding Editorial team

This is a belated introduction to Virginia Rasch, who goes through the draft of this newsmagazine with a magnifying glass (she would never allow a cliché like “fine-tooth comb” to slip past her) to keep errors and infelicities at bay. Virginia is a freelance editor and copy-editor, but gives her services for free to this publication.

Virginia is not just an avid birder, but a naturalist in general, currently acting as Vice-President of BC Nature. Any members needing her editorial services for business purposes – or perhaps if you’ve a book in the offing – are encouraged to contact her at [virginiainbc@gmail.com](mailto:virginiainbc@gmail.com).

### Correct eBirding

Chris Siddle distributed on bcintbird another useful note about correct eBirding, which is worth repeating here. He pointed out that the “Stationary” category must be used to cover a specific period of *sustained* watching. Those of us that glance out of the window on and off through the day, and then add up the bits of time, are eBirding incorrectly.

Full details, which include the use of the “Incidental” category for those glances, can be found at:

[help.ebird.org/customer/portal/articles/2241206?t=400913](http://help.ebird.org/customer/portal/articles/2241206?t=400913)

### Cats, Birds and Mice

UNBC has received pilot funding to start a study in Prince George to test the effectiveness of Birds-be-safe cat collars. These collars work on the premise that birds see a lot more shades of colour than do rodents (which are technically colour blind), and so produce a warning to birds without reducing the ability of cats to catch mice. The collars are far from offensive; in fact some owners put them on their cats because they are fun and decorative.

See [www.birdsbesafe.com](http://www.birdsbesafe.com) for details of the product.



# Bird Records Committee Competition

*George Chulow*

## Win a Membership to BCFO

The BCFO Bird Records Committee is looking for more reports of provincially rare birds. We know they're out there! To support this effort the BRC is announcing a new contest. It's very simple to enter; just follow the rules below:

- Each fully-completed Rare Bird Report Form submitted counts as one contest entry.
- Reports from any time period are desired, but must be of species on the Review List—see [bcfo.ca/review-list](http://bcfo.ca/review-list) – or be wild birds new to the province.
- Reports may not duplicate records already reviewed by the BRC (see website).

Three prizes of a one-year membership may be won. The contest is open to both non-members and current members of BCFO. *Note:* you do not need to be the original finder of a bird to submit a report on it.

The contest ends December 31, 2018, when a random draw will be made for the three memberships from all eligible entries.

Memberships won in the contest may be used to start a new one-year membership, extend an existing membership for one year, or be a renewal for one year.

An example of a fully completed Rare Bird Report can be found at [bcfo.ca/brc-contest-and-guide-to-taking-field-notes](http://bcfo.ca/brc-contest-and-guide-to-taking-field-notes).

Remember, pictures are great and strongly encouraged, but so too are written descriptions.

## On Taking Field Notes

Many birders dream of “hitting the jackpot”: stumbling onto a mega-rarity,

a bird so far out of range that nobody really expected one to show up—ever. The perils of migrating and navigating long distances through often dangerous weather conditions makes birds prone to appearing suddenly in unexpected places. It is this thrill of discovery that motivates many birders. Documenting the occurrence of a rare or unusual bird, however, is an acquired skill, something that may not come naturally, but rather is learned as one becomes a better and more skilled birder. On the other hand, taking detailed field notes might seem too much like “work,” squeezing the fun and joy out of our hobby. Here we provide a few thoughts on documenting a rare or unusual bird with the aim to keep this process in line with the rest of your birding—fun!

A digital existence, from birding apps and smartphones to social media and digital cameras, have revolutionized the documentation of rare birds. A large percentage of birders now carry some

sort of digital camera when they go birding, be it a DSLR or a smartphone. Many rare birds are now documented with a photograph – even ones hastily taken by holding a smartphone camera to one's binoculars. Moreover, smartphones in a pinch can be used to make reasonable field audio recordings, and voice memo apps can be used to dictate your notes without taking your eyes off the bird. But just because the technology exists, doesn't mean that birders are utilizing it to its full potential, and doesn't mean that “classic” field tools – that of notebook and paper – are any less relevant today.

Looking back 30 years at previous rare bird reports it's clear that much has changed. On one hand accompanying photos were almost as rare as the rarities they were documenting; on the other, written reports were detailed and at times exhaustive. Nowadays we have the reverse: almost all submitted documentation is supported with at least

### Is it Reportable?

Should a bird seen previously in BC, such as this Indigo Bunting, be reported to the BRC? If in doubt, check [bcfo.ca/review-list](http://bcfo.ca/review-list). The Bunting is indeed one of the 157 species included in the Review List.

This Indigo Bunting was spotted by Anne Hogan on her deck in Prince George on May 2, and subsequently photographed by husband Bob Steventon.



one photo, but the written documentation is generally weak to practically non-existent. Many assume that a photo is sufficient evidence. Photos, however, do not tell the full story that only a detailed written report can. Is this decline in the written documentation of rare birds due to time constraints? Procrastination? Not knowing what, how, or more importantly, why? We assume the answer to be an amalgam of all these reasons. This is hardly surprising. After all, it can sometimes feel like “all work and no play.”

Many decades ago, we came across James Fisher and Roger Tory Peterson’s “the note-taker field drill.” We have not seen it in any on-line resource. This is a pity because it encapsulates all one needs to take good field notes. It had a huge influence on how we take field notes and we apply these skills today.

It’s easy to forget what you need to write down when you’re in the adrenalin-charged moment of discovering a rare bird. Did the bird have wingbars? Was the tail notched or rounded? Drat! I forgot to look at the tail! Here then are a couple of mnemonics to help you remember what you need to scribble down in your notebook (or dictate into your smartphone): “WHICH IS IT?” and “DO IT!” Run the drill before you look at a field guide. The idea is to get as much detail as possible before the bird disappears. These simple mnemonics will help you get it all down:

### WHICH IS IT?

**Where and when?** Locality and date.

**Habitat:** freshwater marsh, deciduous woodland, tidal flats, backyard feeding station, etc.

**Impression:** What is the bird’s general appearance? Small-headed, big body? Long and skinny? Brightly coloured and gaudy or simply plain grey-brown all over? Just some general thoughts on what it looked like in a broad general sense. “It was all black with a yellow head” or “It was a streaky little brown job” for example.

**Comparison:** How big is it? Note this in relation to some well-known species, or better yet, compared to birds that are nearby for direct comparison.

**Habits:** What was the bird’s behaviour? How did it move, fly, walk, patter, dive, feed? Did it probe in the mud or pick from the surface? Was it probing in the bark or gleaning from the underside of leaves? Describe anything and everything it was doing, by itself or during its interactions (if any) with other species.

**Identification flashes:** These are field marks: distinctive patterns on head, wings, tail, body, flashes of colour or pattern that allow a bird to be identified.

**Sounds:** Describe as best you can everything you heard.

**Important details:** soft part details (shape and colour of the bill, eye colour, orbital ring, leg shape and colour).

**Tail and wings:** describe their shapes, length, colour and patterns (identification flashes [i.e. field marks]), are often found here.

This information will strengthen and support your identification. Additional details make for a more thorough and complete rare bird submission:

### DO IT!

**Distance:** how far were you from the bird?

**Optics:** list all optics you used (binoculars, spotting scope, camera, etc).

**Instant of observation:** The time of day and duration of observation. Here include lighting conditions (sunny, overcast and direction of light relative to the observer and to the bird). You can also quickly note the weather conditions, again, in a general sense (rain, sun, snow, etc).

**Team:** list all the observers who were with you, if relevant.

These mnemonics can form a mental template for getting as much as possible immediately into your field notebook while you’re still looking at the bird. Don’t rely on memory. The order in which you describe the bird doesn’t really matter so long as it’s logical to you. The preferred method for some is to start with the general impression, then work into the details, beginning with the head, then moving on to describe the upperparts, underparts,

wings and tail, then soft parts. The information that you obtain in the field while studying the bird—all of it—become the foundation for one’s Rare Bird Report submission. You include only what you saw and wrote down, not what you should have seen upon opening a field guide. Avoid the temptation to change something that you think you saw, or think you should have seen, only because you saw it mentioned in a book. The importance of describing the bird before looking at published references cannot be stressed enough. This is not the time when, having checked your trusty Sibley guide, you say to yourself: “Hmmm... yeah. Come to think of it, that bird I saw did have a notched tail.” Channelling biases such as these are all too easy to do, even when we’re not aware we’re doing it.

Practise the WHICH IS IT? and DO IT! note-taking drill on common birds so that you’ll be ready for when you find that Rustic Bunting. It’s extremely important to learn the basic topography of a bird. Learn where the various feather tracts are and how together they form patterns of colour that are important to clinch an identification. All field guides have an introductory section where one can learn a bird’s topography. Knowing this will greatly facilitate note taking and provide a logical structure to describing a rare bird. After even a little practice, you’ll be amazed at how quickly and accurately you can describe a bird. Forcing us to look more closely at birds improves our observational skills and adds an extra dimension of enjoyment to our birding.

For further information about rare birds in British Columbia and their reporting, head to [bcfo.ca](http://bcfo.ca) and follow the BRC drop-down tab.

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Bridget Spencer and Isaac Nelson for winning places in the Long Point Bird Observatory Doug Tarry Young Ornithologists Award Program. There are just six places on this program for youth across Canada. Other young birders in the BCFO Young Birder program have previously won places: Liron Gerstman, Joshua Brown, Cole Gaerber and Logan Lalonde.



# BCFO Two-day Trips

## Sunshine Coast September 15–16, 2018

### Leaders

Tony Greenfield & John Hodges.

### Registration

Adrian Leather, 250-249-5561, [q-birds@xplornet.com](mailto:q-birds@xplornet.com)

### Itinerary

*Saturday AM:* Roberts Creek Jetty, Wilson Creek Estuary, Mission Point. Bag Lunch.

*Saturday PM:* Porpoise Bay Provincial Park, Sechelt Marsh, The Shores. Tally-up at Saffron Restaurant, 5755 Cowrie St, Sechelt. 604-740-0660.

*Sunday AM:* Smugglers Cove, Sargeant Bay. Bag Lunch.

*Sunday PM:* Mahan Trail in Gibsons.

## How the Trips Work

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

- Day 1: all-day birding and then evening get together at a restaurant to recap the day and tally species.
- Day 2: morning birding, afternoon optional birding.

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

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

*Cost:* No charge for members; \$30 charge for non-members to cover BCFO membership.

For insurance reasons, all participants on BCFO field trips need to sign a waiver.

Note – The itinerary may change due to tides, weather, and recent sightings.

## Expected Species

The trip focus is on Fall migrants including peeps, Pectoral Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, American Pipit, Vaux's Swift, Parasitic Jaeger, Wood Duck, and many more.

## Accommodation

For overall convenience, the guides suggest:

- Royal Reach Motel, 5758 Wharf Rd, Sechelt. 604-885-7844.

Alternative accommodation:

- The Driftwood Inn, 5454 Trail Ave, Sechelt. 604-885-5811.
- Bayside Campground and RV Park, 6040 Sechelt Inlet Rd. 604-885-7444.



## Photos

*Above:* One of the Spotted Owls at the Langley Northern Spotted Owl Breeding project. (John Gordon Photo) You can see live views of a growing chick through the project's webcam at:

[fwcp.ca/owlwebcam](http://fwcp.ca/owlwebcam).

*Left:* This Short-tailed Albatross was photographed by Melissa Hafting at Clayquot Canyon on March 24, 2018. Melissa with another dozen people had chartered a boat from Ocean Outfitters of Tofino with the intention of finding Parakeet Auklets. Finding three Short-tails instead, along with 400 Black-footed Albatrosses, was more than adequate compensation.





# IO Congress

*George Clulow*

The International Ornithological Congress is considered the most prestigious meeting of bird scientists in the world. The upcoming meeting in Vancouver this August is going to be a landmark, once-in-a-lifetime event, offering an alignment of science and the general public unique in the 134-year history of the Congress.

Not only will an expected ~2,000 delegates mix with other pre-eminent ornithologists from around the world to share cutting-edge international science, but also this august group will join tens of thousands of the public in the Vancouver International Bird Festival, which will run concurrently with the Congress. The events will jointly explore and celebrate the connections of “all our lives with those of the world’s birds.”

BCFO has been involved from the very early planning days supporting the Congress with an early cash donation, and thereby becoming one of only seven Congress Associates. Beyond cash, we were among the first to organize for the Congress a range of tours for the delegates.

We have organized, provided leaders for, and have done the important groundwork for the following birding-focussed tours:

- Vancouver Island / West Coast Pelagic Birding Tour
- Okanagan with Dick Cannings (MP) partnering with Avocet Tours
- Fraser River Delta, Boundary Bay: Shorebirds Focus
- North Shore Mountains birding

- BC Cascades birding tours

To check out the full offering of tours go to [www.iocongress2018.com/tours](http://www.iocongress2018.com/tours).

In addition, some of our Young Birder Award winners will be featured in Festival events.

The Congress meets quadrennially, like the Olympics, and in the ornithological world is an equivalent in status and importance. The 27th Congress will be the first time it has convened on the West Coast of the Americas – a once-in-a-lifetime event indeed.

“Birds as a Gateway to Nature” is the guiding theme of the first Vancouver Bird Festival ([www.vanbirdfest.com](http://www.vanbirdfest.com)) which will run concurrently with the Congress. Festival events at the Vancouver Convention Centre and around the city will showcase of the best of avian science, art, film, stories, music, innovations, conservation, food, travel, photography and optical equipment, to name a few.

Programming for the Festival features renowned speakers such as Margaret Atwood, Purnima Barman, Jennifer Ackerman and the “Birds for Peace” team. Daily signature events include Aboriginal and First Nations performances, Artists for Conservation’s deafeningly dramatic “Silent Skies” mural, the launch of a new series of Birds of Canada stamps, a magnificent opening parade with over 100 youth in bird costumes on stilts, the Bird Expo, bird art, and photographic exhibitions and competitions.

What does all this mean for BCFO members? Well, beyond the prestige of being an important part of the Congress, we will have available, for members in good standing, a total of 100 complimentary, one-day tickets to the Congress. Each ticket would cost \$200 if purchased. Also, we have a very, very limited number of full Congress passes available. These are likely of interest

only to professional ornithologists. For a good flavour of the science of the Congress, most of us will find a one-day pass sufficient.

If you are interested in obtaining a one-day ticket, or tickets, please contact George Clulow. Contact information is found in the Members area of the BCFO website.

One-day tickets will be allocated to members requesting them at 20 per day for each of Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of the Congress. One-day passes will not grant access to Congress Registration Block, nor the Canada Evening.

The full conference schedule with details of presentations will be available on the Congress website in the next few weeks. Please hold your requests until you are able to choose the day you wish to attend. When making a request for a ticket, please specify the exact date you wish to attend. Tickets for multiple days are possible, if space is available on a particular day. July 15 is the cut-off date for requests for these complimentary tickets.

Finally, BCFO will have a complimentary booth in the Expo area of the Convention Centre. We need a member to volunteer to person this booth for a period of time for each day of the Congress. Again, please contact George Clulow if you are interested.

All the above is to say that you might want to plan a Vancouver visit this August, and pick up on the excitement of the Congress and the Festival. The Vancouver International Bird Fair will, as outlined above, have a huge range of events. Most of them will be free.

*Note:* At time of going to press, the VIBF website is still under construction. You can check it out at:

[www.vanbirdfest.com](http://www.vanbirdfest.com)



# Upcoming Meetings & Events

*Compiled by Wayne C. Weber*

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

For most meetings, festivals and other events, the website is the main source of information, and registration can often be accomplished online as well. Wherever information can be obtained through a phone number or 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.

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

June 2 – OKANAGAN MOUNTAIN PARK BIRD BLITZ. This annual survey of the birds of Okanagan Mountain Provincial Park near Kelowna has been held every year since 1993, except for two years after the huge 2003 wildfire. For information or to participate, contact the organizer, Les Gyug, at [les\\_gyug@shaw.ca](mailto:les_gyug@shaw.ca), or phone him at 250-769-5907.

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

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

June 7-9 – ASSOCIATION OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS annual meeting, jointly with Wilson Ornithological Society, at Chattanooga, Tennessee. For information, check the AFO website at [afonet.org/wp\\_english/meetings](http://afonet.org/wp_english/meetings).

June 8-10 – BIENNIAL MOUNT ROBSON BIRD BLITZ. For information, contact Gail Ross at [gailross1@telus.net](mailto:gailross1@telus.net), or Nancy Krueger at 250-563-7896.

June 15-17 – MANNING PARK BIRD BLITZ, Manning Provincial Park, BC (based at Loneduck Campground on Lightning Lake). For information and to register, check the website at [hopemountain.org/programs/manning-park-bird-blitz-june-15-17-2018](http://hopemountain.org/programs/manning-park-bird-blitz-june-15-17-2018). Inquiries may be made by email to La Vern at [lklassen@hopemountain.org](mailto:lklassen@hopemountain.org) or by phone at 604-869-1274.

June 23 – First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the summer from Westport, WA. Westport Seabirds will be operating about 22 trips in 2018 from February through October. For the trip schedule and other information, please check the website at [westportseabirds.com](http://westportseabirds.com).

Aug. 19-20 – ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WATERBIRD SOCIETY, Vancouver Convention Centre, Vancouver, BC (in conjunction with the IOC). For details, check the society website at [waterbirds.org/annual-meeting](http://waterbirds.org/annual-meeting).

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

Sept. 14-16 – PUGET SOUND BIRD FESTIVAL, Edmonds, WA. For information and to register (starting August 1) check the festival website at [www.pugetsoundbirdfest.org](http://www.pugetsoundbirdfest.org), or contact Jennifer Leach at the City of Edmonds Parks Dept. (phone 425-771-0227), or email her at [jennifer.leach@edmondswa.gov](mailto:jennifer.leach@edmondswa.gov).

Sept. 16 – PELAGIC BIRDING TRIP from Ucluelet, BC on the MV Frances Barkley, organized by Nature Alberta. Tickets may be purchased at [www.eventbrite.ca/e/nature-alberta-pelagic-trip-tickets-41032135221](http://www.eventbrite.ca/e/nature-alberta-pelagic-trip-tickets-41032135221). For additional info, questions, comments or concerns, please contact the pelagic trip coordinator, James Fox at [NApelagic@yahoo.com](mailto:NApelagic@yahoo.com).

Sept. 20-23 – FALL GENERAL MEETING, BC NATURE, Kelowna, BC, hosted by the Central Okanagan Naturalists. Full details should be in the summer issue of *BC Nature* magazine, check the BC Nature website later at [www.bcnature.ca](http://www.bcnature.ca), or contact the office at [manager@bcnature.ca](mailto:manager@bcnature.ca).

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

Sept. 28-30 – ANNUAL MEETING OF OREGON BIRDING ASSOCIATION, Garibaldi, OR (near Tillamook). For details and to register, check the Oregon Birding Association website ([www.orbirds.org](http://www.orbirds.org)) at a later date.

Oct. 7-11 – 25th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY, Cleveland, Ohio. For information, check the TWS conference page at [wildlife.org/2018-conference](http://wildlife.org/2018-conference).

Nov. 17-18 – 23rd FRASER VALLEY BALD EAGLE FESTIVAL, Harrison Mills, BC. For information, check the festival website at [fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca](http://fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca), send an email to [info@fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca](mailto:info@fraservalleybaldeaglefestival.ca), phone 604-826-7361, or write the Mission Chamber of Commerce, 34033 Lougheed Highway, Mission, BC V2V 5X8.

Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 (2019) – CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS. For information on dates of counts and contact information for count organizers, check the BCFO website in November and December, or check the December issue of *BC Birding*.



# Young Birder Program

## YB Awards

*George Clulow*

We are delighted to present below the BCFO Young Birder Award recipients for 2018.

All these young birders have:

- demonstrated exceptional observational and birding skills well beyond the “novice” level;
- shown substantive engagement in the activities of the birding community through their accomplishments, participation, and contributions;
- been nominated and sponsored by a BCFO member, and approved by the Executive Committee.

The Awards Program, now in its fifth year and totalling 27 awardees, continues to grow as we find many young, keen, committed birders from around BC. Each recipient receives a free membership to BCFO until age 18, a memorial plaque, and a stylish BCFO ball cap.

In alphabetical order, the BCFO Young Birder Award recipients for 2018 are as follows:

### **Daniel Beeke, age 16, Agassiz**

*Nominated by Melissa Hafting*

Daniel first distinguished himself when he managed to see all three species of



Ptarmigan – Rock, Willow, and White-tailed – during a family vacation in Northern BC. Daniel has gone birding in several locations, including China, where he got fifty lifers in one day with his uncle Tom. His favourite places to bird are Tuytens Road and Cheam Wetlands Regional Park in Agassiz.

He has volunteered at the Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival in Harrison Mills, and at Cheam Wetlands where he has helped clean the park after an ice storm and helped in building the south entrance to the park. Every year he participates in the Chilliwack and the Abbotsford Christmas Bird Counts. His uncles Jim and Dave Beeke mentor him and help him with bird identification questions. He has been birding for six years and participates in the Fraser Valley Birding forum and enjoys posting photos to his Flickr account. He uses eBird every time he birds, and is passionate about citizen science. His favourite type of birding is to scan a large flock of birds to find which species is different. He loves that challenge. His entire family are birders and have helped to inspire him to be the birder he is today.

See flickr.com/  
photos/139279299@N04

### **Zachary Fedder, age 17, Vancouver**

*Nominated by Jared Hobbs*

*Zac says about himself:*



I recently gave a lecture to a grade seven class to introduce them to birding, and I organized a one-hour activity about birds with them. I am also returning to Costa Rica this summer for six weeks to do some research, hopefully on birds. As an active member of the global birding community, I have also been birding around the world (Costa Rica, Portugal, France, Spain, Israel, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Canada, the US, etc) and have participated in birding tours in most of these places. As well, I have participated in Christmas Bird Counts, and in eBird's Global Big Day. I have emailed sightings to Melissa Hafting for the BC Rare Bird Alert. I have introduced birding to my family (close and extended), and to friends. All these things advance the birding community as I contribute to the global knowledge of birds and help spread this knowledge to others. By making connections and participating in birding around the world, I am also bringing the birding community closer together.

See

[jerichobirdingtours.wordpress.com](http://jerichobirdingtours.wordpress.com)

### **Cedar Forest, age 13, Tofino**

*Nominated by Melissa Hafting*

Cedar first demonstrated her enthusiasm and knowledge of birds on the September 2017 Ucluelet Pelagic trip when she was quick enough to spot the Manx Shearwater that hardly any adults were able to get on. She is a very intelligent, sharp birder with an engaging and hu-



morous personality. Very good at species identification, she loves to bird with her best friend, Toby Theriault (2017 Young Birder Award winner). However, she is also a fantastic solo birder, having found a Tropical Kingbird this year in her hometown of Tofino, and has a BC list that many adults could only dream of. She has done several pelagic trips with her friend Adrian Dorst and has seen many Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses. Living in Tofino, a great migrant trap, she has spotted many of the rarities that frequently show up there. Cedar also loves to bird with her friend and mentor Ian Cruickshank, who has taught her a lot about birds. Cedar went on a trip to Manning Provincial Park with the Delta Naturalists in August 2017. President Tom Bears commented that she was so good she became the leader for the group of ten adult birders on the tour. She spotted all the birds and plants, and explained them well to everyone. Truly impressive at 13 years old. She is another young birder in the province who will make us proud for many years to come.

**Kalin Ocana, age 15, Kelowna**  
*Nominated by Melissa Hafting*



Kalin is a generous and helpful young birder. The nominator first met him while twitching a Little Gull in Penticton. As soon as she got to the lake to open up her scope, Kalin came running to show her where the bird was. He had found an American Dipper there as well. As they looked at the Little Gull together, the knowledge he showed

about the species and about all the birds present on Okanagan Lake was impressive. He knew the migration routes and nesting behaviours and other fun facts about the Little Gull. He loves to bird the ABA area and recently went to Baffin Island and Florida.

Kalin birds almost daily near his home in Kelowna and he is very passionate about bird conservation. Under every photo he posts to Instagram, he educates the reader about the bird's plight and issues the species is facing. He also provides little-known informative facts. He definitely is a future conservation leader and nature steward for the Okanagan and Province of BC.

See [www.instagram.com/birdz.okanagan](http://www.instagram.com/birdz.okanagan)

**Jason Roos, 14, Chilliwack**  
*Nominated by Melissa Hafting*

Jason, whose favourite type of birding is owling, has a vast knowledge of birds. His volunteer work includes the Chilliwack Christmas Bird Count in which he has participated for 5 years. He has also volunteered with the Eagle Festival in Harrison Mills. Jason uses eBird every time he goes birding, and is



passionate about citizen science. He loves to bird with his cousin Daniel (also nominated in 2018). His uncle, Dave Beeke, is his birding mentor, and has taught him a lot about birds and identification. His whole family loves to bird and is very supportive of his hobby. Jason will be a valuable contributor in the future to BC's birding community.

**Marnix Vandereyk, age 16, Langley**  
*Nominated by Melissa Hafting*

Marnix loves to count birds and particularly loves to come on hiking field trips in the mountains. He volunteers to do trail clearing with the Langley Field Naturalists. A polite, helpful and respectful birder, Marnix knows a lot not only about birds and their identification but is also proficient in the identification and habits of amphibians and mammals. He is usually the first one to spot a Pika or Hoary Marmot on hikes planned to spot ptarmigan. Marnix enjoys working on the farm at home where he raises calves, sheep and rabbits. He has found many uncommon birds on his property such as Townsend's Solitaires, House Wrens and White-winged Crossbills. As a well-rounded nature enthusiast, Marnix will no doubt continue to add to the understanding of BC's wildlife and birdlife.





## YB Overnight Trip To Tofino

May 11–12, 2018

We started eagerly on Friday at the Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal en route to Tofino via Nanaimo for our pelagic. At the compensation lagoon in Tsawwassen, we saw one late female Long-tailed Duck, 1 Black Scoter and Greater White-fronted Goose, Semipalmated Sandpiper, a Whimbrel, Brant, Harlequins and many Black Oystercatchers. We got in to the Whalers on the Point Guesthouse and met the others. We were all excited for the pelagic the next morning.

Well...our pelagic got cancelled at 6:15 am on Saturday; the same day we were supposed to be going out at 7 am. The disappointment by all was an understatement. On top of that, there was heavy fog in town, making shorebirding impossible. My friend Mark Wynja had done some pre-scouting for us and when we tried to check it out ourselves an hour later, it was still socked in. We did see an Osprey and Blue-winged Teal, a few Whimbrel and Western Sandpipers through the heavy fog but that was it; so I decided to try for a plan B.

We had eleven kids from as far away as Kelowna here and I was trying to keep morale high. I called the Whale Centre and we got on a birdwatching tour to Cleland. There were four-metre swells at the continental shelf so we couldn't go out to pelagic waters. Another year when we couldn't get a Black-footed Albatross (on our last pelagic somehow we got a Manx Shearwater but not a single Albatross) but we wanted to make lemonade out of lemons and that we did. John Forde was a great captain and he took us out to Cleland Island.

At Cleland Island the water was very rough and we could see why the pelagic was cancelled. The green waves and rocks reminded us of Hawaii. We found many marine mammals: Sea Otters, huge Steller Sea Lions (especially the bulls), Californian Sea Lions and Harbour Seals and many birds. We saw hundreds of Pigeon Guillemots and many Common Murres that were sitting on the rocks like penguins. We also saw many Rhinoceros Auklets, Glaucous-winged, Olympic, Mew and Herring Gulls,

Harlequin Ducks, Bald Eagles and at least 40 Black Oystercatchers vocalizing. Black Turnstones, 17 Red-necked Phalaropes and Marbled Murrelets were also present.

The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. Toby and Cedar were in the front, happy as ever spotting all the birds for us. Toby and Cedar's attitudes are so uplifting they made any kids who were feeling down happy as ever. You just can't be sad around these two.

As we drove out we saw Pacific, Red-throated and Common Loons and Red-necked Grebes in breeding plumage. The Pacific Loons truly are stunning. We saw many Brandt's and Double-crested and Pelagic Cormorants, Brant Geese, Surf and White-winged Scoters and a Western Sandpiper as well.

The highlights were two Ruddy Turnstones spotted by Bridget Spencer and two Wandering Tattlers spotted by



Bridget Spencer and Cole Gaerber plus six Tufted Puffins Bridget and I spotted together. The Tufted Puffins were a lifer for eight of the youth.

After thanking Captain John for a great trip, we said goodbye to Toby and Cedar and headed for the ferry. On the way back to the ferry we stopped at Wick Beach to look for the reported

Long-billed Curlew. We could not find it but we had many Townsend's Warblers and over 20 Semipalmated Plovers. We also saw Sanderling, Dunlin, Least and Western Sandpipers. The youth were really hoping to see a wolf in Tofino but the tides weren't right (as they prefer to feed at low tide with the bears) and they are an elusive animal, but we couldn't complain after our great day. A big thank you to Mary Forest for helping us out this day in Tofino.

On the ferry home, we had at least 200 Common Terns and a Parasitic Jaeger as highlights. It was a nice way to end our unexpected but great trip. The youth learned a valuable lesson, that there is always something good to come out of disappointment.

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### Future YB 2018 Events:

- June 30: Manning Park
- July 14: Princeton Trip (August and Swan Lakes)
- August 4: Pemberton Ptarmigan Hike–Semaphore Lakes/Locomotive Mtn
- August 22: Bowen Island – Bird By Kayak
- Sept 8: Hike – Mt Cheam
- Sept 22: Sooke Hawk Watch – Final trip of the year

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*Above: Wandering Tattler by Cole Gaerber*

*Below: Tufted Puffin by Melissa Hafting.*



# Quetzals & Coffee

## Birding in Costa Rica

*Adam Dhalla (BCFO Young Birder)*

With over 900 recorded species in an area five percent the size of BC, my dad and I were hyped to go birding in Costa Rica for nine days this past Christmas. That hype was somewhat lost during our usual “air-pains” – three long economy flights, coupled with our suitcases temporarily going missing – again! (This makes a hat trick – our bags were also delayed on trips to Hawaii and Arizona.) Still, not having a tripod wasn’t going to stop us from getting out in the sun quickly to bird at Parque de Metropolitano de Sabana. Despite the crowds of picnicking “ticos” (slang for Costa Ricans), the place didn’t disappoint, delivering 15 lifers, including excellent views of Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Great Kiskadee, and Rufous-collared Sparrow.

Day two was highly anticipated – we were headed for “birding Mecca” Rancho Naturalista lodge. We woke up at 4 am, had a free hotel cookie and water and were on our way. As we walked to our rented SUV, we spotted Inca Doves and Blue-and-white Swallows nesting in a nearby building. After my dad got used to the lack of driving rules, poor signage and unexpected highway tolls (luckily, we had Costa Rican coins), we got to a town close to a last-minute stop, Ujarras ruins. We got bogged down with GPS issues – this supposedly famous site did not show up on the screen. My dad used his extremely poor Spanish to ask locals, and eventually a kind old man gave us enough polite hand gestures to get us there, and we even spotted some Roadside Hawks and Black Vultures on the way. The old church was beautiful and the Black Phoebes that playfully danced along its dilapidated stone walls added to its charm. Other lifers in the trees there included Social Flycatcher and Crimson-fronted Parakeet.

Our next stop was C.A.T.I.E, a university biology research centre. The parking-lot trees alone featured a smor-

gasbord of new species, including Montezuma Oropendola, Golden-hooded Tanager, Clay-coloured Thrush, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, and Tropical Gnatcatcher. We walked past streams of leafcutter ants and found a Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, as well as a fleeting glimpse of a Grey-headed Chachalaca. A staffer there pointed us to the lake. We drove past scores of Ruddy-ground Doves and a Red-billed Pigeon. Our stroll around the wetlands was awesome – loads of adult and baby Northern Jacanas, Purple Gallinules, and, hidden from obvious view in deep foliage, two Boat-billed Herons, one of our target “golden birds!”

The steep and bumpy dirt road up to Rancho was a birder’s paradise, with Bay-Headed, Passerini’s and Palm Tanagers flying back and forth. We even spotted Black-cowled Oriole and Yellow-bellied Elaenia. After nearly temporarily getting stuck in a ditch, we were blown away when our host showed us our room – near the door, a large hummingbird feeder was buzzing with Crowned Woodnymphs, Green-Breasted Mangos, and White-Necked Jacobins. Our final birds before a supper of “pinto gallo” (rice & beans) and some much-needed sleep were an aggressive Violet Sabrewing harassing the smaller hummers and a single Chesnut-headed Oropendola sharing rice and bananas with some Montezumas.

Rain and fog, common in the cloud forests, even in “dry season,” delayed our tour with local guide Harry Barnard the next morning. We passed the time eating fried plantains and watching Tropical Parula, Summer Tanager, Colared Aracari, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Olive-backed Euphonia and a White-

nosed Coatis (they look like raccoons) in the garden. My dad spotted another of our “golden birds” – the Snowcap – feeding in some nearby Verbena bushes. I quietly ran there – what a special hummer! Finally, the sky cleared, and we checked out the trails and the backyard of a nearby cottage.

Lifers were all over, including Hook-billed Kite, Green-crowned Brilliant, Emerald Tanager, Blackburnian Warbler, and yet another golden bird – Green Thorntail! Harry surprised us by gently poking a stick in a hole to draw out an Orange-kneed Tarantula. We even got to see a Crowned Woodnymph bathing near a waterfall. We wrapped up that area by driving around to local streams where Harry said we might find a Sunbittern – after two fails (but we did spot a Fasciated Tiger-Heron), we were gifted with the sight of this gorgeous bird hopping from rock to rock in the water near a soccer field. The day ended at Hotel Bougainvillea back in San Jose after a long drive. But we pushed ourselves to walk in their expansive garden in the dark and were rewarded with our first sighting of Lesson’s Motmot.

After videoing a hilarious Yellow-headed Caracara trying to attack its reflection on a roof duct, we drove south-east to Tarcoles River for Jose’s Crocodile Tour. We stopped at a bridge overlooking the river and joined the dozens of people gawking at the crocs below – spooky! The dirt road to Jose’s provided excellent birding – Groove-billed Ani, Rufous-naped Wren, and Hoffman’s Woodpecker. The tour was even better. In addition to watching Jose’s fearless assistant Jimmy almost get killed feeding raw chicken to giant

American (freshwater) Crocodiles (don’t try this at home, folks), we saw Crested Caracara, Little Blue Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Mangrove Swallow, Neotropical Cormorant, Anhinga, Tricolored Heron, and Bare-



*“... No self-respecting birder goes to Costa Rica and doesn’t try to see a Resplendent Quetzal....” Adam Dhalla photo.*



throated Tiger Heron. We were even treated to a Basilisk Lizard doing his “walk on water” routine. But the day wasn't over yet! While eating burritos at a local “restaurant,” three Scarlet Macaws flew in and ate figs in a nearby tree – talk about an excellent dessert! And after seeing Gartered Trogon, Willet, Common Tody Flycatcher, Wilson's and Collared Plover in the area, we ended our birding with an amazing show of locals on a beach feeding fish scraps to flocks of Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds, which swarmed, fought, and sometimes caught the food in mid-air.

Coffee addicts will want to emulate our first stop on day five – Finca Rosa Blanca's shade-grown coffee plantation, just north of the capital. Our guide Ulises showed us the amazing benefits of this method (no pesticides, less erosion, and more birds), and we found Squirrel Cuckoo, Mountain Elaenia, White-tipped Dove, and Golden-browed Chlorophonia. No self-respecting birder goes to Costa Rica and doesn't try to see a Resplendent Quetzal. Our research told us Hotel Savegre, in the highlands of the southeast, offered us the best chance of finding it, so we headed there next.

After a challenging drive on the long and winding road, we were rewarded by a spectacular vista – a cache of bungalows nestled on a mountain-side. We joined the birders there in photographing Silver-throated, Flame-colored and Sooty-capped Tanager, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Acorn Woodpecker, Yellow-thighed Finch, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Collared Redstart, Talamanca & Volcano Hummingbird, and many others. But our real hunt started early the next day with Melvin, our guide. We loaded in the back of his truck and headed up the road. But no sign of a Quetzal, “just” some giant Black Guans in a field.

Then Melvin got a call on his walkie-talkie (cellphones don't work well in the mountains) – another guide had spotted one nearby. We soon found a crowd of birders blocking the road, as they searched desperately for it. After some poor long-distance looks, a gorgeous male swooped in – finally, the golden bird of the trip! I got some pretty good pics and video. I also caught a fleeting glimpse of a Northern Emerald Toucanet. No photo, but at least I could add another special lifer to my list.

After that, we headed back to Savegre for some trail hiking. We found tons of species, such as Ornate Hawk-eagle, Barred Becard, Lineated Foliage Gleaner, Ochraceous Wren, and Buffy Tuftedcheeks. As we wrapped up the walk we came upon a family of Black-Handed Spider Monkeys, swinging through the forest. Our day ended with chasing a Torrent Tyrannulet down a river, a meal at Miriam's with a Large-footed Finch right outside and a scary drive back to San Jose, due to a mudslide that had demolished one side of the road!

One can't go to Costa Rica without visiting a volcano, so Arenal was our next excursion. We drove northwest, past a Lineated Woodpecker, some Keel-billed Toucans and even a Yellow-throated Toucan and arrived just in time to hop on a tour. It started with a Margay, a small wild cat, just outside Arenal Observatory Lodge's kitchen. We climbed over dried lava to a viewing spot on the volcano, spotting Red-fore Amazon, White-throated Magpie Jay, Great Curassow, Boat-billed Flycatcher, and other new species along the way. During the walk back down in the dark, we were amazed to find fireflies and nocturnal amphibians, such as Cane T, Leopard Frog, and the striking Red-eyed Tree Frog.

The next morning, we toured the area with Nestor, a local guide. Species were somewhat reclusive, due to the cool weather, but we still spotted many lifers, such as White-throated Ant Tanager, Rufous Mourner, Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Crested Guan. We ended the tour by climbing a very tall and shaky lookout tower, where we spotted White-crowned and Olive-throated Parakeets. As we jumped in our vehicle to leave, a construction worker pointed out an Eyelash Viper on a tree – small and deadly, but luckily, not aggressive, at least not today.



*“...It started with a Margay, a small wild cat, just outside Arenal Observatory Lodge's kitchen....”*

*Adam Dhalla photo.*

We drove to nearby La Fortuna for a sloth tour. We were lucky to spot several of the two- and three-toed varieties. A tiny, dazzling Strawberry Poison Dart Frog was a delight. But we're birders, so the best part of the tour was a photo session at some feeders: Russet-naped Wood Rail, White-breasted Crane, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Buff-throated Saltator, and many others feasted on bananas. Then, as we walked to our SUV, we spotted another gorgeous lifer: Rufous-tailed Jacamar.

I was sad to have reached the last day of our vacation. But we had one last adventure in store – La Paz Waterfall Gardens, just north of San Jose. Although it was raining hard, there were a few special moments. On the way in, I got a great shot of a Prong-billed Barbet and my dad was thrilled to see a Black-and-White Warbler. We had come for the opportunity to hand-feed hummers, using mini nectar feeders, shaped like flowers. We saw and/or fed Coppery-headed Emerald, Black-bellied Hummingbird, and White-bellied Mountain Gem. Finally, the time came for the depressing drive to the airport. In the end, I found 203 lifers on the trip, photographing most of them. If you haven't been to this very “birdy” country, add it to your bucket list immediately. And be sure to visit my website ([adamdhalla.com](http://adamdhalla.com)) for more photos from this trip.

## Chasing Endemics in New Caledonia

Val George

Most birders have targets for the lists they keep. This especially applies to their global life lists. One thousand species is the obvious first really significant target for new listers. Two thousand would probably be the next, and reaching it requires some serious travel and at least some mild dedication to the task.

When I reached the two thousand mark some years ago, I realized that a serious life-style decision had to be made. Was I going to spend the rest of my life – not to mention most of my RRSP savings – attempting to get up into the listers' stratosphere of four or five thousand species, or was I going to live my life less frenetically and set some much less demanding target or targets? I decided on the latter.

So what to target? I could look for

exotic birds, or rare ones, or representatives of all the families of birds in the world. I figured that chasing endemics was a worthwhile goal. There's something very satisfying in finding a bird that can't be seen in any other part of the world. If it's a rare or exotic bird, which it might well be if it's endemic to a country or region, that adds to the pleasure of experiencing it. And, of course, by definition, it enhances your life list.

My life list of endemics is already looking quite respectable: Mikado Pheasant, an exotic Taiwan endemic – tick; the flightless Auckland Island Teal (now that has to be an endemic, doesn't it, because it can't get to anywhere else?) – tick; Green Rosella, a Tasmanian parrot – tick, etc.

Which brings me to a recent endemic-chasing adventure in New Caledonia.

Last year, a relative, an ex-Brit like me who is now a wildlife biologist in Australia, asked me if I'd like to do some birding with him in New Caledonia. This South Pacific Island has 26 endemic birds. I jumped at the opportunity.

New Caledonia is a French territory situated about 1,200 km off the east coast of Australia. It's tropical and consists of a number of islands, one large and some much smaller ones. The main island, where we spent all our time, is about the size and shape of Vancouver Island with a population about a third of Vancouver Island's. The habitats range from ocean and coastal savannah lowlands (including agricultural land) to wet evergreen forests that ascend to the tops of the mountains. There are several fairly large areas that have been set aside as protected national parks. These parks afford the best opportunities for finding the endemic birds.

The island is not particularly rich in bird species. Its checklist has about 200 species on it. The majority are birds found in the eastern regions of Australia, so since both of us had done considerable birding in Australia, we'd seen most of them before. It was the endemics that mostly interested us.

The top target endemic for birders visiting New Caledonia is the Kagu, a light grey bird about the size of a small

*Kagu, the national bird of New Caledonia. Photo by Val George.*





chicken. It spends most of its time grubbing around for invertebrates on the forest floor. It's a very weak flyer because its wing muscles aren't strong, so it stays on the ground most of time.

Chasing the Kagu had some special attractions for us, other than that it's an endemic. It belongs to a monotypic family (Rhynochetidae), so it would add to my list of bird families; and it's endangered with only a few hundred surviving. It's also the national bird of New Caledonia.

We had a week in the country, but by the fourth day we hadn't managed to find a Kagu, despite spending some considerable time in a couple of places where they were supposed to be. We didn't have the advantage of a local guide because we'd discovered when arranging our trip that there were only two nature guides who specialized in birds and both were unavailable for the period we were there. However, one of them did give us the name of a park manager for one of the state parks that offered the best chance of a Kagu. So one morning we managed to catch up with this very helpful gentleman who told us exactly where to go to find the bird. Short story: we saw four – tick.

Now to go back to the beginning. We'd rented a place for the week on the outskirts of Noumea, the country's capital, a city of about 100,000 people. There was some forested property next to our accommodation. Our first morning whilst on our deck eating breakfast, we managed to get three of the island's endemics feeding in the trees and shrubs adjacent to where we were sitting: a white-eye, the Green-backed White-eye; a starling, the Striated Starling; and a honeyeater, the Grey-eared Honeyeater. Needless to say, we were delighted with our excellent start. "Looks like finding the endemics isn't going to be too difficult," I said to my companion.

Not so. Although most of the endemics are described in the field guides as being common or fairly common, they inhabit dense forest where they aren't easy to see. Not having a guide and being unfamiliar with the vocalizations of the birds, we had to rely mostly on sight to identify them. By the middle of the week, we'd ticked off less than half of them. Then, as mentioned earlier, we got some tips from the helpful parks manager who told us where the best places were for each of the species



we were looking for.

One species we *had* to see was the famous New Caledonian Crow. Documentaries and articles in the popular press have described this corvid's amazing (for a bird) ability to not only use tools but to sometimes fashion tools to dig out grubs and other food. After the first few days on the island we were wondering whether we were going to see one. We'd heard their distinctive call in the forest three or four times, but I don't count "heard-only" birds for my lists, so that wasn't very satisfactory. However, with the help of the aforementioned gentleman we did finally get to see a couple.

Gradually, over our remaining days and in amongst seeing Australian species familiar to us, we picked up most

of the other endemics. These ranged from the small, very colourful (red and black) New Caledonia Myzomela to the massive Goliath Imperial Pigeon, which is almost twice the size of our Rock Pigeons.

By the end of our week, we'd seen 23 of the 26 endemics. We did hear one of the three we missed, the well-named, due to its secretive behaviour, New Caledonian Thicketbird but, as previously mentioned, I don't count heard-only birds. I judged our total to be a very satisfactory addition to my life list of endemic birds, especially since we didn't have a guide to help us.

*Above: Cloven-feathered Dove, a New Caledonian endemic.  
Photo by Val George.*

## Birding Yucatan & North Chiapas

**February 8 – 22, 2018**

Nine BC birders roamed Yucatan, North Chiapas and beyond, finding with the assistance of guide Eric Antonio Martinez a sensational array of Mexican birds. The captions to these photographs are extracts from the trip report on the Q-Birds blog by organizer Adrian Leather. The other birders on the trip were John Hodges, Mark Yunker, John Gordon, Jan Erasmus, Ed Jordan, Val George, and Jerry and Lynne McFetridge.

*Right:* “We made our obligatory stop at Oxxo, en route to the delightful village of El Cedral, a beautiful spot in the interior of the island. El Cedral was like a celebration of birding. Two

**Couch’s Kingbirds** were a much-awaited lifer for everyone.”



*Left:* “At Calakmul ...a Squirrel Cuckoo, auditioning as a cuddly toy, put on quite a show. Three **Keel-billed Toucan** flew around. Seven Purple Martin zipped over, and a Rose-throated Becard was added. A Yucatan Flycatcher gave decent views, a Green-backed Sparrow flitted through some branches, and a Black-cheeked Woodpecker landed on a snag, The parking-lot birding certainly wasn't too shabby!”

*...Continued*

*Right:* “Of the three endemics on Cozumel, the Cozumel Thrasher (critically threatened) may already be extirpated due to a tropical storm that wiped out most of its habitat. The two remaining are Cozumel Emerald and **Cozumel Vireo.**”

Another extract to whet the appetite for the full report:

“Xocen offered terrific birding. We were enthralled to see and hear a Pheasant Cuckoo.... A Thicket Tinamou delivered its haunting notes, and an excitable Singing Quail joined in. We added Common Pauraque, Yucatan Nightjar, Yucatan Poorwill, and a Vermiculated Screech-Owl, which was determined to be the vocal star of the night show. Wow! This was breathless stuff, like walking through my dreams.”







*Above left:* “An evening owling session on Sendero Garganta, a little downriver from Yaxchilan, provided superb looks at a **Vermiculated Screech-Owl**, and we also heard a Black-and-White Owl.”

*Above right:* “Eric was determined to get decent looks at **Lovely Cotinga** so we returned to Yaxchilan. The birds were actively feeding, and moving around.”

*Below:* “We ventured to the famous La Reserva de La Biosfera Rio Lagartos on the Northern coast of Yucatan.... A large pond provided three American Flamingo, six Little Blue Heron, four Tricoloured Heron, and four Roseate Spoonbills, but the major score was four **Russet-naped Wood-Rail**, including one which provided really close looks.”  
....continued





*Right:* “We continued along Route 186. Eric started to scan some fields, part of the Usumacinta Marshes. We were in Campeche, but very close to the Tabasco border. A shout went up, “**Jabiru!**” then everything went mad! Ramon saw a spot where he could pull in off the road. As we completed our turn, a guy was walking toward us, with a horse. This was José, the ranch manager, who welcomed us to look around. Of course, we were already doing that! José thought it a good idea to clap his hands to flush birds. As he clapped, thousands of Blue-winged Teal flushed. 40 Black-bellied Whistling Duck, and 100 Fulvous Whistling Duck were well seen. 100 Wood Stork were nonchalantly flying around eleven Jabiru! Two Bare-throated Tiger-Heron added to the excitement, and Grassland Yellow Finch flushed from the trail.”

*Below:* “But the undoubted star of the show was an absolutely stunning Pheasant Cuckoo! It dropped into roadside scrub, but one of the guides spotted it, and Eric got the scope on it. Despite some predictable branches and leaves in the way, for the most part, we enjoyed breathtaking looks at a **Pheasant Cuckoo** – a dream fulfilled! I don’t know about anyone else, but I was floating on air at this point.”

All quoted text by Adrian Leather; all photographs by John Gordon.





# Bluebird Recovery

## Merritt Nesting Boxes

*Al Serfas*

Back in 1993, while up in the Merritt area, I saw a Mountain Bluebird. I went back to Vancouver, built eight birdhouses and returned to the area and put them up. Success! Two of the houses were occupied by bluebirds and the young were successfully fledged. I was hooked. In the following years since, I have continued to put up more and more birdhouses in the Merritt area. As a result, the total number of houses now exceeds over 500.

In the first few years my efforts certainly resulted in an increase in the bluebird population; as well as those of Tree Swallows, Mountain Chickadees and House Wrens. The birdhouses had a removable roof, held in place by two nails for ease in checking. However, it often resulted in the roof coming off, so a rock was placed on the roof to help prevent this. Hence the nest lines became known as the "Rock on Roof" lines! The new, improved houses (the

2014 model) now have a hinged front opening held shut by a bent nail. Now they can easily be checked and cleaning is much, much easier. 2018 will mark the 25th anniversary of my "Rock on Roof" nest lines.

Every spring I travel up from Vancouver to check what's nesting. After the first few years, the numbers of bluebirds nesting seemed to level off, but then slowly started to decline. This was also very noticeable in the numbers of nesting swallows. However, last year I am pleased to report that there has been a noticeable increase in bluebird nests. In the past few years, I have also been fortunate enough to have a few Western Bluebirds nesting in various areas as well. There has also been a continued great increase in House Wrens. The swallows are also continuing to hold their own.

As the number of houses has increased over the years, it is now nearly impossible for me to check and clean them all every year. Consequently, I have requested assistance from people living in the area, especially with the cleaning. Thankfully some people have offered to help in monitoring the houses. Corinne and David Pitt from Merritt have been a great help in the past few years and have been doing a wonderful job. Thanks must also be extended to the many people who have come out, or stopped to talk with me, and offer their

encouragement. I would also like to thank those who have allowed me to erect the houses on their fence posts or property.

Most of the houses are numbered to assist in their location. However, last summer, with the help of a college student, we were able to GPS all the houses and then map their location. This will make monitoring and cleaning the houses much easier. I hope it will also help to encourage others to assist in monitoring and cleaning the houses.

Many of the houses have now been in use for over 12 to 15 years, and are becoming increasingly in need of replacement. As a result, the emphasis in the next few years will be in replacing those in need with the new, improved 2014 model.

I trust this information will help to inform residents who see the houses so they will know why they are there. Please remember not to disturb the nesting birds or damage the houses. Considerable effort has gone into building, erecting and monitoring them so that the birds will have additional places to nest successfully. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Both the birds and I say... THANK YOU!

*Mountain Bluebird photographed by  
Al Serfas.*



## Bring Back the Bluebirds Project: Cowichan Valley

*Valentin Schaefer*

Previously considered common in Garry Oak savannahs and meadows, the Georgia Depression population of the Western Bluebird was extirpated from the San Juan Islands, Fraser River Valley and Vancouver Island/Gulf Islands by 1995. The loss of Western Bluebirds was due to the cumulative effects of habitat loss and fragmentation, loss of nesting cavities with the removal of snags, increased competition from more aggressive cavity nesters like the House Sparrow and European Starling, and the widespread use of pesticides.

The five-year pilot of Bring Back the Bluebirds Project from 2012–2016 was led by the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (GOERT) along with the Ecostudies Institute based in Olympia, Washington, who headed the San Juan Island reintroduction program, and the Ecosystems Unit of the Province of BC. It was supported by numerous partners with over 20 funders, including small but vital support in the early critical stages from the BCFO.

Translocations were a major strategy used to reintroduce the species, along with nest-box programs and habitat restoration. The translocations involved capturing pairs of adult bluebirds from a healthy population in Fort Lewis, Washington, transporting them across the US/Canada border, keeping them in temporary aviaries and then releasing them in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island. Over the years the Cowichan Valley Field Naturalists' Society (CVNS) assumed the primary role with the fieldwork and subsequently the CVNS took over the project lead from GOERT in 2017.

The first translocated breeding pairs to establish a founder population were released in 2012. Additional translocations were undertaken in subsequent years (2013–16) to supplement natural recruitment. The goal was to have 90 Western Bluebird adults released between 2012–16. Over the five years 36 birds were successfully translocated and the population consisted of 95 birds – 28 adults and 67 juveniles. The House Sparrow caused the greatest known source of mortality, killing nestling bluebirds to claim nests for themselves.

Nesting territories are monitored

throughout the breeding season. Observers with binoculars and an ocular scope observe bird behaviour and identify individual birds from unique coloured leg bands. Nest monitoring is done regularly once nest building commences, and individual nests are surveyed to assess number of eggs laid, incubation success, and recruitment into the adult population. Hatchlings are banded when ten days old and individual birds can be identified by unique leg-band colour combinations. Once bluebirds begin to incubate eggs, supplemental feeding stations of mealworms are set up and maintained through fledging. Predator guards and deterrents are also installed in an attempt to decrease nestling mortality. Western Bluebird pairs can produce up to three clutches each breeding season but may build different nests for each clutch.

Future measures being considered to manage mammalian predators include: 1) mounting more nestboxes on free-standing poles with a predator guard of a PVC sheath, cone, or wire wrap around the tree, and 2) raising nestboxes higher and above fence lines. Options to manage House Sparrows include: 1) moving or removing nestboxes in areas with House Sparrows, 2) removing any nest attempts, 3) installing sparrow spookers, 4) pellet gun, and 5) live trapping and euthanasia. In 2015, two live traps caught 23 House Sparrows and an additional six were caught in a nestbox and four were shot with a pellet gun.

The combined San Juan Island and Vancouver Island reintroduction program projects involved a series of translocations to improve short-term success

and foster environmental stewardship to maintain the population in the long term. Concomitantly with translocations, building upon earlier efforts by the Victoria Natural History Society, GOERT and the CVNS have undertaken a vigorous nestbox stewardship program on Salt Spring Island and in the Cowichan Valley and Victoria areas and as far north as Nanoose Bay. These boxes were placed in Garry Oak savannahs in parks and protected areas, and in healthy, pesticide-free agricultural areas and other open meadow habitats on golf courses and private lands. The nestbox installations focused on the Cowichan Valley, Metchosin, the Saanich Peninsula, and the southern Gulf Islands.

At this time the Bring Back the Bluebird Project is not considering further translocations. Instead, it will focus on environmental stewardship to reduce mortality through predation and interspecific competition, increase the number of potential nesting sites, monitor the progress of the existing population by establishing a trail monitoring network, improve relations with landowners and volunteers from the CVNS, pave the transition to grassroots volunteer-based programs and maintain the website [www.cowichanbluebird.ca](http://www.cowichanbluebird.ca)

*Below: Young Western Bluebirds feeding on mealworms provided by the Cowichan Valley Field Naturalists.*

*Photo by Ryan Hetschko.*





## Featured Species

Adrian Dorst's *The Birds of Vancouver Island's West Coast*, is now available from UBC Press. The book covers 360 species in its 550 pages, and samples will now appear regularly in *BC Birding*.

### PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER

*Pluvialis fulva*

**STATUS:** Rare transient in both spring and fall.

The Pacific Golden-Plover breeds across much of northern Siberia, from the Yamal Peninsula in the west to the Bering Strait. In North America, this species breeds only in western Alaska. The winter range extends from Somalia through coastal India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Most of the Alaskan population makes a direct, nonstop flight to Hawaii, a distance of 4,000 km (2,480 mi), with a small number wintering in southern California. The latter are undoubtedly the birds we see in British Columbia.

Until 1993, this bird and its American cousin were considered to be conspecific, and the species was then known as Lesser Golden-Plover. Research conducted during the early 1980s in western Alaska, where the ranges overlap, revealed that they did not interbreed. The two subspecies were subsequently given full species status, with the Asian bird designated as Pacific Golden-Plover and the American bird reverting to the name it had until the mid-1970s – American Golden-Plover.

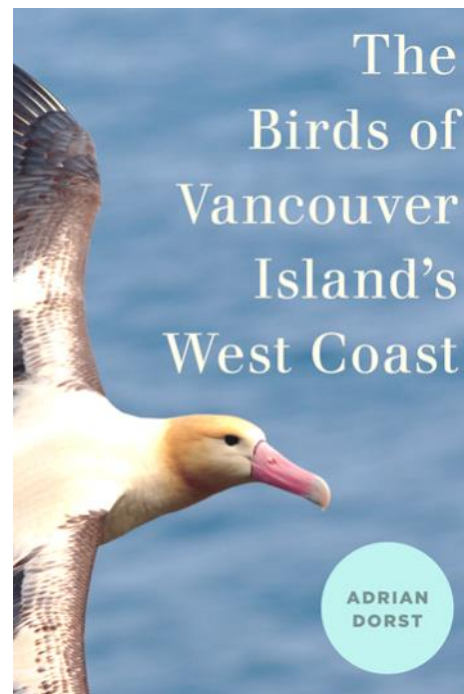
Because little effort had been devoted to distinguishing between the two subspecies in the field, the status of the Pacific Golden-Plover on our coast was unclear. With care, however, the birds can be safely identified. No spring records existed prior to 30 April 1981, when on a rainy day at the west end of Schooner Cove, I found an adult male golden-plover in full breeding plumage feeding on the beach. But why did it have white sides? A detailed written description from that day shows that it

was unequivocally a Pacific Golden-Plover.

A decade and a half passed with no further spring records. Then, on a hunch, I decided to check the Long Beach Airport. In a remarkable stroke of luck, I heard a golden-plover calling as soon as I arrived, and a moment later a bird spiralled down from the sky to land beside the runway. It proved to be a male Pacific Golden-Plover in breeding plumage. That sighting occurred on 30 April 1997, 16 years to the day after the first sighting.

Birds were found in all subsequent years that searches were conducted at the airport in spring, demonstrating that a small number pass through our region annually in spring as well as fall. Of 43 spring records, eleven are for April, 29 for May, and three in early June. All records fall between 23 April and 3 June. That there are 31 records before 16 May and only six after that indicates that most of the spring movement occurs in the first half of the month. Flock size varied from single individuals to family groups of five birds. Based on the information we have today, spring sightings listed in *Birds of Pacific Rim National Park* under American Golden-Plover – five birds on 7 May 1931 at Chesterman Beach, and a single bird on 18-20 May 1974 at Tofino – were almost certainly Pacific Golden-Plovers.

We would not expect to see this species between the end of the first week of June and September. In 2016, however, an apparent female in breeding or transition plumage was observed and photographed on Long Beach from 28 June to 8 July. Apparently too early to be a postbreeding bird, its appearance here at this time of year is difficult to explain unless it was a nonbreeding bird. For the fall migration period, there are 28 records after 1980, with fourteen occurrences in September and eleven in October. On the central west coast, the earliest record was 7 September in 2012, and the latest dates were 26 October in 2001 and 31 October in 2013. There were no August sightings for our region until 12 August 2017, when I observed an adult in nonbreeding plumage on Long Beach. There are August records from Washington, indicating that some pass through earlier. Habitat preferences for both golden-plover species during migration appear to be identical – treeless spaces such as airports, golf courses, and sandy beaches. Unlike



their European counterparts, North American birds rarely convene on mudflats. We have only a single record of a golden-plover at the mudflats, and it flew by without landing. To date, nearly all of our spring records are from the Long Beach Airport and adjacent golf course. In fall, sixteen records are from the airport, nine from beaches, one from the rocky shore, and one undetermined. Most records are from the central west coast, but there is one from the mouth of the Cheewat River along the West Coast Trail. Virtually all records are of singles, pairs, or family groups. The largest number recorded was seven birds at the airport on 26 October 2001, and again on 17 September 2011. Though not impossible, a report of 30 birds at Boat Basin in August 2002 is highly unlikely, because of both the high number and the early date. In the absence of photographs or a detailed description, it has been discounted.

The book can be ordered online at [ubcpres.ca](http://ubcpres.ca). The normal price is \$39.95 but BCFO members can until June 25 receive a 20% discount by entering the code 0106-20.

# Gone Fishing – Hawk Owl

Chris Siddle

## Guiguet the Great

If you are in your sixties, you may remember when the only detailed information about the owls of the province was to be found in the British Columbia Provincial Museum's Handbook No. 18 *Birds of British Columbia Owls* written by C.J. Guiguet. This 67-page booklet, first printed in 1960, reflected the current state of knowledge about most of the owls of North America since BC is blessed with 15 of the 18 species that occur regularly north of the Mexican border. At that time there wasn't much known about many owls, especially northern species like Great Gray Owls, Boreal Owls, and Northern Hawk Owls, not only within BC, but throughout North America. So Mr Guiguet had to borrow liberally from that preeminent source of information, AC Bent's *Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey*. I was twelve when I wrote to Mr. Guiguet, who replied with a kind letter and copies of all the *Birds of British Columbia* Handbooks published at the time. This was very generous of him. The tone he adopted in this letter and in a second one sent a year later was as one birder to another. He took my pre-adolescent bird yearnings seriously, and without criticism. His letters were supportive and phrased as if to a peer and not to a child. How I relished those letters! Guiguet's gentle enthusiasm helped set me on my life's course, the birding part of it any way.

## My First Owls

I read and re-read the BC handbooks as only an obsessive pre-teen can. Not long after reading *The Owls* for the first time, I lucked into my first wild owl. On a hot August evening my parents and I were slowly driving along a gravel road towards Norris Creek to cool off in the stream's icy water. I glanced out the side window to see (oh, heart, be still!) a Great Horned Owl glaring at me just before it flew from the alders along the edge of a dark Fraser Valley forest. Its yellow glare is branded in my mind's eye even today, the mental image more a part of me than any photo

could be. Such wild, dismissive, seemingly angry eyes!

My second owl wasn't quite as dramatic but provided me with a thrill as I realized that the small shape on the utility wire that stretched over a neighbour's hillside driveway really was an owl, an owl that allowed me to get close enough to recognize it as a Western Screech-owl, an unexpected reward as I walked home at dusk from school. To be shown an owl is good; to find one on your own, along a route as familiar as the one you had walked to and from school, was great. Again, the mental image I formed of this bird is somehow far richer and more meaningful than any photo I could possess.

By the time I graduated from high school, I had been birding about six years and had seen most the other usual owls of southwestern BC: Barn, Short-eared, Snowy (during the great invasion of 1967), Northern Saw-whet, and Northern Pygmy-Owl.

My parents didn't like travelling, perhaps because as an airman and a WAAF they had been moved around a great deal during the Second World War. Once settled in Mission they were quite happy to stay home. However, they were unusually supportive of my birdwatching, spending much of their rare spare time taking me on short day trips to birdy places like Pitt Polder, Birch Bay, and Deroche Slough. However, this indulgence did not extend past the Fraser Canyon. So I was excited to escape the Fraser Valley and explore the Interior when I accepted my first teaching job in Fort St John.

## Northern Hawk Owls

On 1 November 1975, two months into teaching, I glimpsed my first Northern Hawk Owl along the Alaska Highway where it curves down the hills on the north side of the little community of Taylor, BC. Hills like these are locally known as *breaks* and are prime habitat for Northern Hawk Owls in migration and winter. The breaks line the north and western sides of the Peace and its tributaries like the Halfway and the Beatton rivers. They are also an obvious feature of Highway 29 which runs across the tops of the breaks from Charlie Lake to Hudson Hope. The breaks are remnant prairie grasslands, much more exposed to the warming sun and the drying prevailing southwest winds than the sheltered, shady and cooler south and east banks which are forest-

ed. In the moist draws between the grassy hill tops are open stands of slim Trembling Aspens, their growth limited by the height of the draw which shields them from desiccating southwest winds.

On the breaks the snow cover is at its thinnest and the view of the river valley is good. It's a good place for a hungry Northern Hawk Owl looking for mice, voles, grouse and small birds. The hawk owl is active by day and often unusually tame, allowing the observer a close approach. As exciting as my "life" sighting was, I couldn't tarry more than a minute or two near the owl because I was a passenger in a car full of non-birding teachers who had received their first full paycheques the afternoon before and were headed to Dawson Creek for a Saturday of wining and dining.

My second hawk owl appeared twenty-two days later along Highway 29 on the breaks above the confluence of the Halfway and Peace rivers. With this bird I was able to take a little more time, thanks to a patient driver. This bird was perched in a roadside aspen and allowed me to get within four metres without appearing disturbed. It never stopped scanning the snowy grasses. As a test, I had the driver blow the car's horn. The hawk owl didn't even flinch, just kept scanning. We left him as the early winter dusk came on and a snow flurry began.

I didn't see another hawk owl for the next two years. I was too wrapped up in learning to be a school teacher to look for one. I had a hard time disengaging from work as an English teacher. There was always marking, because I believed the only way kids learned to write was to write, and a "good" teacher read over all their work and made suggestions for improvement and left encouraging little comments in the margins. A good teacher also planned. Oh, Lord, did I plan. Every 15 minutes of a lesson was planned if not partially scripted. In truth I was deeply insecure about my ability as a teacher and I over-compensated my way through my first several Fort St John winters.

Between 1975 and 1981 everything I learned about Northern Hawk Owls from field experience could be summarized in a couple of sentences. In the southern half of the North Peace the species appeared most often in March – May and again in November. It often, but not always, favoured, edge habitat



such as the breaks. When one discovered a hawk owl, one usually didn't see much hawk owl behaviour other than the bird perched high atop a tree or pole, waiting for prey (voles in late spring and summer; voles and birds the rest of the year) to make its whereabouts known.

After six years teaching in a junior high school, I had transferred to North Peace Senior Secondary School. Instead of 13-15 years old, I was teaching 16-18 year olds, teenagers who for the most part were pretty serious about doing well in school. Many of the students read books, and many had had excellent English teachers in the past, so my job became easier almost overnight. By now many people knew that I was the local "birdman" with the result that students and their parents often reported unusual birds to me. In late 1982 a Grade 11 student told me that there were a lot of owls around his parents' ranch between Fort St John and Hudson Hope. I followed up the tip and found it quite accurate.

### Misguided Attempts at Owl Photography

On 11 December my friend Joan and I found six Northern Hawk Owls along less than 30 kilometres of road on the plateau between Cache Creek (not Cache Creek near Kamloops) and the Halfway River. The habitat was ranchland with plenty of large fields, young aspen forest, a beaver swamp, and several patches of Black Spruce muskeg.

I wondered if any birder had ever seen SIX hawk owls in one day before in British Columbia, but my pondering was short lived, because on 16 January 1983 not only did Joan and I re-locate the original six owls along our original route, but also spotted an additional four closer to Hudson Hope. It was the most memorable day in my hawk owl experience. Ten hawk owls in one day.

16 January was also the day we tried an experiment that could only be described as ham handed, and wrong minded. (I

was much older than Joan, and should have known better. I take full responsibility for the following stunt.)

Joan had a wind-up plastic mouse that ran on two wheels instead of back legs. When we discovered that the mouse tended to spin its wheels on the frozen snow, we cut notches along the edges of its wheels to give them grip. Now that the mouse had snow tires, we had to soften its unattractive plastic appearance. A liberal application of

white carpenter's glue over the mouse, followed by a heavy sprinkling of deer hair gave the toy an feral quality, producing a fake mouse that combined, to my mind, the anarchic with the gormless, like Sid Vicious meets Mr Mole.

Hawk Owl Number Four was our first test subject. He happened to be a one-eyed individual, although that's not why we picked him. He was perched close to the hard snow on the road's edge, a good location on which to run

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Birds - Cheers and Koklass Pheasant, Lammergeier, Pallas's and Lesser Fish Eagle, Tawny and Brown Fish Owl, Great Hornbill, Great Slaty and Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Grey-bellied and Chestnut-headed Tesia, Rufous Sibia, White-browed Shrike-babbler, Black-lored Tit, Snowy-browed Flycatcher, White-capped Bunting etc..

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our punk rodent.

About 11 AM Joan wound up the mouse, which we now optimistically called the lure, and let it run along the snow. At once the owl swooped from its aspen perch but perhaps sensing all was not quite right, hovered over the lure without taking it. Hovering is a foraging habit the hawk owl is well known for. The second time we ran the toy mouse, the hawk owl swooped, seized the mouse in one feathery foot and perched with it on the tip of a 15 metre White Spruce. For a full minute it perched gripping the mouse but didn't reach down to attempt to eat the "prey." Finally it flew with the mouse still its grasp to a snowbank at the edge of the forest and with its back to us mantled over the lure, then flew off, leaving the toy mouse in a depression in the snow.

We tried the lure on three more hawk owls. Bird 5 ignored the mouse entirely. Bird 6 responded to the lure once we dragged it through the snow attached to fishing line. The owl hovered over the moving prey but didn't strike and couldn't be coaxed to leave its perch again. The last bird we pestered was Hawk Owl 2 which flew in from an impressive distance (well over 100 metres), hovered, and then left.

This was our only day using the toy mouse. We discussed how our meddling was causing the hawk owls to waste precious calories in useless pursuit. Thereafter that winter we used a

dead mouse tied to fishing line as a lure hauled across fresh snow with a rod and reel, and we would let the owl have a mouse at the end of the brief period of attracting. Our objective, beside the dubious but always strong desire to get closer to a creature we admired, was to photograph the hawk owls in action. However, photography at -15 to -25 Celsius proved to be a miserable flop. Film froze and shattered when we advanced it, or was scarred by static in the dry winter air. Our mid-price range 1980s cameras and lenses weren't up to the task of capturing a crisp hunting hawk owl photo. After a few experiments we gave up.

### Learning to Identify with the Owl

With our failure came a lesson learned. We put ourselves in the place of the owl. If as owls we lived on the edge of survival in the harsh Peace River winter, would we have found photographers' efforts intrusive? Of course. We could no longer rationalize that we were just two photographers taking up a few minutes of one hawk owl's day.

The next time that you see a wild owl, try to remember the situation I described in the paragraphs above. Resist the urge to make a photoshoot out of the situation. Leave the owl alone. Move on. And don't tell anyone where the owl is, because there's always people who won't/can't make the effort to imagine themselves in the place of the owl. There are always people who

will say to themselves, "What could one or two pictures hurt?"

If you live in the Lower Mainland or Southern Vancouver Island maybe you have seen the so-called "owl paparazzi" pestering owls. Except it goes way beyond pestering. Some would-be wildlife photographers flush owls repeatedly, checking the backs of their digital cameras each time, always hopeful that the next image will be sharper. People push with their little One Shots, and zoom Canons and Nikons into thickets looking for a better angle and use flash for better detail, and squeak and gibber to get the owl's attention. They trespass into barns. They carry their long lenses like weapons of war across the salt grass, having ignored signs that tell them how far some owls have migrated just to hunt the foreshore. Photographers always want to get closer.

The cumulative effects of human disturbance on roosting and hunting owls can be massive on a local scale. People will tell you that a photographer is photographing the owl for only a few minutes of its life, but never mention that an owl's life span is much shorter than a human's. And where there are many humans and few owls, someone is always waiting in line to photograph the owl when the first guy has finished.

## Skeena Spectacle

Larry Joseph

### March 19–20, 2018

This image provides just a little glimpse of this great wonder of nature: the spring run of oolichans. The oolichans had spawned near the limit of the tidal reach in the Skeena. I watched a total of 50 sea lions feeding on schools of oolichan during two days. Thousands of gulls, countless eagles, and some swans were at the location to feed on the oolichan too. The hot spots were easy to find as I drove along Highway 16 between Kwinitsa and Polymar Creek. Tall spirals of circling gulls suddenly appeared over the Skeena where the oolichans had begun to spawn.





# The Reflective Birder

Clive Keen

## The Patch: Quintessence of Birding

Spotting an Elegant Trogon in Arizona ... a Masked Tityra in Mexico... a Hoopoe in Spain: such moments in far-flung places might seem the pinnacle of birding; what it is all about. And yet, for many of us, the true essence of birding is found in everyday moments in our home patch. I admit to being a devoted patch birder. On days when others are racing to cover all the birdiest spots of our area, I'm making my way, yet again, just to my treasured patch. Will I see something new? Unlikely, because I'm there so often. Are there rare and exotic species to be admired? No. Patch birds are by definition a homely bunch. But it doesn't matter in the least. Patch birding remains the heart and soul of birding for many reasons.

First, instead of the scrambled chasing for ticks, patch birding is about savouring the moment and moments. There is no hurry. You'll be back again in a few days. You don't need to agonize over IDs, because you know the jizz, the behaviour, the preferred habitat of your patch's birdlife. You don't wallow in flummox over the unknown songs and calls, because you recognize and acknowledge them all. Patch birding is not, though, simply birding in the slow lane. Rather, it opens the way to a depth of understanding impossible on a tick-chase.

Your patch is where you really learn, for instance, about seasons. You come to know when the species will arrive, and you will anticipate and then delight in their first appearance. You'll then see the courtship behaviour, then the nest selection, then the quiet egg-sitting, and then the first fluffies, which grow so fast into semi-independence. You'll know when it is time for the families to leave, and when you'll need to offer a wistful *au revoir*.

Along the way, you have been in a position to really understand such things as moult. Those ducks, for instance, so resplendent when they first arrived, are now in eclipse, though

you'll be watchful for when hints of finery begin to reappear, and know then that winter can't be too far off.

Then, you get a sense of habitat that is hard to grasp during high-octane birding. This particular spot by the pond edge is where the Waterthrushes will hang out. Those particular trees are the ones from which Cedar Waxwings will hawk for insects. This vulnerable bare patch is where yet another Killdeer will decide to deposit an egg. And you'll know the vegetation. When the thistles are flowering, you'll be primed to watch for squadrons of new swallows.

Your patch also gives you the best preparation for the times you go further afield. Really knowing the birds in your patch makes it so much easier to know the birds in more distant places. It's like having completed all the edge pieces in your jigsaw, so you have something solid on which to build. And when you know all the regular birds expected in your home patch, strangers will stick out like neon. A Bobolink seen at a location renowned for them might be no great thrill, but one spotted in your patch where they've never been seen before will be cause for jubilation.

Because you know the patch so well, you'll appreciate the subtler differences made by time of day, by the weather, by disruptions, by the visits of predators. Perhaps best of all, you get to really know and appreciate perfectly "ordinary" birds. Spend long enough watching even the plainest bird, and you find that there's far more to them than apparently dowdy plumage. You also get to partake in their world; im-

possible when you are off tick-chasing. You'll get to recognize individual birds and follow their varying fortunes. Will the Red-wing with the damaged leg make it? Will the leucistic Pine Siskin find a mate? How many of the chicks now following mother Merganser will be in her wake when they are old enough to fly?

Patch birders are a calm lot, but when their patch is threatened you will see a different side. Fewer wetlands would have been drained, and "waste" spots turned into parking lots, if patch birders had been there to defend them. Having a beloved patch automatically creates a conservationist.

So, if you don't have your own patch as yet, search for one not too far from your house or place of work. It has to be a spot you enjoy, or you won't keep going there. It will help if there's some varied habitat, and particularly if there's some water. Preferably, it should have something to offer twelve months a year and have at least some areas that are wild rather than manicured. It does not need to be a birding hotspot, though your dogged observations might well make it so.

You'll have found a richly rewarding variation on the "local" theme. We're urged, for various reasons, to think local, eat local, deal local, and shop local. There are certainly convincing reasons to bird local. Adopt a patch, and after a while you'll find that the patch adopts you.

*"..Those particular trees are the ones from which Cedar Waxwings will hawk for insects..." CNK photo.*



# Three Vultures

*Dave Manning*

I love vultures. All three in North America have delighted me in recent years. The Turkey Vulture came first, soaring over my Salish Sea island. Discovering a small chick peering at me from its nest cave was all it took to fall in love with this being.

Next was the Black Vulture in Arizona, which I've been enjoying for the past several winters. The dance of the male next to his mate was enough to capture my heart and gave me some tips on how to impress my wife.

The third vulture, the magnificent



southern part of the province, and there you'll see Turkey Vultures, gliding effortlessly above. For a treat, journey to the southern end of Vancouver Island in late September and watch them kettle in the hundreds, waiting for just the right winds to carry them across the Juan de Fuca Strait and on south. A few may winter over in

the coastal region.

So keep looking up and dream of flying with our vulture friends.

*Note:* Dave Manning will be giving a presentation on vultures at the Hope AGM.

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*. Top: Black Vulture. Left: California Condor. Below: Turkey Vulture chick. Photos by Dave Manning.*

California Condor, is found in only a few select locations in the western US. The Grand Canyon and the Navajo Bridge in Arizona and Pinnacles National Park in California are good places to see them. There's no mistaking them for any other bird, unless you happen to come across a prehistoric flying dinosaur.

You're not too likely to see the California Condor or Black Vulture in BC. But look up any summer day in the





## New Findings

### Lifer Ruffed Grouse

*Joshua Brown*

I took this photo (right) in Coquitlam at Minnekhada Regional Park. This was a really special birding moment for me. I was very surprised to hear of a Ruffed Grouse seen in Vancouver, let alone actually getting to see it myself. When I arrived at the park in the evening, a few people were waiting with the grouse to show it to me. To my amazement it was only about ten feet away standing on a barrier on the side of the road. As I came up and got out my camera to take some photos, the grouse actually walked towards me and got even closer until it was only about two feet away. It seems ridiculous, but Ruffed Grouse has been a bird that I've been looking for for more than five years; I've been all over Interior BC and the Okanagan and even to Ontario in my search for one, and I've been as close as hearing them fly away from me only a few metres away on multiple occasions, so to finally see my lifer Ruffed Grouse actually in Vancouver and with such fantastic views is one of the best birding moments I've ever had.



### A New Birding Location

*John Gordon*

It's not that often that the politicians get something right but that is exactly the case with the Lower Mainland's newest birding location. Originally a decommissioned water treatment facility, Blakeburn Lagoons in Port Coquitlam could have easily been turned into yet another subdivision. Thankfully a decision about the future of the site went to a vote and the citizens voted with their tax dollars to have a beautiful nature park instead.

... Around the edges a small flock of Wilson's Warblers darted around in the shadows.

*Ruffed Grouse by Joshua Brown.  
Wilson's Warbler by John Gordon.*





## Briefing

### The Heavy Hand of Humans

Wetlands constitute one of the most important land classes on the planet, providing the highest levels of biodiversity and productivity. But despite the crucial ecosystem services and functions provided by them, they are being degraded and lost at a greater rate than any other land class. A principal reason for their loss in most cases is that humans can find no directly profitable use for wetlands. Particularly significant is the drainage and drying out (or infilling) of wetlands.

A group of investigators interested to examine more thoroughly the drivers of wetland loss selected waterbird abundance as an index of wetland status in national jurisdictions around the world. They made this choice because there is a significant history of systematic observation of waterbirds in more countries than of any other possibly relevant phenomenon.

The investigators recovered nearly 2.5 million count records for the northern hemisphere winter period of January–February, covering 461 waterbird species at 25,679 wetland sites worldwide for the most recent three decades. Analyzing their data in 1°x1° grid cells, they examined trends of waterbird abundance at the community level (all species considered together) and species level. In the latter case changes in individual species in each grid cell (population changes) and mean changes for each species across all grid cells (species changes) were both considered.

Putative drivers of change considered at the national level included measures of climate change, GDP growth and population change, land and water use change, and effective governance. The existence of protected areas was also a criterion.

At the community level, the principal driver of change is effective governance, meaning how well the authorities in a country can establish and enforce rules related to land use and wetland protection. GDP growth, population change, climate, and land and water use change were all secondary factors.

Waterfowl have increased in abun-

dance in North America and Europe, and have decreased in South America, Africa and the Middle East. It must be noted, however, that the regions of decreasing waterfowl occurrence are the ones with fewest records.

Species level changes were governed nearly entirely by the interaction of governance and protected area extent. GDP growth (negative effect) and species body mass (positive effect) were minor factors in this analysis. Governance dominated population-level changes too, with rapid declines especially in smaller-bodied species in areas of less effective governance.

From this analysis we learn that pro-

ected areas are important for waterfowl and that effectively administered protected areas are of special importance in regions of less effective general governance. Further, it is clear that effective governance is crucial to favourable prospects for world waterfowl populations.

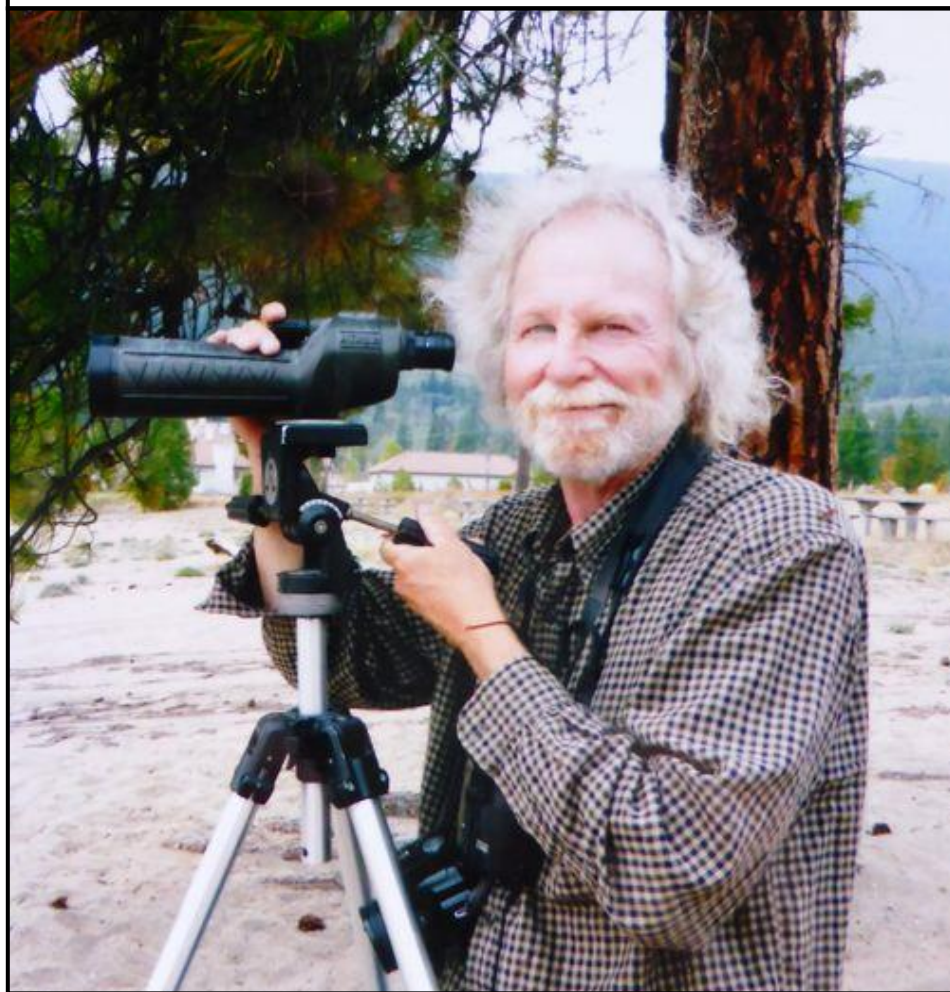
#### Reference

Amano, T. + 8 others. 2018. "Successful conservation of global waterbird populations depends on effective governance." *Nature* 553: 199–202.

Summary by M. Church

### Douglas Leighton, August 7, 1953 – March 28, 2018

Long-term members will remember Doug Leighton, an early BCFO member. At the age of ten, his family moved to Penticton, and he promptly became an enthusiastic birder with his friends Richard and Sydney Cannings. Doug went on to become a park naturalist with BC Parks before returning to Banff in 1985 to pursue a professional photography career. He had great success: his photographs were widely published, and his award-winning photographic books appeared in several languages. He moved in 2005 to Blaeberry which became the focus of his birding activities and research.





# In Praise of BC Birding

...and a bit more

David Sterling

*BC Birding* is a mighty good read. Lots of good stuff contributed by members. I say “read” because it cost me \$12.00 extra to get a paper copy. For me, the online issue is good for a quick scan, but you can’t beat a hard copy for an evening’s sit-down read with a glass of wine.

Back to Volume 27 No. 4, December 2017.

Tom Ley’s and Terry Stevenson’s story tells about some great works for the birds. And that was on the edge of the huge Chilcotin burn up. I liked Chris Siddle’s tribute to that much maligned bird, the magpie. The magpie contributes a bit of colour and sparkle to a drab winter’s landscape. A magpie flashing over the snowbound world is often the only sign of life – the Saskatchewan Macaw. Young birders chalked up a spectacular list of fall migrants at the Sooke Lookout.

Clive Keen’s contributions are always worth a thoughtful read. For the fun of it I tried to fit myself into one of the categories he mentions. I don’t. I never had a mentor unless you count the Spruce Grouse pecking up gravel at the front door or the Great Horned Owl giving a hoot from the chicken house roof. There were weasels rolling eggs over the floor at midnight and skunks wanting a winter’s lay-up in the barn. These things helped to make me a naturalist. I was a closet naturalist for a good many years, packing a .22 rifle when bird watching. If seen by a neighbour I was just one of the local pot hunters. As the years passed I travelled the world sometimes as a tour leader. Sometimes I landed in a foreign land, and with a rental vehicle struck out alone to find new nature sights and sounds. As time flew by my desire grew to see multitudes – migration events, feeding assemblies, sea bird colonies, particularly those where a major event in human history happened or there was a story or a poem not related to the bird numbers.

## The Bit More

As I had ten days to use after my daughter’s wedding in London, I decided to go to Spain for some birding. I just managed to squeeze into a charter flight leaving full from tail to cockpit door with young Brits heading out for beaches and cheap wine. Some were already well into the stuff. At Malaga I picked up a car and away to the hills to find Choughs and Spotless Starlings. It was hot, with a gale-force wind, the Sirocco, off the Sahara. Visibility in the fine-sand atmosphere was poor, but in the afternoon I noticed a stream of raptors overhead. Honey Buzzards! In late afternoon I was at Tarifa where a load of raptors was pitching into a wooded ravine for the night. Next day was a super migration spectacle. Honey Buzzards, various eagles, White Storks, Black Storks, and Eurasian Griffon Vultures were on the wing. Bee-eaters, overhead, were seldom seen but always heard. All heading for Morocco. A harrier blown out to sea was slowly flapping for shore against the strong head wind. Out there in 1805, Lady Emma Hamilton’s lover, Admiral Lord Nelson, trashed the fleets of France and Spain. The battle of Trafalgar.

I am on Camlica Hill, Istanbul, Turkey, embedded in a group of Danish and German birders, all attached to powerful scopes. We are gathered on the deck of a little open-air Turkish tea house. A pair of ancient Turks sit impassively drinking tea and sucking on a water pipe. It is a number five migration day on the scale of one to five, five being tops. White Storks, some Black Storks, eagles! I hear a shout “der Kaiser!” – Imperial Eagle. Egyptian Vultures, Booted Eagles, Spotted Eagles totalling well into the hundreds. Here, where Europe meets Asia, there is enough human history to choke a museum. Below us, the ancient Roman Christian City of Constantinople, where now, minaret spikes of Islam stick out over the city’s canopy.

We are being ushered into a church in Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus preached, just as a huge flock of White Storks came sweeping low over the sea towards us. I notice that they flew in a ragged flock not like cranes and geese that move in V’s and long lines. I ask for a delay. This host of storks is too good to miss! Another spectacle! One of those prophets of olden times would

interpret this event as a meaningful omen.

Beyond argument, the greatest site in North America for large numbers of migrating birds is the “River of Raptors” over Cardel, Mexico, just north of Vera Cruz. Swainson’s Hawks from the great plains, Broad-winged Hawks from eastern North American forests, Turkey Vultures from everywhere, with occasional flocks of Wood Storks and lines of American White Pelicans, unite in a river of birds. Pronatura has taken over the flat roof of a hotel. While the bird counter’s tallywackers keep up a constant click, most of us just sit and enjoy, uttering an occasional “Wow! look at that” or calling for another latte or a cerveza. Hernando Cortez’s HQ, and a huge barn where the caballeros stabled their horses before marching inland to the city of the Aztecs is close by.

Saint Paul’s Island, one of the Pribilofs in the Bering Sea, is a famous bird bazaar. Here, where you can see two species of puffin, Least Auks, Red-legged Kittiwakes, and Red-faced Cormorants, you get a feeling that this the uttermost part of the Earth. Down on the shore, where the fur-seal beach masters proudly watch over their mates, snatches of Rudyard Kipling’s delightful anthropomorphic poem come to mind.

A fur seal reminisces: “The song of midnight dances that churned the swell to flame – The Beaches of Lukannon – before the sealers came!”

Here, on a the hill on old Beringia, that 400-mile-wide land bridge joining Asia and America into one super continent, I can visualize a family of hunters, clutching spears with broad obsidian points, gazing out at the megafauna on the tundra.

“Wot’s for dinner tonight, Dad?”

“Not beach-barbecued rare mammoth steak again!”

## The Name Game

“You Hair-crested Drongo!” served one of our members well when an expletive was required. Given a different tone of voice, it could also do good service as a term of endearment. If you, too, have found extra uses for a bird name, remember to share it with this magazine.



*Lapland Longspur, Iona south jetty, May 14, 2018 – see page 3. Photograph by John Gordon.*