

# BC BIRDING

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*A Great Horned Owl nest and young, photographed by Chris Charlesworth in West Kelowna on April 18, 2023.*



**Publisher**

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

**About the BCFO**

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

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

**Membership**

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

**Annual Membership Dues**

General Membership (Canada): \$30

Junior Membership (Canada): \$20

U.S. and International Membership: \$35

**Newsmagazine Submissions**

To submit material to this publication, contact the Editor by email ([clive\\_keen@hotmail.com](mailto:clive_keen@hotmail.com)). Books for review should be sent to 10790 Grassland Road, Prince George, BC V2K 5E8.

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

Articles should be in plain text, either as the content of an email, or as an attachment (preferably Word). Photographs should be in jpeg and sent as separate attachments, not embedded in text.

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

**Advertising Rates**

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

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

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



## IMPORTANT DATES

### VERNON CONFERENCE & AGM

#### EVENT DATES

**June 7 – 9**

Pre-conference extension trip to the  
Okanagan Valley

**June 9 – 11**

Vernon Conference & AGM.

## Zoom Presentations

Presentations will recommence in September after the spring/summer break, and will take place on the third Wednesday of the month.

## Back Cover Photograph

This male Spruce Grouse was photographed by the Editor in Algonquin Park on May 16 while taking part in an Eagle-Eye tour. Photos on pages 17, 29 and 32 are from the same trip.

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# President's Message

*Gary Davidson, Nakusp*

Big changes are coming to the BCFO! Last year we elected three new board members, and this year there are four vacancies, making room for more new members. Most of next year's board members will be in their first or second year of service to the BCFO. New members mean new ideas; this is good for any organization. And the changes are already coming: for the first time BCFO now has a social media presence.

This year's conference is almost upon us. By the time you read this the deadline for registration will have passed. However, at the time of writing there are still openings

for conference delegates to participate in the pre-extension trip. If you're keen to explore the birdlife of the south Okanagan, it may not be too late to register.

## Board Membership

As I mentioned above, we have four vacancies on the board for next year. Thus far, three members have put forth their names for consideration, leaving one more spot to fill. The workload is not onerous, just four or five Zoom meetings each year. If you have any interest in serving, or if you'd like more information on the what's involved, please contact me directly.

In the last issue of the newsmagazine there was an article about a watercolour painting that has been donated to the BCFO by artist John Waldin. We will be holding a silent auction at this year's conference. If you are not planning to attend the

conference, but would like to bid on the painting, send your bid to me prior to the conference dates. Proceeds from the auction, will go to the BCFO Education and Conservation Committee.

This will be the last President's Message I write; I am one of the four board members not returning next year. I have been on the board for six years and BCFO Policies and By-laws require board members to step down after six consecutive years on the board. It has been a privilege to serve on the board and to serve as president for the last two years. I look forward to serving the BCFO in other capacities next year. While I'm also stepping down as chair of the Education and Conservation Committee, I will be serving as Chair of the Cannings Award Committee.

## Welcome New Members

**Myrna Pearman - Sylvan, AB**

**Lori Henry - Vancouver**

**Andrew Jacobs - Victoria**

**Don Cecile - Vernon**

**Linda Cheu - Courtenay**

**Margaret Mackenzie - Vernon**

**Marcel Isabelle - St. Jerome QC**

**Pat McAllister - Vernon**

**Ron Read - Victoria**

**Paul Schorn - Vernon**

**Kenneth Whyte - Vernon**

**Dianne Murphy - Rosthern, SK**

**Frank Sullivan - North Vancouver**

**Sandra Milligan - Campbell River**

**Vicky Scott - Gabriola Island**

**Claudia Lipski - Alix, AB**

**Janet Spiers - Ottawa, ON**

**Gail Loughridge - Vernon**

**Connie Haist -  
Ladysmith**

**Marnie Williamson - Vernon**

**Jenni Stol - Bonnington**

**Susan Ghattas - Coldstream**



## BCFO 33<sup>rd</sup> CONFERENCE & AGM, June 9 – 11, 2023, Vernon, BC

# Schedule of Events

**Location:** Prestige Vernon Hotel 4411 32<sup>nd</sup> St, Vernon, BC V1T 9G8.

**Registration fee:** full conference registration is \$195 per person.

**NOTE:** 20 rooms at the Prestige Vernon Hotel have been set aside at conference rates. First come, first served. To book a room call (250) 558-5991. There are also numerous other hotels in Vernon.

### Friday, June 9

**Registration, Social and Saturday Field-trip Signup:** 5:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the Prestige Vernon Hotel, O'Keefe/Ellison Room. Pick up your conference package and socialize with fellow birders: there will be appetizers and a cash bar. Field trip selections for the morning of June 10 will also be made at this time, and you will be asked to complete your conference waiver form and review the BCFO Code of Ethics. Signup sheets for the Sunday morning field trips will be available just after the AGM.

### Saturday, June 10

**Breakfast:** 5:30 to 6:00 AM, prior to field trips, Prestige Vernon Hotel.

**Conference Field Trips:** 6:15 AM departures from the Prestige Vernon Hotel.

- Trip 1 - Kalamalka Lakeview Road, High Ridge Road, and the Lower Commonage
  - Trip 2 - Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park
  - Trip 3 - Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park
  - Trip 4 - Silver Star Mountain – Sovereign Lake high boreal birding
  - Trip 5 - Beaver Lake Road
- (See page 7–8 for details.)

**Lunch:** 12:00 to 1:00 PM..

**Afternoon Speakers:** 1:00 to 2:30 PM, Saturday. Jocie Brooks – *The Life and Art of Allan Brooks*;  
Les Gyug – *Okanagan Mountain Park, Before and After the Firestorm*.

**Annual General Meeting:** 3:00 PM. Signup sheets for the Sunday morning field trips will be available just after the AGM.

**Social with Cash Bar:** 5:30 to 6:30 PM.

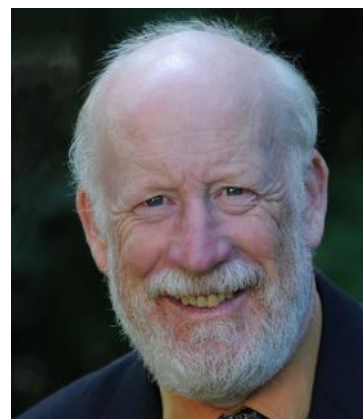
**Banquet:** 6:30 to 7:30 PM.

**Steve Cannings Award Presentation:** 7:30 PM.

**Keynote Speaker:** 7:45 PM, Richard Cannings – *Adventures in Okanagan Owling*.



*Keynote speaker Richard  
Cannings*



### Sunday, June 11

**Morning Field Trips:** depart 6:15 AM from the Prestige Vernon Hotel.

**Lunch:** 12:00 to 1:00 PM.

**Farewell.**



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# Online Registration

### TO REGISTER FOR THE PRE-CONFERENCE EXTENSION TRIP

You can register for the conference through the BCFO Website (bcfo.ca) and pay conference fees using PayPal or eTransfer.

Go to the AGM/Extension Payments tab under the Events > Annual Conference drop-downs. This will bring up a fillable registration form. To pay for more than one registration, simply make sufficient single payments for each person you wish to register.

*The only way to register for the extension trip is via the web-site.*

Go to the AGM/Extension Payments tab under the Events > Annual Conference drop-downs. The form will include the opportunity to indicate your desire to attend the pre-conference extension trip.



## Alternative Registration Form

Name(s) .....

Address .....

Phone ..... Email .....

### Conference Registration

Maximum registrations: 80. Attendance is limited to BCFO members and accompanying spouses/family members. If spaces are available, non-members may join BCFO at the same time as they register for the Conference.\*

Full conference fee includes: Friday night Meet & Greet, Saturday & Sunday breakfasts, lunches and Saturday evening Banquet plus all field trips and talks. Refunds for cancellation will be considered if received before 27 May.

\_\_\_\_\_ @ \$195 /person = \$\_\_\_\_\_

BCFO Young Birders \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$90 /person = \$\_\_\_\_\_

Social events ONLY (Meet & Greet, and Banquet) \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$75 /person = \$\_\_\_\_\_

\*Membership fee for non-members \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$30.00 – single/family = \$\_\_\_\_\_  
(see BCFO website for membership details)

Total registration fee(s) for the Conference = \$\_\_\_\_\_

Will you be attending the Friday evening reception: Yes ..... No .....

Do you have any dietary requirements: Yes .... Requirement .....

### Waiver

All registrants for the conference and extension trip are required to complete the WAIVER OF LIABILITY AND RELEASE OF CLAIMS form, available at the Conference at the time of registering for field trips. Please make cheque or money order payable to **BC Field Ornithologists**. Send your registration and payment to BC Field Ornithologists, P.O. Box 61670, RPO Brookwood, Langley, BC V3A 1K0.

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# Field Trips

## Field Trip 1

Kalamalka Lakeview Road, High Ridge Road, and the Lower Commonage.

You will be following your leader south of Vernon to a portion of the old highway towards Kelowna. Now named Kalamalka Lakeview Road, this is a scenic grassland route with the hills of the Vernon Commonage on the west and grassland and remnant Ponderosa Pines intersected by shrubby draws and occasional talus slopes to the east set against Kalamalka Lake.

The route proceeds south to High Ridge Road north of Kekuli Bay Provincial Park then joins Highway 97 for a brief section before pausing at the base of Bailey Road for a brief exploration of riparian shrubbery before climbing Bailey Road, passing an active Osprey nest and stopping to scan Bailey Pond. Then the tour turns north onto Commonage Road for a final stop at Rose's Pond before ending back in Vernon.

The tour will target open-country and pond species including Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, White-throated Swift (scarce), Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Willow Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Eastern Kingbird, Common Raven, Rock Wren, Gray Catbird, Western Bluebird, Yellow-breasted Chat, Bullock's Oriole, Yellow Warbler, and Black-headed Grosbeak.

There will be a final stop or two along Mission Road to look for Swainson's Hawk which traditionally nests at the Vernon Army Camp and possibly at the entrance road to the Allan Brooks Nature Centre.

Walking difficulty: Easy stop-and-go automotive tour. Driving caution must be taken especially on the section of

Commonage Rd. between Bailey, Rose's Pond, and Mission Road because of fast drivers and very limited pull-off areas.

## Field Trip 2

Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park and possibly other Swan Lake stops, O'Keefe's Pond, and Otter Lake.

The success of this morning outing will depend upon the water levels in the valley in late spring. A wet spring with high ground water may produce an ephemeral pond next to Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park, attracting gulls, the occasional tern, late shorebird migrants, and breeding waterfowl including Cinnamon Teal and Gadwall. However, a wet spring may also flood normally productive cattail and bulrush marshes and submerge shores, dramatically decreasing biodiversity at Otter Lake and O'Keefe Pond. Equally impactful, an arid spring can dry up wetlands. Pray for a "normal" not-too-wet, not-too-dry season.

Target species at the south end of Swan Lake include a pair of Northern Harriers, one of the largest Yellow-headed Blackbird colonies in BC, Tree Swallows galore nesting in boxes managed by the North Okanagan Naturalists who take an active interest in the management of the Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park, and a very photographable occupied Osprey nest next to a two-story viewing tower. Other species possible include Red-necked Grebes and Pied-billed Grebes (nesting), Wood Ducks (scarce), Gadwall, Common Loon, and even the occasional Western Grebe are targets as well as the usual marsh birds such as Sora, Virginia Rail, Wilson's Snipe and Marsh Wren.

If there is time the tour will continue driving north along Old Kamloops Road and Highway 97 to the junction of Highway 97 and St. Anne's Road where O'Keefe Pond is located right next to

the road. Here are Red-winged and Yellow-headed blackbirds often perched within close photographable distance, a diversity of swallows, and waterfowl. The tour continues north turning onto Otter Lake Rd. where catbirds, Cedar Waxwings, Bullock's Orioles, and other species of riparian brush can be seen along Deep Creek. The final stop will be at Scott Park at the north end of Otter Lake to view the marsh. This is a local hotspot with 150 species on its accumulated sightings list. This is a good spot in early June for Black Swift, Wilson's Phalarope, Great Blue Heron, Bullock's Oriole, Gray Catbird, Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged and Cinnamon teal, Northern Rough-winged and Bank Swallow, Redhead, Yellow Warbler, and occasionally Double-crested Cormorant.

Expect to walk about 2 kms on mostly level ground in Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park. The remainder of the tour will involve stop-and-look driving. Scopes are highly recommended for Otter Lake.

## Field Trip 3

Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park

For conference participants who are comfortable hiking at least 4 km, this tour explores the largest remaining Ponderosa Pine-Douglas-fir forest remaining open to the public in the North Okanagan. The tour will arrive at the Red Gate entrance and pass through fairly open forest towards Cosens Bay on beautiful Kalamalka Lake.

The first km is on level ground while the second km descends an arid south-facing slope to a small sheltered bay on the north-east shore of the lake backed by a marsh in damp springs. Exploring these two areas will take up most of the morning, but if there is time, the tour will drive to a second parking lot (Cosens Bay Gate) to bird the base of the cliffs that run east west across the

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park.

Target birds in the dry forest include Dusky and Ruffed Grouse, Calliope Hummingbird, Golden Eagle, Red-naped Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, Dusky Flycatcher, Cassin's Vireo, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, White-breasted and Pygmy nuthatches, House Wren, Townsend's Solitaire, Cassin's Finch, Red Crossbill (Ponderosa Pine call-type), Chipping Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Nashville Warbler, Western Meadowlark, and Lazuli Bunting.

In the cottonwoods and marsh around Cosens Bay we will search for Common Merganser, California Quail, Vaux's Swift, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Sora, Cooper's Hawk, Red-naped Sapsucker, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Tree and Violet-green swallows, Gray Catbird, Swainson's Thrush, MacGillivray's and Yellow Warbler and Black-headed Grosbeak.

### Field Trip 4

Silver Star Mountain – Sovereign Lake – high boreal birding.

Join Chris Siddle on a short tour of the spruce-fir forests surrounding Sovereign Lake. We will be walking about 2–4 kms of ski-trails and communications one-lane roads. In early June these trails may still be covered in fairly deep snow so wear waterproof boots and be prepared for last-minute changes of plans. Layered clothing is highly recommended for the weather can be very changeable at 5,000 feet running from cold to hot.

This trip involves dense forest edge birding and can vary from highly productive to a complete bust, so you've been warned. However, you can usually count on a few mosquitoes so bring repellent. Hopefully at least one participant will still have acute hearing and

can draw the crowd's attention to the location of chickadees and kinglets, because your leader admits to being "somewhat deaf" when it comes to these species.

Target birds include "Franklin's" Spruce Grouse, and Boreal Chickadee, Mountain Chickadee, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Canada Jay, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, and Lincoln's Sparrow and Fox Sparrow (Slate-coloured type). Other species in the general area include Barrow's Goldeneye (Brewer's Pond, Silver Star village), Spotted Sandpiper (same site), Northern Pygmy-Owl (rare), Hammond's Flycatcher, Pacific Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit, Swainson's and Varied Thrushes, Cassin's Finch (sporadic), Red Crossbill, and White-crowned Sparrow (gambelli types). Usually there's plenty of parking at km 2 of the Sovereign Lake Road.

### Field Trip 5

Beaver Lake Road

Beaver Lake Road rises through a variety of habitats – grassland slopes, mixed woodland, conifer forest, and upper plateau lake environs – affording the chance to see many different species. Bluebirds, meadowlarks, Lazuli Bunting, and a variety of forest birds are possible on this route. As much of the lower part is private land we will be driving with frequent stops to look and listen.

Come prepared to carpool so that we reduce our need for parking space and to minimize our environmental impact. There are no facilities, just "happy trees" at higher elevations so be warned.

Please bring water and a snack. Pace will be easy with perhaps some short walks on uneven ground on forest trails.

## Field Trip Leaders

### Chris Siddle

A long-time resident of Vernon and life-long birder and naturalist. He has published many papers and articles in a number of scientific journals.

### Pam Laing

Currently residing in Kelowna, Pam has been active with the Central Okanagan Naturalist Club for many years.

### Gail Loughridge

Born in Victoria where she met Cam Findlay and was introduced to the world of hummingbird banding. She later received her hummingbird banding permit and has been active in the BC hummingbird banding program in Vernon for the past 15 years.

### Margaret Mackenzie

A long-time resident and naturalist of the Vernon area. For over ten years, she has coordinated the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club Bluebird Nest Box program consisting of 22 trails and over 400 boxes. She is extremely knowledgeable about local habitats and ecosystems and is our local go-to person to help with plant identification. In recent years, her proficiency with a camera has enhanced her knowledge of birds and become a great accompaniment to her ability to identify bird song.

### Pat McAllister

A long-time naturalist of the Vernon area, Pat enjoys sharing her knowledge of birds, plants, local geology and general ecology to all ages. She has been a member and supporter of North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for many years.

### Marnie Williamson

A director of North Okanagan Naturalists' Club for over 12 years. She has lived in the Vernon area for over 40 years and knows some of the local and



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regional spots that bring the wonder and joy of nature to one's soul.

### Don Cecile

Don is a retired school teacher/administrator who has been an avid birder and photographer since 1986.

He has a biology background with several seasons conducting shorebird census/nesting studies in the Canadian and Alaskan arctic. When he is not pursuing birds off-continent, he is most often found pursuing birds of the Salmon Arm shoreline.

### Andrew Jacobs and Susan Ghattas

(Andrew and Susan have stepped in at the last minute to replace indisposed trip leaders – many thanks.)

## The Speakers

### Dick Cannings

Dick was born and raised in Penticton in a family that loved nature and the outdoors. He gravitated to biology as a career and worked for 17 years in the Department of Zoology at the University of British Columbia. In 1995 he moved back to the Okanagan with his wife Margaret and young children, where he worked with Birds Canada, coordinating Canadian Christmas Bird Counts, the eBird program and the British Columbia Owl Survey. He served on various boards and committees, including eight years as co-chair for birds on the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, eleven years on the British Columbia Environmental Appeal Board and five years on the British Columbia Forest Appeals Commission.

He was a founding director of the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance and has also served as a board member for the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Dick has written over a dozen books on the natural history of British Columbia.

In 2015 he moved from biology to politics and now serves as the Member of Parliament for South Okanagan-West Kootenay in Ottawa.

### Jocie Brooks

Jocie Brooks is a piano teacher who moonlights as a “nature nerd.” In keeping with family tradition, she is a birder and naturalist, with particular interest in botany and fungi. Currently, Jocie is the leader of the Comox Valley Nature botany group. She lives in the Comox Valley with her two teenagers.

### *The Life and Art of Allan Brooks*

Allan Brooks (1869–1946) was one of North America's most renowned illustrators of birds and mammals. The Brooks family came to Canada from England and settled in the Chilliwack area in the late 1880s. Young Allan was enthralled with the wilds of British Columbia. He established a home at Okanagan Landing,

near Vernon, and eventually divided his time between the Okanagan and his winter home in Comox.

Allan illustrated many major bird books of the day, including *Birds of Western Canada*, *Birds of Canada*, *Birds of Washington* and *Birds of California*. His paintings

were also widely circulated in magazines such as *National Geographic*, *Canadian Nature* and *Audubon Magazine*. He wrote and illustrated articles for many ornithological journals including the *Condor* and the *Auk*.

Allan's grand-daughter, Jocie, will give an overview of Brooks' life and art, focusing on his time in the Okanagan and his many paintings of birds and wildlife from this rich area. There will be a “sneak peek” from Brooks' diaries and sketch books that are in the Brooks family private collection.



### Les Gyug

Les is a self-employed biologist living and working in the Okanagan for the past 35 years. His work has included environmental consulting and monitoring and designing and conducting wildlife research and inventories for all manner of wildlife from mice to moose and birds to bears. He has conducted bird surveys of many sorts for over 40 years, but lately has specialized in working with species-at-risk, particularly sapsuckers and other woodpeckers. He has been an active member of the Central Okanagan Naturalists Club for 30 years and was a director of BCFO from 2006-2012.

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# Pre-Conference Extension Trip

## The Okanagan Valley from South to North

**Dates:** June 7, 8, and 9, 2023.

**Cost:** \$160 per person not including meals and accommodation.

**Locations:** The tour will begin in Osoyoos where participants will meet the leaders on the evening of Tuesday, 7 June, for dinner. Expect to spend three nights (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) in Osoyoos. Details of motels and restaurants will be provided to all signed-up participants.

**Registration and payment:** Go to the Pre-Conference Extension Trip page on the [bcfo.ca](http://bcfo.ca) website. This page opens at 9:00 am, April 1.

**Group Size:** This tour is limited to 12 persons on a first-come first-served basis.

### Overview

The focus of this tour will be the Okanagan Valley south of Penticton, since morning tours of the North Okanagan will be available on the Conference weekend. There will be the opportunity to make a few stops north of Penticton on our return to Vernon on Friday. In the following, we describe the tour without reference to specific days and times. This broad approach allows for maximum flexibility. Once in the field we will be able to access more precisely a schedule, and the accessibility of each site.

We will endeavour to make this tour as comfortable and rewarding as possible. Expect sunny warm conditions (but come prepared for occasional wet conditions), wear sturdy waterproof footwear, pack plenty of snacks, and expect early morning hours (in June 6:00 AM departures are neces-

sary), some irregularity of meal stops, and the flexibility to deal with the occasional “natural” comfort break. Apply insect repellent to discourage mosquitoes and wood ticks.

### Itinerary

Early Wednesday morning we will car-pool and head west along Highway 3 over the Richter Pass to the Chopaka area, a brushy flat between Highway 3 and the US border. This area, which is also called Nighthawk after the name of the border station, is famous for attracting Sage Thrashers, Grasshopper Sparrows (sporadic), Lark Sparrows, Brewer’s Sparrows and Long-billed Curlew (uncommon). After exploring flats from the road leading to the border we will return over Richter Pass, pass through Osoyoos and drive up the mountain on the east side of town.

Anarchist Mountain forms the high eastern side of the Okanagan Valley. As we climb we will pass through a succession of habitats including orchards, arid rocky hillside, Ponderosa Pine and Douglas-fir forest, and finally Western Larch-spruce-fir forest and high grassland. Our targets in this patchwork of forest and fields will be Swainson’s Hawk and Williamson’s Sapsucker but many other species are possible including nesting Mountain Bluebirds.

If time allows on our return to the valley we will go north of Osoyoos Lake to Road 22. This location is especially rich with birdlife and rewards a slow careful search. We will check the oxbows of the Okanagan River next to Highway 97 for waterfowl, late migrating shorebirds, and wetland passerines like Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Cedar Waxwings, and Marsh Wrens. At the hard-stem bulrush marsh next to the junction of the highway and the beginning of Road 22 proper we will look and listen for Sora and Virginia

Rail as well as Wilson’s Snipe and a colony of Yellow-headed Blackbirds. The ridge to the west is a good site for soaring Golden Eagles.

Along Road 22 west of the channelized river we will search the fields for Bobolinks, one of the most visible colonies of these members of the blackbird family in BC. Long-billed Curlews can sometimes be seen as well, but are more visible in April and May. Ospreys nest along the south-east dyke which passes riparian thickets and bulrush ponds usually full of birds including Willow Flycatchers, Gray Catbirds, and Veeries. Yellow-breasted Chat will certainly be heard if not seen. The south end of the dyke where the river joins Osoyoos Lake is a hotspot for rare waterbirds.

At the east end of Road 22 we will once again listen for chats and check out the waterfowl which usually include Wood Ducks, Blue-winged and Cinnamon teal. Hooded Merganser is also possible. After a short stint on Black Sage Road, we will take Mackenzie Road to the Haynes Lease Ecological Reserve. Careful not to disturb this fragile environment, we will experience the Great Basin vegetation as it looked in the past before vineyards and urbanization claimed it. Targets will include Chukars, Rock and Canyon wrens at the base of the massive rock wall known as The Throne, Golden Eagle, and perhaps distant views and cries of Peregrine Falcons that traditionally nest on the rock face. Veteran old-growth Ponderosa Pines spaced wide apart and surrounded by tall shrubs make for productive Lewis’s Woodpecker habitat. Lazuli Bunting, Western Bluebirds, and Lark Sparrows also occur.

Camp McKinney Road runs east out of Oliver. Traditionally, distances along McKinney are measured from the gas station at its junction with Black Sage

## BCFO 33<sup>rd</sup> CONFERENCE & AGM, June 9 – 11, 2023, Vernon, BC

Road. The first nine kilometres are First Nations land where we bird from the side of the road. This area is a large sage area known as Manuel's Flats where Vesper and Lark sparrows occur especially at rockpiles (past km 3).

Past km 10 we start looking for Gray Flycatchers in the pines at cattle guard. This species first extended its range from Washington State in the 1980s and so far has remained very locally distributed in the Okanagan occurring (sparsely) only as far north as Summerland. The forest beyond km 10 remain the best spot in Canada for this species. In the surrounding dry forest Townsend's Solitaires, Clark's Nutcrackers, all three nuthatches, Cassin's Finches and Red Crossbills also occur. This general area was home to the last White-headed Woodpeckers that could be found by the greater birding public in 2001. Since then the species has been highly elusive and with the recent increase in wild fires may be extirpated in Canada.

After exploring km 10–13 we will return to Oliver and head west towards the Fairview-White Lake road. A Bank Swallow colony, Black-chinned and Calliope hummingbirds and possibly a Least Flycatcher calling "chebec" from aspen copses may enliven the first few kilometres. At the km 7.5 intersection we will check out public land at the corner for White-breasted and Pygmy nuthatches, and Western Bluebirds before continuing straight on towards White Lake.

The next important landmark is the junction of Green Lake-White Lake. About 5 kms north of this junction we will stop at a pull-off on the right where a gated track leads down towards White Lake. Here we will look for White-throated Swifts overhead, and Nashville and Lazuli Bunting singing from brushy edges. Grassland birds here include Western Meadowlarks, Vesper Sparrows, Mountain and Western Bluebirds. Chukars may announce

their presence from the rocks while Gray Partridges are possible.

We will double back towards Oliver to visit River Road and Hacks Pond – Yellow-breasted Chats call from the riparian thickets along River Road. Often a male Black-chinned Hummingbird can be spotted perched on the wires where River Road becomes gravel. Hacks Pond is a little oasis at the foot of a steep pine covered slope. Expect Black-headed Grosbeaks, all three teal species, Marsh Wrens, Yellow Warblers, Gray Catbirds, Eastern Kingbirds, Red-eyed Vireos and other riparian songbirds.

Back on Highway 97 heading north we may stop at Inkaneep Provincial Park, a deciduous riparian picnic area or carry on to the north end of Vaseux Lake where we will spend a pleasant hour or two exploring the marsh boardwalk and then MacIntyre Creek Road up the arid slope east of the lake. White-throated Swifts, perhaps a passing Golden Eagle, Chukars, Rock Wrens, and Canyon Wrens make this an especially interesting spot, and a highlight of the tour.

If we have time, we will tour the Shuttleworth Creek and Venner Meadows that climb high into the forested slopes on the east side of the valley.

After a stop at Okanagan Falls for ice cream at Tickleberries, we will briefly inspect the falls to the south end of Skaha Lake for American Dipper and Barrow's Goldeneyes, though it's late in the season for both of these birds. Once through Penticton we will pull over to scan the western slopes north of Summerland for Mountain Goats to add to our mammal list which by the tour's end may include 15 species or more.

### Conclusion

The tour will end at the Prestige Vernon Hotel in time for conference registration at 5:00 PM.

## The Trip Leaders

### Gary Davidson

Gary is a retired secondary school math and physics teacher. Most of his working career was in Nakusp where he still lives. He has been an active birder and naturalist since his university days in the early 1970s. He has compiled the Nakusp Christmas Bird Count since 1975 and he completed in excess of 50 Breeding Bird Surveys over a 30-year period. He contributed over 100,000 bird records to the 4-volume publication *The Birds of British Columbia*. He is a director of the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies and has published numerous articles in their journal *Wildlife Afield*. He is an eBird reviewer for three regions in BC. He is the current president of the BCFO and has served on the Board of Directors for six years.

### Chris Siddle

Chris is a retired secondary-school English teacher and has been an active birder since 1962. He has compiled and participated in dozens of Christmas Bird Counts, and carried out 25 years of Breeding Bird Surveys. He was also a field editor for the Royal British Columbia Museum's publication *The Birds of British Columbia* (1990–2000) and contributed species accounts to *The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of British Columbia*. He is a former director of the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies and remains the Centre's book review editor for *Wildlife Afield: A Journal of British Columbia Natural History*. He has worked as a co-leader for Avocet's Tours and as a sightings reviewer for eBird. He is a member of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists and in 2016 was the recipient of the BCFO's Steve Cannings Award for contributions to the province's ornithology. He writes a column, *Gone Pishing*, for the BCFO's quarterly news magazine, *BC Birding*.



# BCFO Short Trips

## 100 Mile House June 23-24, 2023

This BCFO field trip will cover the 100 Mile House area on the expansive Cariboo plateau, where a few northern and eastern species mix with more common birds of the BC Interior. One day will focus on breeding warblers and songbirds in the rich forested habitats near Canim, Hawkins and Hendrix lakes. Possibilities include Black Tern, Spruce Grouse, Black Swift, Alder Flycatcher, Veery, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush, MacGillivray's Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, and Tennessee Warbler (rare).

Another day will be spent exploring the marshes, grasslands, aspen parklands and burned areas near 100 Mile House, where Sandhill Crane, Sharp-tailed Grouse (rare), Wilson's Phalarope, Calliope Hummingbird, Black-backed Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Mountain Bluebird, Clay-colored Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and numerous waterfowl species breed.

This trip will be led by Paul Foth, local 100 Mile House area birding tour guide. To register, email Paul at [paulrfoth@gmail.com](mailto:paulrfoth@gmail.com).

## Other Trips

Field trips are also being planned for Merritt and the Coquihalla Summit (August 2023) and Salmon Arm Bay (September 2023). Details will be given by email.

## How the Short Trips Work

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

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

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

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

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

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



Above: Whimbrel by Adrian Dorst.

## FOUR NEW DIRECTORS NEEDED!

At the Vernon Conference and AGM three Board members are standing down after long service (the maximum allowable is six consecutive years) and another director has had to resign. Please consider stepping up to add your input and guidance for the future direction of the BCFO. Alternatively, if you know of a BCFO member well suited to the role, please forward their name. Members with treasurer/bookkeeping experience/interest are particularly encouraged to join the board.

If sufficient nominations are not received to fill all vacancies, the Board will seek to find suitable candidates from the membership.

The time commitment is not great – typically four or five meetings per year conducted via Zoom. We need new members with new ideas. Please give some thought to assisting your organization.

Gary Davidson, President, 250-265-4456, [gsd37@yahoo.ca](mailto:gsd37@yahoo.ca)

## Notes

### Kevin Martin Bell 12 May 1942 – 17 May 2023

Kevin Bell, a BCFO director from 2005 to 2011, died on May 17 at the age of 81.

Kevin served as BCFO President and Vice-President, and was active in the birding world for other naturalist organizations, including Nature Vancouver and the Wild Bird Trust of BC. Just this month he received the Alan Duncan Bird Conservation Award, coordinated by the Stanley Park Ecology Society, for lifetime contributions to championing bird habitat conservation across the Lower Mainland.

Kevin was retired Chief Naturalist/Manager at the Lynn Canyon Ecology Centre and District of North Vancouver Natural Parklands. He led naturalist trips for some 40 years, and was instrumental in the creation of Maplewood Flats as a migratory bird reserve. He was outspoken and active on environment issues, and was even arrested for blocking crews building the new highway through West Vancouver's Eagleridge Bluffs, which destroyed bird nesting habitat.

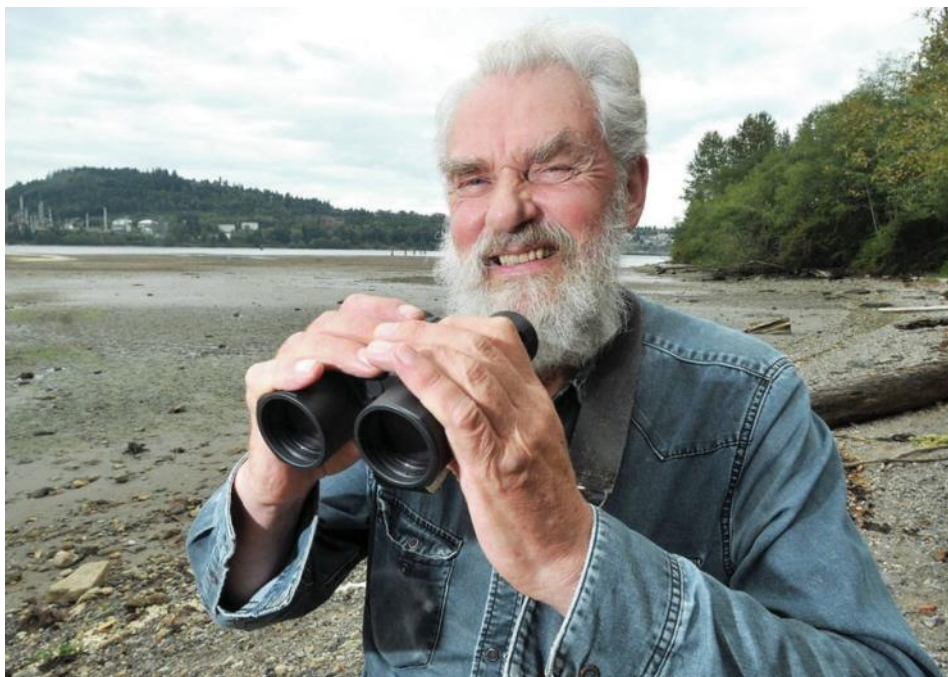
More about Kevin can be found at:

[www.nsnews.com/local-news/north-shore-naturalist-recognized-for-lifetime-conservation-work-7024027](http://www.nsnews.com/local-news/north-shore-naturalist-recognized-for-lifetime-conservation-work-7024027)

### Official BC Bird?

In early May the CBC carried a story entitled "Should B.C.'s official bird, the Steller's Jay, be replaced by the Rufous Hummingbird?" It was not a serious proposal, but the reasons for contemplating it were sound enough: two thirds of all Rufous Hummers breed in BC.

[www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-official-bird-steller-jay-hummingbird-1.6831788](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-official-bird-steller-jay-hummingbird-1.6831788)



*Kevin Bell in Maplewood Flats Conservation Area. Photo from North Shore News.*

### Birding Hotspots

Sage Pasay (Quesnel) points out that there is a new birding resource which is in major need of input by BCFO members.

The website at [BirdingHotspots.org](http://BirdingHotspots.org) is compiling profiles of eBird hotspots so birders can find out what the locations are like and what to expect if they go there. Descriptions will include details of access, maps, and notes on special species to be found at the location. The site has not yet added British Columbia to its database, since it needs at least one volunteer editor for the province: an ideal task for a BCFO member. If you are interested, go ahead and contact them at:

[birdinghotspots.org/contact](http://birdinghotspots.org/contact)

- INDIGO BUNTING, Saanich, May 20
- BLACK-THROATED SPARROW near Kaslo, May 19
- SNOWY PLOVER, Tofino, May 17
- SNOWY EGRET, Kamloops, May 8–9
- WHITE-TAILED KITE, Langley, May 7–8
- BLACK-TAILED GULL, near Victoria, May 2–7
- COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD, Sidney, April 30
- ACORN WOODPECKER, Sooke, April 25–29
- KING EIDER near Price Island, April 15

See [bcbirdalert.blogspot.com](http://bcbirdalert.blogspot.com)

### So Long, Pale Male

The most famous Red-tailed Hawk in the world, Pale Male, has finally succumbed to old age. The bird from Fifth Avenue, New York had been a celebrity since the early 1990s, and is the subject of a prize-winning film. See:

[www.thelegendofpalemale.net/?mc\\_cid=91b5e6d789&mc\\_eid=5b824cddca](http://www.thelegendofpalemale.net/?mc_cid=91b5e6d789&mc_eid=5b824cddca)

### BC Bird Alerts

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

- INDIGO BUNTING, Gibsons, May 27

# BCFO Young Birders

*Krista Kaptein, Courtenay*

## Featuring Joshua Brown

For ten years the BCFO has been recognizing and supporting outstanding young birders with the Young Birders Award. One of the earliest recipients of the Award was Joshua Brown of North Vancouver. In 2015, his nominator Russell Cannings noted: "Joshua has been birding with his family for quite a few years, and has recently upped his game to an impressive level. He takes excellent bird photos, posts to birding lists, and submits copious records to eBird. Last May he was part of the "Western Teenagers" team at the Penticton Meadowlark Festival. In August he joined up with two of last year's Young Birder recipients Liron Gertsman and Logan Lalonde for a Vancouver Big Day when they found a real rarity, a Reeve at Reifel Refuge."

The Young Birder Program, the field component for youth, was designed and led by Melissa Hafting who started organizing field trips for young birders in 2014. In 2016 the Young Birder Program was adopted as an official program of BCFO. The trips were memorable for all the youth involved. "I loved getting to spend time with other young birders and hearing their stories and experiences. We were able to make meaningful connections over our shared passion thanks to the program," Joshua says. "I'm grateful for Melissa's leadership and her willingness to take the young birders on trips to look for new birds. A particular highlight was our trip to Illal Creek to look for White-tailed Ptarmigan. We had done a few previous hikes without success for the Ptarmigan, but after a rough 4x4 road and a steep hike to the peak we were rewarded with incredible views of five individuals. It was very special to find such a rare species, a lifer for nearly all



*Joshua Brown in 2015 at the time of his Young Birder Award.*

of us at the time, and it was even better that we did it together as a group."

Joshua is currently studying wildlife biology at McGill University. He offers some thoughts for young people interested in birds: "Take opportunities that

you have to learn - one of my most significant experiences with birds was taking part in the Young Ornithologists Workshop (YOW) at Long Point Bird Observatory with Birds Canada, which happens every August. While there I learned how to band birds and conduct

## THE BCFO YOUNG BIRDER AWARD

This award, inaugurated in 2014, is given to outstanding youth birders, aged 11 to 18, in recognition of their accomplishments, contributions, and engagement with birds and birding in the province. The award welcomes these talented young birders into the birding community. Nominations are sought annually for qualified young birders.

Each recipient of a Young Birder Award receives a plaque, a BCFO ballcap, free BCFO membership (electronic) until age 19, plus other contributed awards.

To be selected for a Young Birder Award, recipients must meet all of the following criteria:

- Be at least 11 years of age, and no more than 18 years of age as of January 1st of the year of the Award.
- Have demonstrated exceptional observational and birding skills well beyond the "novice" level.
- Have made significant contribution to activities in the birding community such as: posting to listservs, entering data to eBird, or participating in local surveys, bird counts, bird banding, and field trips.
- Be sponsored and nominated by a BCFO member who has direct knowledge of the candidate, their birding skills, and their contributions to the birding community.





*Joshua now, volunteering for RSPB at Rathlin Island in Northern Ireland.*

can be a challenge for young birders, especially without a driver's license, but finding a nearby park and birding it regularly as a patch is a great way to learn about your local birds and watch as the species change with the seasons. It's often the dedicated people who visit a park every week who find rarities amongst the usual species."

Joshua is involved with bird surveys and research of all kinds and has worked with Bird Studies Canada, the RSPB, and the Wildlife Trusts; and is the Regional Reviewer on eBird for the Squamish-Lillooet District. He particularly loves seabirds, with his favourite experiences in nature being the times spent at seabird colonies filled with thousands of puffins, murres, and razorbills. Joshua has continued as a member of the BCFO because he likes being part of a group that connects

field studies, and I made connections with Birds Canada mentors who taught me a huge amount. I would thoroughly recommend that any young birder should apply for the YOW. I would also suggest getting involved with bird research, such as citizen science like eBird or the Christmas Bird Count, or bird banding at a local bird observatory."

There can be difficulties for young people, Joshua notes: "Transportation



birders and ornithologists across BC. He also enjoys the magazine and the journal, in which he was pleased to publish an article on a Red Crossbill discovery in 2021. ([bcbirds.bcfo.ca/volume-31-2021/](https://bcbirds.bcfo.ca/volume-31-2021/))

*Two of Joshua's photographs:  
Above: Rock Ptarmigan.  
Left: Pigeon Guillemot.*



# Avian Encounters

## Curlew Treats

As the snow was melting on April 8, Sage Pasay (Quesnel) had a treat photographing this Long-billed Curlew in a local field. Armies of Prince George birders were similarly treating themselves at the Walrath Road site, where dozens of curlews can be seen on a typical day in early April. Interest this year was again heightened by the return of birds wearing leg-tags from a 2019 Bird Studies Canada research program. The birds named Lane, Raven, Jay, Alyssa, Graham, and Schalin were soon spotted, still sporting undamaged tags.

The ability of Long-bills to chow down earthworms can be most impressive. As can be seen on the photograph to the right, the worms are quite substantial, and yet individual birds can be seen to swallow one after another after another and keep on searching for more. They must have great digestion.



## Getting up Close and Personal

*Ted Goshulak (Langley) certainly succeeded with this Spotted Towhee.*



## Pelee Madness

*Clive Keen, Prince George*

One of the most bizarre avian encounters of the year occurred at The Tip, Point Pelee, on May 9. Along with what seemed to be 100,000 of my best friends, I was waiting and hoping at dawn for one of the fabled fallouts of migrant warblers. The fallout never came to pass, and warblers remained in seriously short supply, but among the Bonaparte's Gulls was a ... no it can't be ... that's ridiculous ... tell me I'm not seeing things ... Good God it must be ... a Willow Ptarmigan.

Apparently the Ptarmigan had identified as a gull, as it flew along with them to and from Pelee Island, but while they munched on fish brought in by the surf, it went wandering up towards the trees to see if it could find anything more to its taste.

It has to be said that the crowd –

several hundred battle-hardened birders – was remarkably well behaved. As the bird moved, everyone backed off to give it ample space. Better than that, people tried to work out where the bird was likely to stray, and cleared the area so that it could forage relatively undisturbed. Just one photographer was overcome by excitement (or naïveté) and got a bit close, but the crowd informed him of his error, and he immediately apologized and backed off. It was one of the relatively rare moments when I came to accept that my fellow man is really not so bad as is painted.

How on earth a non-migratory bird that should be at 6,000 feet plus or on the tundra, should be swanning on the beach at the southern tip of Canada, is a puzzle for the ages. Go figure. But I was glad to have witnessed it.

*Photos by author. Note that a very long lens was used, and the photographs are heavily cropped.*





# Southwestern Australia: a Global Biodiversity Hotspot

*Val George, Victoria*

I've just returned from a trip to Australia to visit a niece who moved there from the UK about 15 years ago. This was my third visit, so I've had the opportunity to do a lot of birding in the area where she and her family live about 250 km west of Melbourne. Her husband Jon is a wildlife biologist and an avid birder, so I've been fortunate to have an expert guide and companion. In addition to these visits, I've had opportunities to bird most of the Queensland coast, as well as Tasmania and southeast Australia.

I had not birded western Australia, so when I suggested to Jon – who also hadn't birded that region – that we should do a one-week trip to the southwestern area he jumped at the chance.

The small southwest corner of Australia is designated as a Global Biodiversity Hotspot, one of about three dozen in the world. These areas are of special significance in protecting species biodiversity, have unique ecosystems and unusually large numbers of endemic species.

Southwestern Australia has a great variety of habitats, from coastal to wetlands, to scrubland and forests. The forests that cover much of the region are dominated by several endemic eucalypts: jarrah, karri, wandoo, and others. The endemics that interested us, of course, were the birds – 17 of them; we were also looking forward to seeing other species that weren't in other areas of the country we'd birded.

Birdwatching in the region is amazing, with the birds, especially the endemics, very easy to find – that's according to the tourism websites for the area, so it's gotta be true, eh? Actually, that's not much of an exaggeration.

One of the smartest decisions we made in preparation for the trip was to

hire a guide for a day. The first day of our trip we'd tried a couple of reserves near Mandurah, where we were staying, a small town about an hour's drive south of Perth. We did find some good species including lifers for me such as the beautiful turquoise-blue Splendid Fairywren and Brush Bronzewing, a pigeon; but we got only one of the endemics, the aptly-named Red-capped Parrot. So when we met our guide the following morning and he asked us what we especially wanted to see, Jon and I simultaneously said, "endemics!" "There's 14 of the 17 in the areas we can cover today. We should get all of them," replied our guide. We were somewhat sceptical about his optimism, having previously experienced exaggerated claims by guides.

The first place we went was a shrubby area where we looked for our first endemic, the Western Fieldwren. It took over an hour to find one. Jon and I thought: at this rate it'll take two or three days to meet our guide's target.

We shouldn't have been so cynical. The next place we went we quickly found Western Whistler and Red-winged Fairywren. Then our guide took us to an area of open grassland broken by eucalypts where we found a pair each of our two top target birds: the endangered Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo and the critically endangered Bau-

din's Black-Cockatoo.

We stopped for a picnic lunch in a forested area surrounding a reservoir and picked up several additional endemics: White-breasted Robin, Red-eared Firetail, and a couple of members of the Honeyeater family.

A word here about the Honeyeater family (Meliphagidae) because it's the largest family of birds in the country. It contains about 180 species and is confined to Australasia; Australia has about half them, accounting for about a tenth of all the species on the country's checklist. These birds are some of North American birders' best avian friends – not only do they form a large percentage of potential lifers, they're

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*Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo. All photos by author.*



also some of the easiest to find because they mainly feed on nectar which they get from the flowers on the out-sides of shrubs and trees.

Three of southwestern Australia's endemics are honeyeaters: Western Spinebill, one of the more colourful members with its bright rufous chest and collar, Gilbert's Honeyeater, and one of the larger members, Western Wattlebird.

Visits to a couple more reserves produced the remaining endemics – except for one, the Western Thornbill, a drab LBJ. We'd had several false alarms when we came across the very similar Inland Thornbill, a common and widely distributed species. Our guide wasn't going to be beaten, however. Extending the day well past the time we'd booked him for, he drove us to an area on the outskirts of Perth where we quickly found a small mixed flock of birds in some eucalyptus trees; the flock contained our target species – mission accomplished!

So our guide wasn't exaggerating when he said he'd find us all 14 of the endemics possible in the areas we'd birded that day. He did tell us where we could look for the other three but they were in areas over two hours drive from where we were staying. We



*Above: Brown Falcon. Below: Red-capped Plover.*

decided to give them a miss and instead spend our time looking for other species of interest to us.

Whilst chasing the endemics we did, of course, see many other species. Some of them, such as Rufous Treecreeper and Blue-breasted Fairy-wren which, though not confined to southwestern Australia, have very lim-

ited ranges, added to our life lists.

The parrots (Psittaculidae) and cockatoos (Cacatuidae) are two of my favourite families of birds. Australia is one of the best countries to see them because it has a large number of species and they're seen everywhere you go. These families contain about 60 Australian species, making the group the second largest in the country after the Honeyeaters. In addition to the endemic members, we saw Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, large flocks of noisy pink and grey Galahs and white Long-billed Corellas, Regent Parrot, and Australian Ringneck.

The region has many kilometers of oceanfront with cliffs, sandy beaches and marshland. Here we saw such species as Australian Darter, cormorants such as Little Pied and Little Black, Australian Pelicans, and Silver and Pacific Gulls. We also observed several species of terns, some of which, such as the Crested Tern and the dainty little Fairy Tern, breed in the region.

Raptors were not common. We had single sightings of the massive Wedge-tailed Eagle, the tiny Little Eagle, and a Brown Falcon, a bird similar to our Prai-







rie Falcon. We had two sightings of Eastern Osprey – considered by some authorities to be a separate species from ours – one a pair at a nest with an almost fully fledged young.

Wetland areas, both freshwater and saltwater, produced Black Swans, ducks, such as Australian Shelduck and Maned Duck, grebes, such as Great Crested and Australasian, ibises, such as Australian and Straw-necked, and herons such as White-faced.

We didn't look specifically for shorebirds because most of them were familiar to us as migrants from the northern hemisphere or species we'd previously encountered in Australia. We did, however, record a few when we were looking for other birds: Red-necked Stint, Red-capped Plover, Pied Stilt, and a few others.

Forest and shrubby areas produced many species of small birds. To mention a few to give some idea of the variety: White-browed Scrubwren, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Western Gerygone, Southern Emuwren, Rufous Whistler,

Dusky Woodswallow, Tree Martin, Silveryeye, and Weebill.

North American birders planning a trip will obviously want to know the best places to bird. Hiring a guide for a day, as we did, and picking his or her brain for places other than those visited is the best and most efficient way to get this information. Otherwise, the websites for the main towns in the region – Perth, Mandurah, Bunbury, Margaret River – have very detailed and usually quite accurate information.

The southwestern corner of Australia is well worth a visit, even if you've already birded several other regions in the country.

*Top: New Holland Honeyeater.*

*Right: White-breasted Robin.*





# Birding in Israel

March 14 – April 6, 2023

*John Gordon, Langley/Cloverdale*

I first visited Israel forty-five years ago. Originally I had planned to stay a few weeks before travelling overland to India. Weeks turned into months. I kept a diary of my adventures describing the wonderful sights and "exotic" birds I saw. (I spent my early childhood in Newport, Wales where nothing is exotic, but I digress.) Anyway I had always wanted to return. During my stay I hitch-hiked the length and breadth of the country including several days in the disputed West Bank. I was shown great hospitality by both Israeli and Palestinian families.

The purpose of the second visit would be twofold. First to revisit and photograph places I had written about, and second to attend the 2023 Eilat Bird Festival, something planned for 2019 but cancelled due to the pandemic.

## The Festival

Promotion for the festival states: "Organized by the Israel Ornithological Center (Birdlife Israel) of the SPNI, the Eilat Birds Festival brings together birders from all over the world for an unforgettable birding week during the peak of spring migration in southern Israel. Since the first festival in 2007, the Eilat Festival is now a well-established event and is known in birders' circles as the ultimate package for birding Southern Israel.

"The Festival is based in Eilat and takes in all the major sites and key species of Southern Israel. Besides the Eilat area, the festival package includes excursions further afield to Nizzana and the Negev as well as the famous "Stars of the night" tour to the Dead Sea region."

## Eilat

Situated on the Red Sea and on the southernmost tip of Israel, Eilat is a five-hour drive south of Tel Aviv. Development has impacted wildlife. Acres of prime habitat including vital salt marshes have been lost. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) and others are working to educate government and the public about the value of protecting the remaining habitat.

Eilat would be our home for ten days, seven of which I would be birding while Sandee visited the beaches, the hotel pool, sauna and stores. Isn't life good.

## Conservation

Attending the Eilat Bird Festival was not only to learn about the birds but to experience the important conservation work taking place in Eilat and elsewhere in Israel. There is even cross-border co-operation with neighbouring Jordan and a long-running Barn Owl project. SPNI is also involved in numerous other projects, too many to list here. Our registration fees went to habitat enhancement. Guides donated their time and skills. Following the Eilat

Bird Festival, the Champions of the Flyways held their annual fundraiser and with corporate backing raised a substantial amount.

The Eilat Bird Sanctuary, formally a garbage dump, is now a haven for resident and migratory birds. Work is underway to expand with extensive planting of native shrubs and trees.

Slowly but surely there has been some progress. Lobbying backed up with scientific data from SPNI has put the brakes on proposed installation of wind turbines and power lines. Bird Life Israel is even working in conjunction with Eilat's air traffic control to make sure planes, even commercial jets, are not taking off and landing during peak migration times when thousands of raptors can be found soaring on mid-day and afternoon thermals. Early morning and evening scheduled take-offs are less likely to encounter birds and avoid bird strikes. Normal service returns when migration ends. At one high elevation location a continuous stream of various eagles, buzzards and kites soared on thermals heading northward to Central Europe and the Russian Steppes. At lower elevations Spoonbills and shorebirds were on the

*Below: The Spectacled Bulbul is found in almost every habitat, including gardens and parks. Photos by author.*





as, the species is thriving.

### Sea of Galilee

The second part of the trip was for Sandee, whose wish was to visit Galilee, Nazareth, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. We did that and more. Between the relics I did manage to fit in a few hours of birding. In Galilee I spent an afternoon in the nearby Hula Valley. The contrast from Eilat and Negev Desert was startling. The dry desert heat was replaced by a lush fertile plain. The area was once extensive marshes but had been drained and crops planted. Slowly but surely and with co-operation from government, SPNI and the farming community, the birds are returning.

### Jerusalem

At the Wailing Wall and Temple Mount, Common Swifts swooped above worshippers.

Our hotel on Jaffa Road was within walking distance from the Old City and

conveniently only a twenty-minute walk to the Jerusalem Bird Observatory. The Gazelle Valley was a short taxi ride. Before Jerusalem grew into the bustling city it is today there were once wildlife corridors which allowed animals to move freely through the region. That no longer exists.

In Jerusalem I met up with Naomi, a Birding Pal who had kindly offered to show me around the reserve. Her keen ear found me the Sardinian Warbler, a bird I had seen in Eilat but I hadn't been able to photograph.

The last full day in Israel I visited the Jerusalem Bird Observatory. I joined a group of school children as they attended a bird banding session. Lifers that morning included a Collared Flycatcher and Monk Parakeet and finally after countless hours of searching, a Common Nightingale.

### Safety?

Overall we felt safe wherever we went. It was important to keep an open mind and listen rather than take political stands one way or the other. Even though some of our friends felt concerned I personally don't think Israel is any more dangerous than Mexico or even Surrey, BC.

move as were large numbers of passerines.

### Highlights

McQueen's Buzzard and the Black-Scrub Robin were highlights for the avid listers in the group. The McQueen's offered scope views of them dancing on a lek. One evening we birded the Dead Sea until midnight and had good looks at a Nubian Nightjar. Those were just a few of the 90 lifers I picked upon the trip. Two-hundred-plus species were seen or heard during the week. I ticked 172 that I actually saw.

Native plants were in bloom and a few warblers were passing through and feeding on fruits and insects. One species that has benefited from development is the tiny Palestinian Sunbird. Fifty years ago the species was considered rare and only found where native plants flowered year round. These days, with ornamental planting commonplace in cities and residential are-

*Top: The Black-winged Kite resembles a Short-eared Owl in flight, and is found in the Mediterranean area and Africa.*

*Below: The Citrine Wagtail breeds in Northern Russia and Siberia. Seen here at the Eilat Bird Sanctuary before crossing the Negev Desert.*



Copyright © John Gordon Photography



# Birding From a Hide – in Thailand

*Andy & Marilyn Buhler, Vernon*

This spring we were fortunate enough to be able to travel to Thailand with Eagle-Eye Tours. This birding adventure took us from the lowlands near Bangkok in the South to several mountainous areas around Chiang Mai in the North. Since this was our first-ever time birding on the Asian continent there were numerous bird species whose names we had never even heard of before – Minivets, Tesias, Fulvettas, Minlas, Liocichlas and Sibias among others. I admit we were still sorting out names after our return home. However, at least 260 new species got added to our lifelists. It was a great time of birding!

When we go on birding trips our first imperative is to “see the bird,” then we try to get some photos to act as memory joggers once we return home. For the last few years, we have also brought along a small audio re-

corder. That input allows us to embellish the memories. The recording gets typed up, photos get added in and we have our diary printed up as an “aide-memoire” to look back upon later (needed even more now



*Top: Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush.*

*Left: Kalij Pheasant male.*

*Bottom left: Blue Pitta.*

*Below: Kalij Pheasant female.*

*Photos by authors.*





# UVic Birding Club Survey of the Hesquiat Harbour Herring Spawn

*Andreas Lohstraeter, Aiva Noringseth, and Hannah Hickli,*

## The IBA

Hesquiat Lake Area Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (IBA) is located on the central west coast of Vancouver Island. This site was designated as an IBA for supporting globally important populations of breeding Marbled Murrelets and includes the adjacent watersheds of the rivers leading into Hesquiat Lake and Hesquiat Harbour.

Last June, IBA Caretaker Dianne Ignace and her family hosted members of the University of Victoria Birding Club, as well as the IBA Provincial Coordinator, to update Marbled Murrelet counts, the likes of which had not been surveyed for over 20 years. This year, in early March, youth ornithologists from the Birding Club returned to Hesquiat to complete the first-ever survey of a famous avian phenomenological event, the Pacific Herring

spawn, which occurs yearly in the harbour.

## Hesquiat

Hesquiat is located 50 km north of Tofino tucked quietly in an hourglass harbour beneath towering Strathcona Provincial Park mountains to the east, among stands of great green fir and spruce. A living extension of the ocean and the rugged coast, this territory has been inhabited by the Hesquiaht people since time out of mind. Today, Dianne Ignace and her family are among the sole permanent residents of this remote region. It was through hearing Ignace's stories during last year's Marbled Murrelet survey that we were made aware and intrigued by anecdotes of enormous Pacific Herring spawning events that occur each spring in the harbour and the wildlife frenzy they fuel; Ignace informed us that this dramatic happening attracts large aggregations of seabirds, a well-surveyed

phenomenon in nearby IBAs such as Barkley Sound, where thousands of gulls and seabirds are attracted by the ephemeral bonanza of energy-rich eggs. Thus, we returned this year with the primary goal of conducting adequate counts to properly quantify the extent of foraging birds during this never-before-surveyed herring spawn event.

Pacific Herring are a key forage fish that, much like salmon, provide a fundamental seasonal food source that links terrestrial and aquatic food webs of the West Coast. They also hold intrinsic and cultural importance to many coastal First Nations across the lands now known as British Columbia. Herring were once harvested commercially on the Northwest coast of Vancouver Island but heavy extraction has significantly contracted their range and resulted in the loss of entire breeding populations. This decline in abundance, as well as a shrinking range, has affected the phenological abundance of fish

predators and egg foragers such as coastal waterbirds. Ecological monitoring efforts are therefore important not only to inform ornithological conservation but also to enhance our understanding of the fluctuating distribution of a key cultural and ecological resource.

## First Survey Day

With skipper Jeff Ignace and IBA Caretaker Dianne Ignace keeping us afloat, we took to the waters on our first day to perform a full harbour survey. The milky, pale

*Below: The survey crew enjoying the last of the surveys in sunny Hesquiat.*



turquoise waters on the eastern shores of Hesquiat Harbour indicated our silvery fish of interest were in attendance and busy—a sight also welcomed by thousands of birds and marine mammals that had been enjoying the spawn over the past few days. As we figure-eighted through the harbour, our group of six surveyors, four equipped with a running knowledge of the PNW gull hybrid complex and two holding a lifetime's experience on the land, swapped bird knowledge, harvested roe, and enumerated over 11,000 waterbirds. Around 75% of these foraging birds were gulls, overwhelmingly Glaucous-winged gull hybrids (nearing 1% of the national population for the species), with a good showing from California, Thayer's, and Short-billed gulls as well. Surprising to us was the degree that GWGU hybrids with Herring and Western gulls showed a high phenotypic strength to the latter parentage, with hybrid gulls with light eyes and dark mantles, respectively, being a common sight along the spawn. Gulls generally stayed in species-specific chunks amidst the larger flock. We conjectured this perhaps indicates that the herring spawn is not only a critical nutrition source in early spring, but also an important social space during the lead-up to the breeding season. Our hosts informed us that this was the largest magnitude (density and length) spawn they had seen in decades, a positive sign, corroborating an apparent increase in herring biomass since last year's encouragingly large spawn (which was estimated at nearly five times the size of Hesquiat Harbour's smallest recorded spawn in 2012).

In addition to the vessel-based IBA survey, we completed four shoreline surveys following Birds Canada's BC Coastal Waterbird Survey (CWS) methodology along two different routes, roughly North and South along the harbour shore. All CWS that we completed contained large mixed-gull flocks congregating on shore to pick through beached roe or to rest when the wind was at its worst. While gulls dominated

the harbour, we also saw large gatherings of shorebirds lining Antoine's Point, a sandbar north of Hesquiat IR-1. Around 800 "shorbs" feasted on herring roe washed ashore on kelp wrack in great sheets, including 475 Black Turnstone and 250 Dunlin. At Duck Pond, northeast of Matlahaw Point and curving along the west coast, 20 species and over 1,800 individuals were observed; as the name suggests, our count included an abundance of Mallard, Green-winged Teal, and American Wigeon. The following survey, along the inner harbour to Surf Point, resulted in 24 species observations and a minimum of 3,142 individuals. Other sightings of note include a dense flock of at least 3,000 Surf Scoter and four Black Scoter foraging in the bay and a relatively large group of 20 Greater Yellowlegs seen regularly skittering across the shore. Our four CWS in Hesquiat are the first completed in the area, and thus initiate the worthy task of maintaining long-term, localized monitoring to determine how coastal waterbird populations change over time.

#### **Non-avian Encounters**

A great deal of notable non-avian wildlife encounters were made during surveys and in our down time spent hiking and exploring the peninsula. The herring spawn undoubtedly incited the presence of grey whales staging in the harbour, our best estimate being 35 individuals present at one time, exhibiting behaviours such as nursing calves and apparent "rubbing" (swirling and twirling their bodies along the substrate to remove ectoparasites) along a sandbar at Antoine's Point. Other species of note include sea otters, black bears, and amphibians of conservation concern including the northern red-legged frog, northwestern and wandering salamanders. Four hours of ultrasonic recording yielded two detections of California Myotis calls, an expected bat species for winter activity but a first acoustic record in the region.

#### **Five Surveys**

An idea that sprouted from an offhand comment made by the Hesquiat Lake Area IBA caretaker, our survey trip performed four coastal waterbird surveys and one vessel-based IBA survey during the first ornithological survey of the Hesquiat Harbour herring spawn. In all, we saw 42 waterbird, corvid, and raptor species foraging in the spawn on the shores and waters during our surveys of Hesquiat Harbour, in addition to 14 passerine species. The herring spawn seen in the harbour this year may be the largest in decades, indicating a positive sign for herring recovery on the Northwest coast. While our surveys provide a snapshot of the spawn activity this year, we hope that this work is a part of continued interest in performing avian surveys in the more inaccessible and remote lengths of the herring spawn range, work that should maintain priority of working with Indigenous communities that hold wealths of place-based knowledge. Moreover, if the Hesquiat herring spawn continues a positive trend over the coming years, it would be beneficial to return to Hesquiat Harbour to monitor the resurgence of this avian and broader ecological phenomenon.

#### **Thanks**

The completion of these projects involved extensive collaboration with and reliance on the local and Hesquiat community. We would like to especially extend our gratitude to Dianne and Jeff Ignace, whose passion, knowledge, and skill supported our fieldwork from beginning to end. Thank you also to our funders, BCFO and BC Nature, who provided funding support that resourced our survey. We hope our work begins to highlight the importance of connecting with local stewards of the Northwest coast who hold wealths of knowledge, and whose collaboration can allow incredible new insights such as those gathered through this work.

If you would like to connect with the UVic Birding Club, find us on Facebook and Instagram. Send the young birders in your life our way!



# Dipper Nests Revisited

Charles Helm, Tumbler Ridge

In the March 2023 edition of *BC Birding* an article I wrote was published, entitled “On Dippers and Their Nests.” In it I questioned why in a single season a pair of American Dippers had built two seemingly perfect nests at Bullmoose Falls, rather than reusing the first one for a second brood.

I included photos of each nest, and asked: “Was one of the seemingly perfect nests not quite up to Dipper standard? If so, what was wrong with it, that could justify all that extra effort rather than some retrofitting?” The article ended with the thought that I might never learn the answers, but that sometimes just pondering and wondering is as good as knowing.

In fact, the probable answer became apparent sooner than expected. And what’s more, it might have been apparent to an observant reader based on the information provided in the article, along with Figure 1, which is reproduced here.

A few weeks after the first cross country skiing visit to Bullmoose Falls, during which the two nests were identified, my wife and I skied to the site again, expecting to find an unchanged pair of nests. Instead, we were dismayed to find that a small rock slab had become dislodged from the ceiling above the second nest, and had come to rest on the top of the nest.

This unfortunate evidence prompted a review of the first nest, and I then noticed what had been ‘hiding in plain sight’, as is perfectly evident in Figure

1: there were a number of small slabs of rock lying on the lower portion of the nest, and an irregularity at the top of the nest opening showed where one of these slabs had possibly grazed the front of the nest as it fell. As these slabs lay on top of the nest material, they clearly post-dated construction of the nest.

Entering the realm of conjecture, we can suggest that this might have been a traumatic event for the Dipper pair, which may have served as a catalyst for the decision to rebuild. The fact that falling slabs of rock landed on two nests in one year suggests that this may be a risk factor for Dippers, a trade-off for the benefits of nesting in preferred habitat close to a waterfall on a hard-to-access ledge. And can the repeated visits perhaps contribute to the dislodgement of the rocks?

In the New Testament (Matthew 7: 24–27) we are advised to build our house on rock, in contrast to the folly of building a house on sand. This evidently does not apply to building your house on rock if another rock is situat-

ed immediately above it, ready to drop on your home.

Nonetheless, there are benefits to building a house on rock under a ceiling. In Lesotho in the early 20th century, the missionary Ellenberger constructed and lived in a “Cave House,” in which the ceiling was conveniently provided by a rock overhang. There his infant son Paul was born. Remarkably, that ceiling contained the tracks of the ropod dinosaurs, the ancestors of birds. Paul Ellenberger’s infancy may have been globally unique, as his first memory might well have been gazing up at the ceiling and contemplating dinosaur tracks. It might be mere coincidence, but in addition to going on to becoming a priest he devoted much of his life to the study of dinosaur tracks, and became a global authority on the topic.

Tracking is the art of not just looking, but seeing and interpreting – not just tracks, but other traces too. In the case of birds, these include feeding traces, eggshell fragments, nests, etc. It is also a continuous learning process, in

*The first Dipper nest, with slabs of rock overlying its lower portion. Photo by author.*





which errors are made, realized, and corrected, and lessons are hopefully learned that prevent repeat errors.

So it was with the Dipper nests. Why had I not correctly interpreted the evidence the first time round? Perhaps I was tired and unobservant after a 10 km ski. Perhaps the identification of

two nests aroused my interest, to the exclusion of a more detailed interpretation. Perhaps I just assumed that Dipper nests are immune to such depredations. Whatever the cause, I was not “seeing” properly, and I needed to “get my eye in.”

Returning to the site in the winter of

2023/24 will be intriguing. Will the damage inflicted by the slab at the second nest necessitate the construction of yet another nest? If so, I will learn from experience, and will be sure to check for evidence of damage from falling rocks.

## Briefing 1

### “We prefer the old familiar faces, thank you”

An interesting experiment (of the unplanned kind) is going on in the United Kingdom. Some familiar and well-loved birds of the countryside and the cities are disappearing, while new immigrants are appearing. The avifauna is changing, probably in consequence of both environmental change and peoples’ activities on the land. The adoption of industrial-scale agriculture since about 1950 has led to the disappearance of hedgerows and natural meadow, leading to significant reduction in numbers of popular “field birds” (e.g., Skylarks, Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer, Twite, Meadow Pipit, Barn Owl. and even the storied Cuckoo.

Conversely, since the 1970s, Little Egrets have crossed the English Channel from France and by the 1990s spread through much of the British Isles and began to breed there. An elegant bird, it is a relatively popular addition to the British avifauna (who can resist admiring bright yellow “socks” at the bottom of long, jet-black legs?). The British population is the northernmost in the world. Its northward movement undoubtedly is a consequence of climate change.

Other birds have responded to the climate. For example, the Blackcap and Chiffchaff, two small, normally migrant warblers, have established wintering populations to general approval in southern England.

The story is not so favourable for some other species. The Red Kite, formerly common in the country, was

hunted and poisoned to virtual extinction by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; a remnant population consisting of only a few individuals persisted in a remote part of Wales. Attempts at rehabilitation of the population began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and a major effort was undertaken after 1950. The result is a thriving population in England and Wales and reintroduction to Scotland. Unfortunately, the enterprising birds have extended their usual diet of field mice, rabbits and other small game to include picnic meats laid out by humans for their own consumption. Apparently, they have even learned to grab meat from the hand. Nor are game-keepers happy with the habits of the birds.

Ring-necked Parakeets are medium-sized parrots native to India and south Asia. They appeared in the wild in England in 1969, probably as escaped cage birds, and now number some 10,000 individuals. They reside mostly in southeast England, where they have made themselves unpopular by devel-

oping a taste for orchard fruit. Surprisingly, severe winter weather does not appear to discourage them. The parrot’s noisy, boisterous habits and the suspicion that these birds coopt nesting holes from other birds also upset many people.

The British are seriously concerned for their birds. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has over a million members, easily besting all the British political parties combined. And they seem generally to prefer their traditional countryside and town birds. Rapidly expanding species (the parrots) and ones that behave in inconvenient ways (the kites) are definitely not so well valued. But that rather reminds one of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century experience with the Starlings, both here and there. The old familiar faces appear to be the local favorites wherever one goes.

Michael Church (Vancouver), with notes from *The Economist*.

Right:

A  
Little  
Egret  
getting  
Some  
Respect



# Birding Crossword

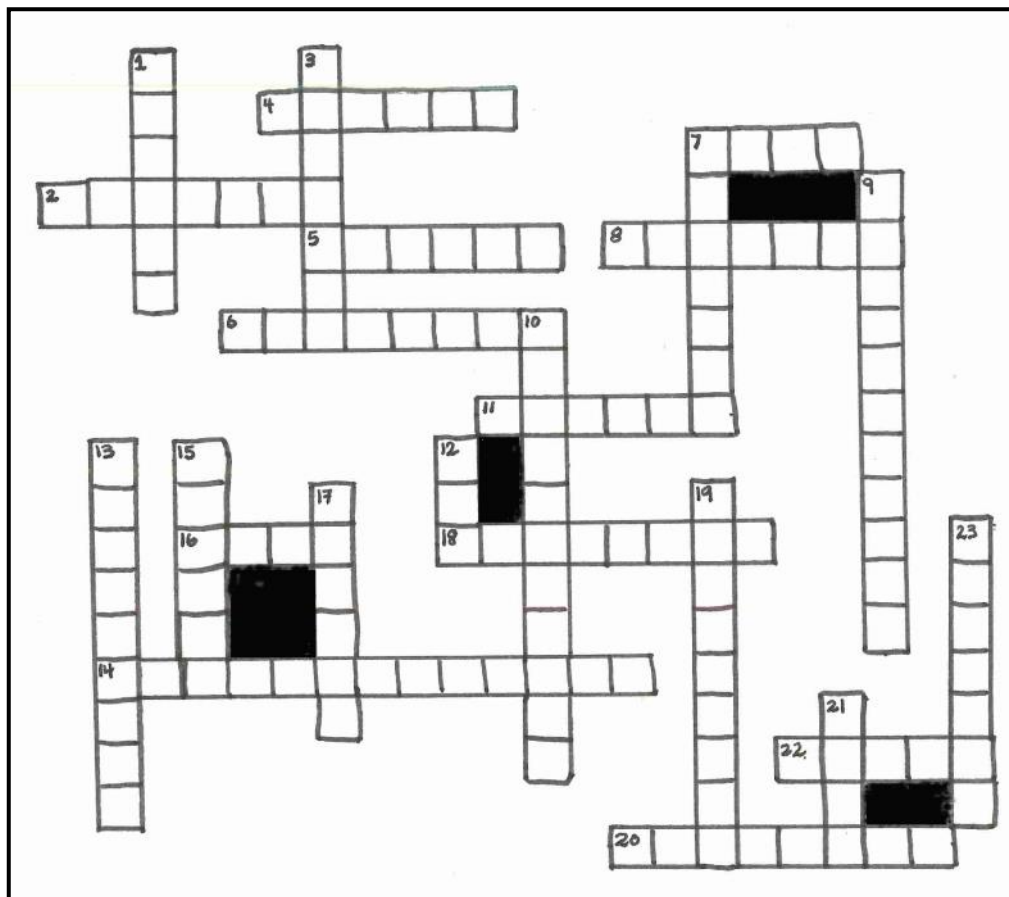
This BC-bird-related crossword was prepared by Hannah Hickli (Victoria) who thanks Rebecca Reader-Lee, Emma Reader-Lee, Aiva Noringseth and Liam Ragan for their help.

## ACROSS

- 2 Dystopian delicacy of Cronenberg's *Crimes of the Future*, and gulls
- 4 Migration autobahn
- 5 Electric, stovetop, airborne
- 6 Well-known Park, where birds originated
- 7 Strong, in Pyle's terms
- 8 Flight feather
- 11 Big in the sky, small in the stream
- 14 Hollywood's favourite eagle
- 16 Apt naming would make a RNDU jealous
- 18 Modern birds are this type of dinosaur
- 20 Canadensis demands that you pull, forcefully
- 22 Notorious National icon

## DOWN

- 1 Authoritarian aerial insectivore
- 3 Colour distinguishes geography
- 7 Common occupation for a shrike
- 9 Sapsucker or merganser
- 10 Layman's accipiter
- 12 Songbird's enemy
- 13 Shares an Arabic root word with the former prison Alcatraz
- 15 Different turdid
- 17 Inhaler instructions
- 19 A plant storage structure similar to a bulb, or, a social insect
- 21 By ear, progeny of pigeon and owl
- 23 Affix to the avian order



## Rara Avis

Adrian Dorst (Tofino) photographed this Black and White Hawk-Eagle at Yelapa, Mexico, this past winter. This species is considered rare in Western Mexico other than in spots hundreds of miles to the south, but Adrian has seen the bird regularly in the Yelapa region: it is probably the most reliable location in Western Mexico to view the species.

In spite of seeing the bird reasonably often, this was only the second time Adrian had seen it perched.



## Briefing 2

### Spartina Woe

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

The East Asia–Australasia flyway is the world's most important migration route for coastal water birds. It includes the entire 18,000 km long coast of China. This coast is particularly important because it provides the first major stopping point between the summer grounds in Siberia and the birds' destinations from southeast Asia to Australia and New Zealand, and there are (or were) abundant stopping places. Birds feed and rest on the extensive tidal mudflats along the China coast. It is a matter of great concern then, that smooth cordgrass [*Spartina alterniflora*] has invaded many of these flats. It is tall and grows to great density, effectively making it impossible for the birds to forage on areas where it is established.

The grass is native to eastern North America and, paradoxically, was deliberately introduced to China in 1979 – a time of great concern there for food production and relative insensitivity to collateral environmental effects. The purpose of the introduction was to stabilise the flats to allow agricultural or urban development. *Spartina* not only achieved that purpose, it blocked shipping channels and ruined inshore shell fisheries. And it has spread far beyond the intended treatment areas to occupy, today, 68,000 hectares (680 km<sup>2</sup>) – an area that would be, if one compact block, 26 km square. Contemporary China – increasingly wealthy and increasingly concerned with the state of the environment – has resolved to eliminate the grass by 2025. But it is doubtful that this goal can be achieved, even with the human and material resources that China can now bring to bear on the project.

There appear to be four viable routes to elimination: digging the weed out; poisoning it; drowning it; or burying it. All have disadvantages. Poison

seems undesirable in the open coastal environment and, to control *Spartina*, must be re-administered in successive years; drowning the grass has proven to be expensive, mainly to build the necessary dam to control water level; further, water drowns the infauna upon which the birds depend. Digging up or burying the plant is expensive and neither activity fully eliminates it – follow-up hand removal is necessary, while methods involving earthmoving equipment compact the soil and disturb infauna and their habitat. Ultimately, the method of control will have to be adapted to local conditions. To this end, the removal project will be administered via the coastal provinces and local communities. Elimination of *Spartina* from the Chinese coast is a hard problem, but the continued full viability of the flyway may depend upon its resolution.

#### Reference

Strokstad, E. 2023. China battles alien weed at unprecedented scale. *Science* 379: 972. (A brief news article.)

### Why Did the Virginia Rail Cross the Road?

*This particular Virginia Rail wanted to show off to a dozen birders on May 17, 2023 at a point near Sparrow Lake, Muskoka County, Ontario. The birders were taking part in an Eagle-Eye Tours trip to Point Pelee and Algonquin, and were on the final brief stop before concluding the trip. It was a fine conclusion to a fine trip. Photos by Clive Keen.*

Details of the next Pelee-Algonquin tour can be found at  
[www.eagle-eye.com/tour/point-pelee-algonquin-park-birding-tour/](http://www.eagle-eye.com/tour/point-pelee-algonquin-park-birding-tour/)





# For Your Ears Only

Corey Mazurat, Kelowna

On the second of May I accompanied an elementary school class on a birding day in and around downtown Kelowna (photo right). The students had started birding last September but had never ear-birded before. After a brief explanation of what my gear was and what we'd be doing with it, we set out to listen to the locals.

We ended up hearing and seeing around 30 taxa, at least according to my eBird list, with the usual suspects in full force. Four Bald Eagles were a treat for both the students and some interested on-lookers, but my highlight was a very enthusiastic Merlin who dazzled



on the wooden beams of the structure upon which he was hopping, and one student said she clearly heard rustling and scratching when he preened his feathers.

A pair of Canada Geese (photo below) with a fresh clutch of 12 goslings glared balefully as passers-by ooh-ed and ahh-ed. The students were instantly charmed and quickly dubbed the geese Romeo and Juliet – though it was a fierce debate as to which goose was

which, with the bigger goose eventually being crowned Romeo. Not everyone was convinced, though, and I did hear one dissenting student say “... yeah, but my mom is taller than my dad, so the bigger one isn't always the boy.” In addition to the typical sounds of the adults, the mic enabled us to hear the gentle pitter-patter of the goslings' feet on the grass, as well as the soft, unsure peeps as they forayed into the pond.

The benefits of using a microphone



us with his aerial displays and piercing cries.

We managed to get some particularly excellent recordings of a Brewer's Blackbird (photo above). He was entirely unaffected by our presence, and actually seemed interested in the behaviours of the small humans who pointed a big fuzzy microphone at him. Thanks to the noise-isolating properties of a shotgun mic, the “chuk ... chuk ... churrrrrr” of the call was easily heard over the headphones. We were also able to hear the scratching of his feet





and recorder were clear when we went to Rotary Marsh, a small, protected wetland just off Lake Okanagan. Initially it seemed a cacophony composed by an angry bird god, but once the students could aurally tune out the subdued and delicate honking of the Canada Geese and the muted, gentle trill of the Red-winged Blackbirds, the soft grrr-woof of the female American Wigeon – not to mention the chuff-chuff-chuff-ing of an Osprey in its nest -- were easily heard.

The final activity was a sound map. Students chose a spot on the grass and sat with their eyes closed, listening to the sounds of the world around them. Then they tried to represent the sounds via a quick pencil mark on a piece of paper. An example is to the right.

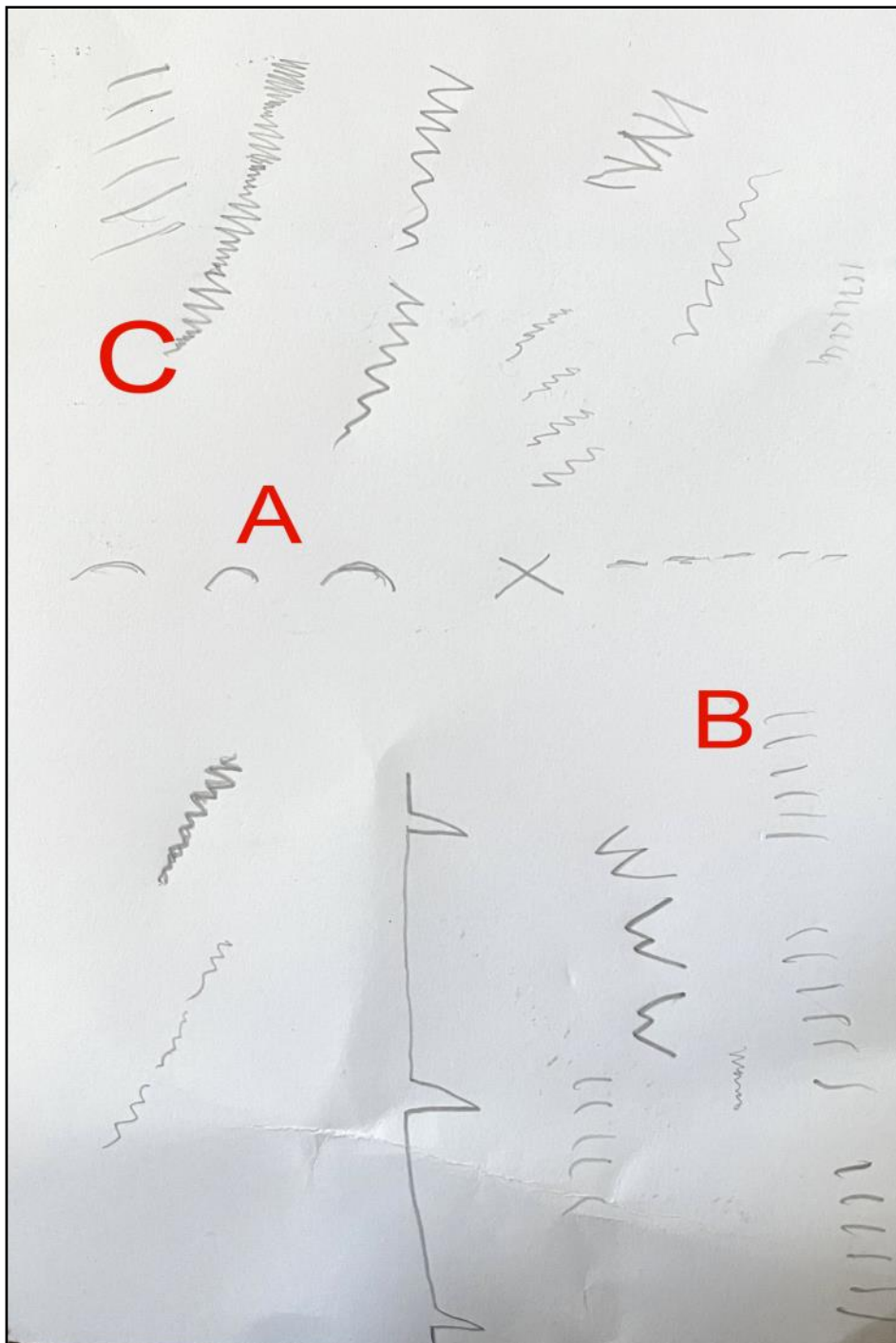
The 'x' at the centre represents the location where the student was sitting, and the top of the page is the area they faced. Each map took about 10 minutes of listening to create.

Figure A is the student's representation of a Mallard's quacking. Interestingly enough, the spectrogram for the mallard shows a similar arched shape, especially in the 2k-4k range.

Figure B represents the honking of a flock of Canada Geese who flew overhead. The repeating pattern of six lines really replicates the repeated calls of the geese – as soon as I saw it I knew it was the geese. Figure C shows the machine-gun racket of an annoyed red squirrel – as if there's any other kind.

Though there isn't room to show other examples, many of the students' drawings were quite close to the actual spectrograms of the birds. When I ran some of my recordings through software and plotted it to a single image, the resulting audio map showed a striking resemblance to the students' diagrams.

The sound map doesn't show the tempos or periodicity of the calls – everything is on one page, after all, and so if you didn't know you would think the geese and the ducks and the red-winged blackbirds were all making



noises at once, and at the same volume, and for the same amount of time – but it's a very intuitive way to transcribe sounds for yourself. It helps you to think about describing sound, and it works well as an aide-memoire. I was recently in Banff for an outdoor educators' conference and as I was in my hotel room one morning, I heard an unusual call outside. It didn't repeat immediately but while it was fresh in my memory, I grabbed a pen and scrib-

bled down a quick sketch of how it sounded to me. This enabled me to later compare it to actual spectrograms and discover that the weird call in question was actually that of a ... prairie dog. Well, it was good practice for the next time my mobile runs out of battery, anyway. Happy birding, and keep your ears open!



# Gone Fishing

Chris Siddle, Vernon

## Twitching and Dipping

### The Twitch

Twitching is when a birder makes a special trip to see a bird that's (usually) out of range. Imagine that a Pine Warbler has been seen at Reifel Island and that you're home in Chilliwack. In a classic twitch, time is of the absolute essence. There's not a moment to be lost. If you have a spouse, you inform that person that you have to leave now. You take the shortest, fastest route to the location where the warbler was last seen. If you have to wait a day because of medical appointments or job requirements, ok, that's still a twitch, but if you just put off the twitch for days because you're ambivalent about doing the twitch, that's not really a twitch, is it?

Hesitancy usually marks the beginning of the end of the twitching phase of a birder's life. When images of snarled traffic enroute, speeding tickets, crowds of ignorant beginners crowding an urban street to glimpse the bird in someone's yard, the homeowner not necessarily sympathetic to a crowd of strangers after a dickybird...if such dark images flash through your mind faster than does a pleasing mental of the desired bird, you're done, mate. Your twitching days are over. All that remains for you to do is to admit you don't twitch anymore, but such an admission can be very difficult to make because it often seems that by no longer twitching you are also leaving behind spontaneity, energy, in a word, youth.

Twitching has long since entered the mainstream of the English language. It's included in the Oxford English Dictionary. Several times when I have been birding, complete nonbirder strangers have asked me if I'm twitching. They always seemed pleased with themselves that they know the word,



*A Pine Warbler – but at Point Pelee, not Reifel.*

giving an extra emphasis to twitching as if it were a magic word. To hear the word used by a non-birder is not a pleasant experience. It's jarring, and irritating, like hearing Grandma use an expression she thinks is cool, up to date, and cutting edge, but one which teenagers, the true distributors of new language, stopped using light years ago.

How and when did twitching as a term originate? Mark Cocker, author of *Tales of a Tribe*, a recollection of the British birding scene of the 1960 and 1970s, tells the story of two top London birders in the 1960s who were part of a ten-birder committee whose job it was to check out the accuracy of rarity reports in the London area. Bob Emmett and Howard Menhurst would double on Emmett's Matchless 350 motorcycle. In the cool climate of southern England, often the two men would become chilled during their open air trips, and Menhurst, in particular, became known for his post-journey shaking. Thus twitch was born.

Twitch is a lovely word. It captures the involuntary nature of the birding obsession, the excitement of the chase, the snappy response, the race to the bird. It conjures up an exciting period

in a birder's existence when he or she was free enough to drop everything to try to see a bird. It speaks to me of both slavery (to an obsessive need) and freedom to immediately pursue an enslaving desire. *Twitch* is a verb that cannot be stretched to include any other activity. You can't twitch and also drop off a letter at the post box. You can't twitch and take Granny for a sightseeing trip too.

Birders speak of "needing" a bird, meaning, for me, they badly would like to see the bird and check it off on that achingly vacant space next to its name on their personal checklist. For example, last week, when I read the eBird report of rare species seen in BC within the past day or two, I immediately spotted "Black-tailed Gull" (Esquimalt Lagoon). I have never seen a Black-tailed Gull. Squat, long-winged, and sporting a black tail, it would be an excellent addition to my list of vagrant gulls. I need a Black-tailed Gull. The outlines of a plan to twitch the gull flare within me, then almost as quickly die down. Images of the long, too-often repeated drive over the Coquihalla, the slow traffic on Highway 1 between Abbotsford and the Port Mann Bridge, the hassle of the ferry... my need for a

Black-tailed Gull fades, but does not die. It's still with me, but only as a minor ache.

### The Dipping

What happens when you twitch but fail to find the bird? That's called "dipping" and it's an awful feeling. Disappointment doesn't begin to capture the crush of the spirit. "Oh, the bird was here a minute ago!" says an undeserving clot who saw the bird. "Too bad you didn't leave five minutes earlier," volunteers a cruel bastard. Remember how the English prolonged the agony of William Wallace in Braveheart? Such an execution should be performed on the last speaker, but even more slowly. I want to take his beating heart from his chest and throw it at his feet.

Besides anger there is self-recrimination. What a waste of gas, what an unnecessary polluting of the air with emissions, what a waste of money on fuel, what a waste of my time!

I should have spent my time with my spouse, building a better relationship. I should have done something fun with the children, something they'd remember with happiness and gratitude for the rest of their lives. But, no, I went chasing a bird and, unlike this crowd of know-nothings who saw it (but didn't deserve to), I arrived too late. No, the bird has gone and I will never see its like again.

The drive home is long and sad.

What is the origin of "dipping"? I briefly searched the internet and came up empty. It's probably British, a term possibly borrowed (and never returned) from some obscure game. Maybe a reader will write in and enlighten me as to dip's origin. While the word's etymology is unclear, the torment felt by dipping is very clear to anyone who has experienced it. The Australian comedy writer and birder, Sean Dooley, wrote that the pain of dipping increases with the distance you've twitched. If you've flown from Melbourne, Victoria, to Townsville, Queensland, for a Black-tailed Gull only

to be told that it hasn't been seen since last Thursday (a week ago) the pain of the dip becomes "a near suicidal existential crisis."

Sean's story is clearly showing its age. What about emails, texts, etc. warning him that the gull wasn't being seen anymore? He's silent on the subject. Nowadays no one would twitch without first using the latest technology he/she knew how to use to find out if the bird was still around and where it had last been seen. However, I do like the point he's making and his description of the pain felt. If you have birded anywhere in Australia, or if you just want a good laugh or two, check out his two books, *The Big Twitch* and *Anoraks to Zitting Cisticola*. Sean has an outstanding ability to see the ridiculous, yet wonderful, world of the birder.

Younger birders are at a great advantage over 70-somethings like me when using communication technologies like Discord, TikTok, Facebook, Messenger, RipRap, SlipSlap, and other tech thingees. As for me, I still rely on a house phone. I have a cell phone but can't seem to remember how to access my messages. If I hear about a rarity before it appears on the previously mentioned eBird list, it's because someone younger and tech savvy has

phoned or mailed me. It's nice when young'uns remember their elders.

### Postscript

The longest distance I have twitched was about 1400 km in early spring of 1987. I was deeply into BC provincial listing and needed a White-headed Woodpecker. I learned by phone that one was coming to a feeder at a house on Anarchist Mountain, east of Osoyoos. It was Spring Break so I was free from teaching. I drove almost non-stop from Fort St. John to Anarchist, found the house and for the next two days sat in my vehicle, staring out the window, waiting for the White-headed Woodpecker to show. The bird never appeared. Forty-eight hours was the limit of my patience. Later, back home, I learned that the woodpecker had changed to a neighbour's feeder and had been seen frequently less than a quarter km away from where I had been sitting.

That dip left a long, deep scar on my soul.

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*Below: A Black-backed Woodpecker, surely the object of many a twitch. Scott Thomson photographed this female, one of a pair, on Bluenose Mountain near Lumby, BC. Unusually, the site was not associated with a burn area.*





# Bird Photographers' Corner

*Clive Keen, Prince George*

## Post-Production Magic

"The White-winged Crossbill photograph below is complete rubbish, deserving only instant deletion."

If I'd shown the original shot, straight from the camera, the statement above would have appeared entirely true. In the original, the Crossbill occupied a tiny part of the frame: a huge amount of cropping would be needed for it to gain our attention, surely destroying the resolution. Then, there was hardly any separation of the bird from the background, so it was largely lost in the jumble. On top of that, there were distractions all over the image, so the eye could not linger on the bird. All in all, it appeared to be a complete no-hoper.

In the digital age, though, miracles can happen.

### Cropping

The heaviest weapons against extreme cropping are upscaling tools, such as Topaz's Gigapixel. They can pluck detail from thin air, turning low-res into high-res in jaw-dropping fashion. The Crossbill photograph did not in fact require upscaling weaponry – Topaz's AI Sharpen proved to be enough on this occasion, but it required double service.

A trick I've learned recently is to use AI Sharpen twice, using a mask each time. First, I'll mask out the rest of the image, and sharpen just the bird, taking care not to over-sharpen any of it. Then, I'll go back and see what parts of the bird will cope with another dose of sharpening. In this instance, I found that the bill would accept double-sharpening without looking phoney.

### Separation

The next stage in the process was to create separation between the bird and the background. The standard way of doing this is to increase the tonal difference between subject and back-

ground, which is easy to do with the latest photo-editing programs. In this case, I just lightened the background until it started to look unnatural, and then throttled back a bit. Separation was greatly improved, but not yet enough. An additional trick I found when working on this photograph was to ensure that the colour of subject and background are distinct. By partly desaturating the background, removing most of its red, the bird popped out from the jumble. I could have added saturation to the bird for further accentuation, but the bird would then be misrepresented, which is of course a no-no in birdtography. Instead, I added a small amount of vignetting to give a muted spotlight effect.

### Removing Distractions

Distractions, of course, can undo all the good work in getting the eye to stay on the bird. It's rare for a bird photograph not to have distractions in the background. Fortunately, today's clone tools, content-aware fills and spot-healing brushes make light work of these. This is not misrepresenting the bird, so gives no ethical problems.

The final result might not be a prize winner – it was, after all, rubbish before post-production – but the magic of today's photo-editing tools can make at least nylon purses out of sow's ears.

## How Low Can You Get?

Another point raised by the Crossbill photograph concerns getting down and dirty. We all know that when photographing birds located on the ground it is essential to get the camera down low. But this can mean sprawling in the mud and, for those of us past our prime, trouble getting not just down but back up again. There is apparently a fix.

The solution I'm working on is, first, to carry a shooting stick (a walking stick with fold-out seat). When a low-down bird offers a photo op I'll take a seat on my one-legged stool and hold the camera close to the ground with the monitor angled up. I can then shoot away with the camera just inches from the ground using the monitor rather than the viewfinder. In theory it's a perfect solution. With enough practice I might even get good at it. Let me know if it works for you.

*Below: A White-winged Crossbill shot that somehow survived the delete button.  
Photo by author, April 2023.*



