BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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Keeping cool on a very hot day. Anna's Hummingbird bathtime by Dennis Forsyth. See page 3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Advertising Rates
Full page: $125 per issue or $112.50 each for four or more issues.
Half page: $75 per issue or $67.50 each for four or more issues.
Quarter page: $40 per issue or $36 each for four or more issues.

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

BCFO Officers & Directors

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AGM Planning: Gary Davidson
Archivist/ Librarian: Les Gyug
BC Birding (Newsmagazine) Editor: Clive Keen
Print Distribution: Kaitlyn York
British Columbia Birds (Journal) Editor: Nathan Hentze
Production Editor: Daryl Henderson
Featured Photographer: Carlo Giovanella
Membership Secretary: Larry Cowan
Two-day Trips: Paul Foth
Website: TBA
Zoom Presentation Coordinator: Larry Cowan

Committees
BC Bird Records Committee: Joachim Bertrands, Chair (Victoria), Dianne Cooper (Cranbrook), Jeremy Gatten (Saanichton), Ian Cruikshank (Victoria), Liron Gertsman (Vancouver), Michael Force (Kelowna), Mark Phinney (Dawson Creek).

Steve Cannings Award Committee: TBA

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

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

BCFO Short Trips

The Directors are looking for ideas for BCFO two-day and three-day field trips. These trips are free to members (non-members are charged $30, which covers BCFO membership.)

The 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.

If you have ideas for a short trip, Paul Foth would be delighted to hear from you.

paulrfoth@gmail.com

Upcoming Zoom Presentations

21 September 2022
Human Caused Bird Mortality. Collection of bird carcasses – final year 2022. *Tara Imlay*

19 October 2022
Confessions of a Seabird Addict. *Michael Force*

16 November 2022
Costa Rica – Should it be on your bucket list? *Clive Keen*

Contents

Cover Photographs

Front: The Anna's Hummingbird shots were taken this August by Dennis Forsyth (Denman Island) on a decidedly hot day. He used a Canon R5 with Canon EF-S 60 mm macro lens mounted on a tripod, with a remote shutter release. The ISO was set at 1600, shutter speed at 1/1600th and aperture of 3.2.

Back: *The Narwhal* missed out on John Gordon's Red-breasted Sapsucker photograph, as they only had space for landscape format. Their magazine's loss was our gain. See page 16 for details.

President's Message

Gary Davidson, Nakusp

Despite having to wait three years, our Annual Conference in Smithers was a great success. The field trip leaders and the audio-visual presenters, all from the local area, were excellent. Having the support of the Bulkley Valley Naturalist group and other local naturalists helped assure the success of the event. A special thanks to all those who contributed.

As I mentioned in my last message, three of our board members have just completed their sixth consecutive year on the board. Our policy requires that they now step down from the board for at least one year. We asked for nominations in the March newsmagazine and three people expressed interest in joining the board. Mark Phinney, Nathan Hentze and Clive Keen were duly elected at the AGM. We look forward to working with these new board members in the coming year.

Our Annual Conference was not the only casualty of the pandemic; two- and three-day field trips were also discontinued during this time. However, with the easing of health restrictions, we were able to offer our first trip in May. A keen group of birders spent two days exploring the many and varied birding sites in the Creston Valley. Thanks to Paul Foth for leading this trip. In the coming months we hope to find more members willing to lead trips like this. If you're interested in leading such a trip, please let us know. When new trips are planned, notification will be made in this newsmagazine.

I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome Daryl Henderson to the BCFO team. He will be taking on the role of production editor for our journal, *British Columbia Birds*. He replaces Neil Dawe who is retiring after many years of service to our organization. Thanks so much for your work, Neil!

On a sad note, I'm sure you're all aware that we lost a long-time member of our organization recently. Wayne Weber passed away earlier this year after a lengthy battle with illness. His contribution to the BCFO and to birds and conservation in general can't be overstated. We'll miss you, Wayne! For many years, Wayne had served as chair of the Cannings Award Committee. Wayne's health and the pandemic combined to prevent any awards being made for the last year or two. The board is now revisiting the award's criteria and the nomination process; we hope to get back on track and start recognizing worthy recipients in the near future.

Since our Zoom presentations have been so well received, we plan to continue them for the time being. Larry tells me he already has the fall schedule booked! Look for the next one in September.

BCFO Business

Directors' Meeting, 30 June

Officers
The following officers were appointed:

- Gary Davidson, President
- Charles Helm, Vice President
- Krista Kaptein, Secretary
- Josh Inman, Treasurer

Future Conferences
Offers to hold future conferences had been received from Vernon and from Creston, and it was agreed that planning should go ahead for a Vernon Conference in 2023 and Creston in 2024. For 2025, Dawson Creek or Fort St John were considered highly suitable options.

BC Birding Magazine
The new distributor of the print edition, Kaitlyn York (Maple Ridge), had been exploring the possibility of printing the magazine in colour rather than black-and-white. In years past, full-colour printing would have been prohibitively expensive, but Kaitlyn found that though it is still more expensive, colour is no longer out or reach.

Directors agreed to print the magazine in colour for an experimental period of a year. There would be an obvious improvement in quality – photographs of birds in black and white miss much of the point – but the cost of the print edition was already in excess of the $12 supplement paid by those electing to receive it. The matter would therefore be reviewed at the 2023 AGM, after the full costs and benefits have been ascertained.

Directors' Meeting, July 25

Conferences
Directors agreed that the 2022 Smithers conference was successful and enjoyable, but attendance was lower than expected – perhaps due to ongoing COVID concerns – contributing to a loss of some $2,000. Ways of reducing expenditure in future years would be worked on.

Organization of a conference in Vernon in 2023 was going more slowly than expected owing to difficulties in finding a suitable venue. Enquiries were ongoing.

Responsibilities
Charles Helm would fill the vacancy on the Education and Conservation Committee, Paul Foth agreed to look over the Two-day Field Trip Coordinator role, and Daryl Henderson was confirmed and welcomed as the new production editor of the journal, *British Columbia Birds.*

Steve Cannings Award
Directors agreed to create a new committee for the Steve Cannings Award, which recognizes exemplary service to BC ornithology. The award had been in abeyance for the last few years, owing first to COVID (awards are normally made in person at the AGM) and then the illness of the committee chair, Wayne Weber. Until this hiatus, the ward had been presented annually as follows:

- 2007 Ian McTaggart-Cowan
- 2008 David Sterling
- 2009 Madelon Schouton
- 2010 Jeremy Tatum
- 2011 Ralph Ritchey
- 2012 Glen Ryder
- 2013 Fred Zwickel
- 2014 Martin McNichol
- 2015 Alan Burger
- 2016 Chris Siddle
- 2017 Art Martell
- 2018 Rick Howie
- 2019 Neil Dawe

At its September meeting, the directors would be looking into both the membership and terms of reference of the reconstituted committee.

BCFO Annual Reports

The following reports were prepared for the Annual Conference at Smithers in June.

President's Report

Following two years of COVID-delayed conferences, we're finally here! A special thanks to Marian Porter for sticking with it for all this time. Normally, conference organization is the president's responsibility, but Marian was determined to finish what she started three years ago. The job of the president is always made so much easier when an active board is willing to chip in and help wherever possible; such has been the case during the last 12 months. Even our two new board members this year, Krista Kaptein and Paul Foth, have jumped in with both feet to help the organization. Krista is our secretary and Paul led our first field trip in almost three years! There will be more changes at the board level in the coming year. Three long-standing members are completing their sixth consecutive year on the board, and according to policy, must step down for at least one year. Marian Porter, Art Martell, and Monica Nugent have been very active within the organization and their contributions will be missed. Marian and Art have now served two six-year terms and their value to the BCFO cannot be overstated. It's not only board members who help the ship run smoothly. Nathan Hentze, our journal editor, and Clive Keen, our newsmagazine editor, both contribute many hours of their time on your behalf. A special thanks to all these people!

In the coming year we hope to get back on track with two- and three-day field trips. But we also plan to continue with the Zoom presentations. Participation rates have been high and are obviously very popular with members.

Gary Davidson, President

Financial Report

Details of income and expenditures are given in the table on the following page. The balances of our accounts at 31 December 2021 are as follows:

- Tangerine (Savings): $46,498.90
- GICs $20,227.69
- Coast Capital Chequing $14,859.92
- Total: $81,586.51

Josh Inman, Treasurer

Education & Conservation Committee

After a quiet couple of years, research seems to be ramping up again. Three applications have been received and approved in the last 12 months.

A UBC grad student will be studying the impacts of temperature changes on the breeding success of Western Screech-Owls.

BC Nature in conjunction with IBA caretakers will be conducting an inventory of the Osoyoos Oxbows IBA. This is the fifth and final Okanagan IBA to be surveyed. Your Ed/Cons committee has given financial assistance to all five of the surveys.

Black Swifts will be studied in southwest BC to learn more about the breeding chronology, habitat requirements and breeding success rates. The team will also try to assess the impacts of climate change and stream flow changes on breeding success.

Gary Davidson, Chair, Conservation and Education Committee

Newsmagazine (*BC Birding*)

1. Production of the magazine has continued over the past year on schedule and with no undue problems arising.

2. After many years of involvement with the magazine, including acting as previous Editor, June Ryder passed on responsibility for printing and distribution of the paper edition. Kaitlyn York has now taken on this role.

3. Virginia Rasch, who has been the proofreader for the magazine since 2017, has moved to Southern Quebec, and thus there is a vacancy for this role. Members with knowledge of copyediting, willing to take on the task, are urged to contact the Editor. [Note: Bri-

	2021 Operating	2021 Education & Conservation ($39,776.25 as of Jan 1)
Revenue		
Membership and hardcopy	9,882.51	
Conference Fees		
Conference Extension		
Donation		1,421.13
Bank Interest (Coast Capital only)	0.00	
Bank Interest (Tangerine)	391.73	
GST Rebate	197.17	
Advertising		
Caps	1,193.67	
Miscellaneous	190.24	
BC Checklists		
Total	**11,855.32**	**1,421.13**
Overall	**13,276.45**	
Expenditures		
Newsmagazine Printing	1,066.02	
Newsmagazine Postage	1,168.94	
Conference		
Conference Honouraria		
Conference Extension		
Extension Honouraria		
Journal Printing	3,715.20	
Journal Postage	1,127.84	
Postage - membership & general	255.50	
Website	41.98	
Insurance	1,100.00	
Walkie-talkie		
Caps	1,335.78	
Decals		
Society Fee	20.00	
PO Box Rental	181.65	
Research & Other Grants		2,000.00
BCFO Awards		
Young Birders - Trip Subsidies		
Young Birders - Caps mailing		
Young Birders Program	220.49	
Change of Address		
BC Checklists		
Travel Costs		
Zoom Meeting	416.00	
Trip Honourarium		
Total	**10,649.40**	**2,000.00**
Overall	**12,649.40**	
Surplus/Deficit	**1,205.92**	**-578.87**
Overall	**627.05**	
Education and Conservation Fund		**39,187.38 as of Apr 30**
Assets		
Bank Balance: Tangerine	**66,726.59**	
Bank Balance: Coast Capital	**14,859.92**	
PayPal		
Total	**81,586.51**	

BC Birding Edition	Pages	Illustrations
September 2021	36	45
December 2021	24	36
March 2022	40	37
June 2022	32	34
Total 2021-22 (20-21)	*132 (133)*	*152 (138)*

an Self, William Caulfield and Shawn Mason stepped forward. Thank you!]

4. Clive Keen continues to edit and desktop-publish the magazine and deal with the web edition.

5. The design of the magazine is in serious need of refreshment. First created by the Editor in 1994 for a sister magazine, and essentially unchanged ever since, the design is becoming increasingly antique. Members with knowledge of print layout, capable of creating templates in Microsoft Publisher, are urged to step forward.

Content

Thanks are again due to all contributors, and particularly regular contributors Michael Church, Wayne Weber, Chris Siddle, Charles Helm, John Gordon, Larry Cowan, Adrian Dorst, Adam Dhalla, Gordon Brown, and Larry Joseph. Additional regular contributors continue to be sought. One-off contributions are always welcome, however brief. Pleasingly, the flow of photographs continues to increase, as does the quality, driven by advances in camera technology. Photographers are nevertheless reminded that good-quality bird and birding photographs are always sought and do not require a related story-line.

Clive Keen, Editor, BC Birding

British Columbia Birds

Art Martell left some very large shoes to fill when he handed the editorship of *British Columbia Birds* down to me in September 2021. At that time Volume 33 had a start with one accepted manuscript published online. Since then, the current volume has progressed with the acceptance of three additional manuscripts, including the annual report of the BCFO Bird Records Committee. While smaller than some recent volumes, the finishing touches are being put on this issue. As always, members can find the most recent accepted articles on the journal's website.

With this volume nearly complete, attention is now on the next volume. A couple articles are currently being prepared for submission to the journal. I encourage the membership to strongly consider writing up any novel observations, historical summaries, or details on provincial firsts that they may have, and to encourage their friends and colleagues to do likewise. This is the journal by and for the birders and ornithologists of the province, and it needs your submissions to succeed.

This journal also succeeds in both print form and on the website through the dedicated volunteers who serve on the Editorial Board, who provide advice, guidance, and thoughtful reviews of submitted articles. They are Andy Buhler, Rob Butler, Mark Phinney and Mary Taitt. Special thanks go to the Production Editor, Neil Dawe, who does all the formatting for the print journal and manages the journal website. And it is with much appreciation for Neil's hard work over the past many years in this role that we are announcing that we're looking for a successor to Neil's position. Neil has graciously offered to help bring a new Production Editor up to speed with his process. If you are interested in this opportunity please contact either myself or Neil Dawe.*

I have two goals for the journal over this next year. One, to work with prospective authors to encourage submissions of articles and increase the article count for the next volume, and two, to increase the exposure of British Columbia Birds to readership beyond the BCFO. I'll report back next year with how it goes.

Nathan Hentze, Editor,
British Columbia Birds

*Note: Daryl Henderson has since been confirmed in this role.

Right: another Hummingbird shot from Dennis Forsyth (see front cover and page 3): this time a Rufous Hummingbird preening after taking a bath.

BCFO Membership Status to August 2022

Larry Cowan, Pitt Meadows

The graph at the bottom of the page represents a summation of the BCFO membership numbers over the last ten years. The end numbers for 2022 may change but history suggests not to any large degree. As can be seen, 2022 is the highest membership total since 2013, and a search of records available to me indicates that it is the highest in the club's history.

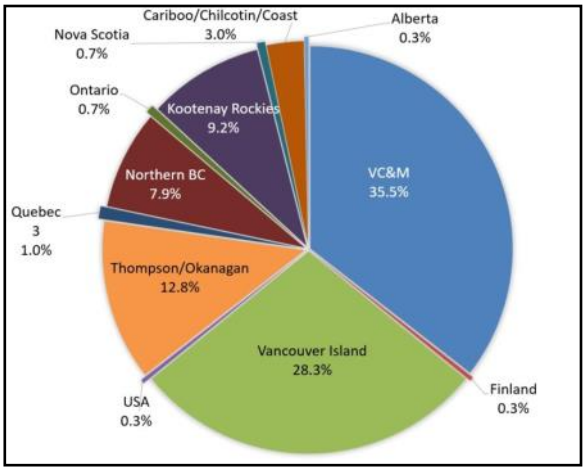
The table directly below summarizes Regular, New & Non-renewal figures. Complimentary, Life, Young Birder Award, and Institutional memberships are excluded. The table also indicates the percentage of "New" members included in the yearly total. The membership retention rate is calculated by dividing the "Non-renewals" by the membership total from the previous year's total.

In 2021 the club added the option for members to pay their membership via eTransfer. Using eTransfer saves the club the processing fee from the PayPal/Credit Card option. During this year's membership cycle 24% have paid via eTransfer, 66.1% via PayPal/Credit Card and 9.9% by cheque. Cheque payments usually involved the payment for multiple years and/or the addition of a donation.

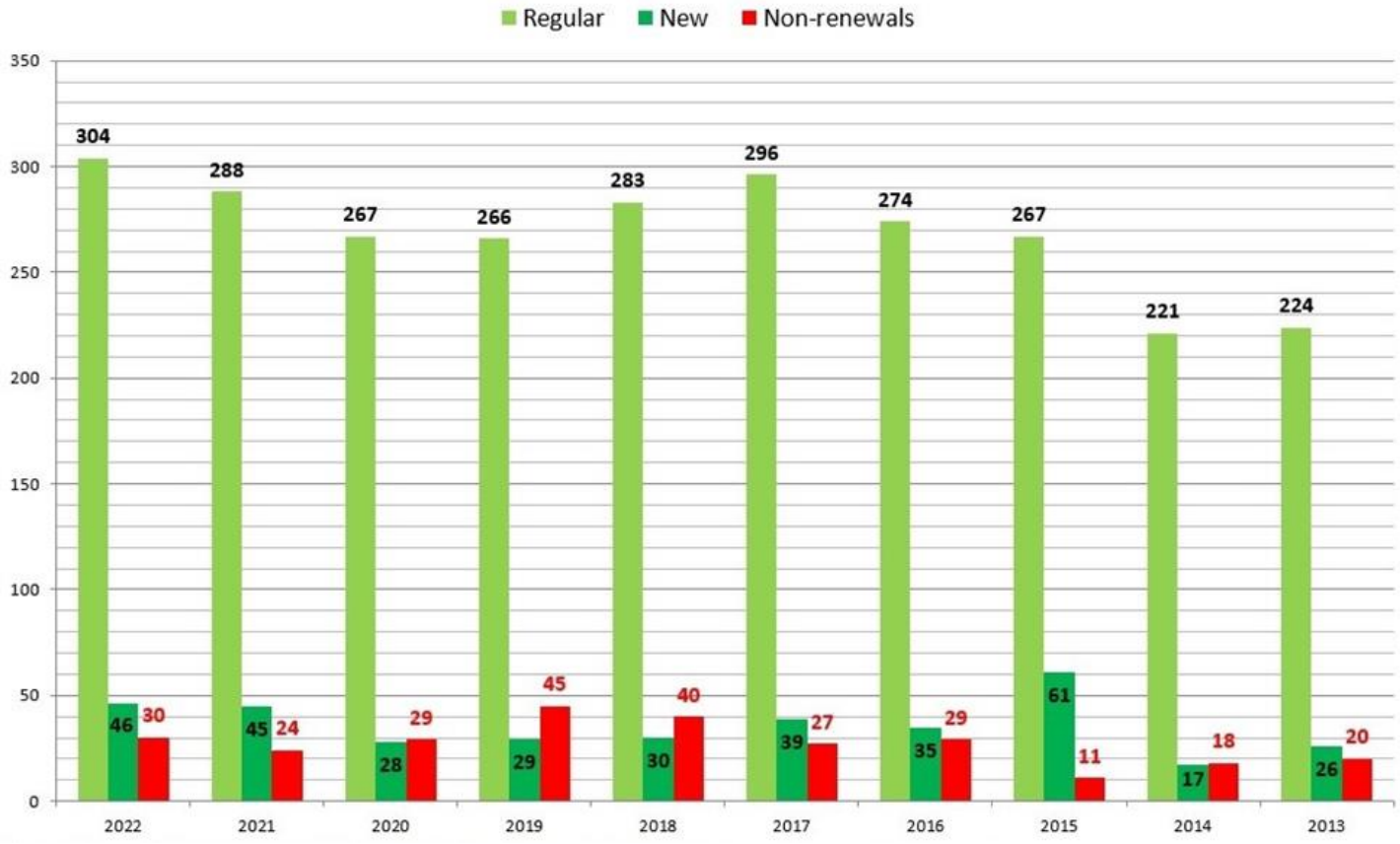
117 members opted to receive a printed mailed copy of *BC Birding* compared to 96 in 2021 which represents a 22% increase from 2021. To emphasize this change it should be noted that 26 of our 46 new members (56%) chose to pay the surcharge and receive a printed copy. Conversely 121 members chose to view *BC Birds* via the website versus 111 in 2021.

Our series of Zoom presentations continues to attract membership participation with 143 members or 49% of the approximate 292 members to April (last presentation to date). 30% have viewed two or more with 10% tuning in for all four presentations. The fall slate of presentations is set to go. See bcfo.ca/zoom-presentations-schedule.

Finally, a graph showing our geographic representation in the Province and externally.



New >	15%	16%	10%	11%	11%	13%	13%	23%	8%	12%
Retention rate >	90%	94%	89%	84%	86%	90%	89%	95%	92%	91%
	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Regular	304	288	267	266	283	296	274	267	221	224
New	46	45	28	29	30	39	35	61	17	26
Non-renewals	30	24	29	45	40	27	29	11	18	20



Whooo's interested in supporting our society?

The *British Columbia Field Ornithologists* is looking for volunteers to help with the following Society activities:

- **Web site management:** Involves oversight of BCFO's website layout, structure, and permissions; the writing and publishing of occasional posts to the Home Page and other website sections announcing items of interest to both members and non-members. Infrequent questions from the general public also require replies, or forwarding to BCFO members who have the expertise to answer.

- **Website management for the Bird Records Committee:** Involves updating both the Public and Committee Only sections of the BRC. Rare bird reports and supporting documentation, including photographs, are collated and supplied by the BRC Chair for posting. Writing short, summary announcements of BRC decisions is also required. Being party to BRC deliberations requires that confidentiality be maintained.

Familiarity with WordPress would be an asset but the current web site managers are prepared to help anyone interested in learning the WordPress content management system as well as provide guidance through the first year.

For both the above activities, a review of the scope of work involved can be seen on the website. As a BCFO Member, this is an important and significant way to contribute to the society.

For more information contact George Clulow (gclulow@shaw.ca).

BCFO 2022 Conference and Extension

A Northern Adventure

Marian Porter, Salt Spring Island

An unforgettable week was spent among the mountains, forests and wetlands of the northwest corner of the province from the Douglas Channel near Kitimat to the Bulkley Valley where Smithers is located. 106 species of birds were seen during the Smithers conference in the varied landscapes of the high elevations of Hudson Bay Mountain, meadows and open forest of the Malkow Lookout Trail, lakes, wetlands and the backcountry road of the Suskwa River Valley.

The Field Trips

The Telkwa High Road and Malkow Lookout Trail field trip was the most productive in terms of species biodiversity. Eleven species were found only in this area, with the highlights being Calliope Hummingbird, American Kestrel, Merlin, Mountain Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Magnolia Warbler and Blue-winged Teal. A hybrid Yellow-belliedxRed-naped Sapsucker was found on the second field trip. An unconcerned Black Bear sat on its haunches and watched the group pass by as it munched dandelions. The trail gained 700 feet in elevation to an old forestry lookout which provided unparalleled scenery of the Bulkley Valley, Babine Mountains and Hudson Bay Mountain.

The Vallee Lake and boardwalk trail wetland had species such as Sora and Virginia Rail as well as American Three-toed Woodpecker in the surrounding forest.

The Tyhee Lake and Round Lake trip had the only records of Lesser Yellowlegs, Bonaparte's Gull and Red-necked Grebe for the conference bird list.

Participants of the Hudson Bay Mountain field trip travelled through lower subalpine forest to open alpine meadows to find Dusky Grouse, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Horned Lark, American Pipit and Gray-crowned Rosy Finch.

The Suskwa River Valley logging road traversed through wetlands, lakes and forest with a four-year-old burn that added species such as Spruce Grouse, Blackpoll Warbler and Black-backed Woodpecker.

The Trip Leaders

An important component of the conference field trip was meeting the field trip leaders who tackled their areas with the knowledge, enthusiasm and good humour essential to having a fantastic experience in unfamiliar territory. I would like to thank Ken White, Alex Woods, Mel and Evi Coulson, and Frank McDonald for their commitment and dedication to our conference after such a long delay due to COVID. Ray Sturney made numerous exploratory trips into the Suskwa Valley to ensure the group would be able to negotiate any washouts and flooding. He introduced Ezekiel Goerke as his talented young assistant, and I sincerely hope Ezekiel continues with birding and contributing to BCFO.

The Technical Session

The technical session was an impressive introduction to some of the local conservation issues. Frank Doyle gave a comprehensive overview of the precipitous decline of the Northern Goshawk population in the Skeena Region. The discovery that large blocks of old growth forest are needed for breeding and hunting resulted in management recommendations and their implementation in forestry practices to ensure recovery of a sustainable breeding population. Curt Gesch gave a passionate and entertaining presentation of the evolution of his 153-acre farm property near Telkwa to include restoration for bird and wildlife habitat, encouraging land stewardship for all property owners. Michael Kawerninski gave a perfect finish to the day with his spectacular bird and grizzly photos.

The President of the Bulkley Valley Naturalists, Anne Hetherington, recommended the speakers who made the technical session and banquet such a success. The BVN founder, Rosamund Pojar, provided the contacts for our field trip leaders who she recognized as the most exceptional birders in the region.

Pre-conference Extension Trip

The pre-conference extension trip gave a good introduction to northern birding with field-trip leaders that had a long and extensive knowledge of the region and the best birding locations. Walter Thorne took us to the Douglas Channel to bird the Kitimaat Village and Minette Bay area. Marine species such as Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot, Harlequin Duck and Bonaparte`s Gull were located with the sobering view of the Canada LNG site in the background.

Exchamsiks River Provincial Park was an early morning pleasure with old-growth Sitka Spruce and Mountain Goats on the surrounding mountain cliffs. Sooty Grouse, Hermit Thrush, Veery and a Red-breasted Sapsucker family were among the birding highlights in the area. New Remo had a bird sanctuary which was a productive wetland adjacent to the Skeena River southwest of Terrace. Female Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers were seen with broods of ducklings and a Pileated Woodpecker was seen feeding a nearly fledged young in an old snag. Diane and Art Weismiller took us to a nearby property they had purchased to preserve more wetland habitat.

The last field trip before returning to Smithers was the Ferry Island campsite with a 150-acre park surrounded by the Skeena River. Although close to Terrace, it was filled with early morning birdsong from species such as American Redstart, Veery, Red-eyed Vireo, Warbling Vireo and numerous American Robins.

Thanks

Looking back, I feel privileged to have met with and spent time birding with individuals who are having such a positive impact on conservation for birds and wildlife in their communities. Walter is a director and driving force in the Kitimat Valley Naturalists, an organization that received the Irving Fox Award for their outstanding contributions to the sustainability of natural and cultural resources in northwest BC, especially with their efforts to protect and enhance resources at the Kitimat River and estuary. Data collection through BC Waterbird Surveys, eelgrass restoration and bat protection are some of the many projects of Walter and the naturalist club. Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys are organized and conducted by both Walter and Diane. The Smithers conference field trip lead-

ers and Rosamund Pojar are similarly involved with bird data collection through Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys as well as other projects. Frank Doyle and Anne Hetherington have been instrumental in the recovery and conservation of Northern Goshawks in their region.

I have come away from my week in northwestern BC with a new appreciation for what a few dedicated individuals are capable of achieving and have an increased resolve to tackle local conservation issues to benefit the environment and especially birds.

Photo right: a MacGillivray's Warbler spotted by the Editor on the way to the conference.

Photo below: Some of the participants birding on the first morning of the BCFO three-day trip to the Creston area in May.
Photo by Mike McGrenere.

Wayne Weber, October 15, 1947 – June 27, 2022

From One Editor to Another

Clive Keen, Prince George

Many – perhaps most – BCFO members will have known, or known about, Wayne Weber and been saddened by his passing just one day after the BCFO AGM, at which enquiries after his health were legion. Wayne was a key figure in the BCFO right from the start – indeed, the very first words of the very first BCFO newsletter (April 1991) were written by him:

> *On behalf of the founding directors of British Columbia Field Ornithologists, I extend a welcome to our fledgling society. Our intent is that BCFO should serve the interests of everyone interested in the study and enjoyment of birds in BC. We expect that the great majority of our members will be amateur ornithologists and birders, but we hope that some professional ornithologists will join BCFO as well. One of our main goals is to improve communication between amateur and professional ornithologists ….*

Wayne acted as the Editor of this magazine (then called *British Columbia Field Ornithologist*) through its founding, and though production technology has certainly advanced since April 1991, the general flavour and intent of the publication has remained unchanged. It is amusing to read Wayne's comments on the type of submissions that were wanted, as they've hardly changed in the years since. He often made calls for site guides. He'd be amused to hear me repeat it in his honour: *If you have a favorite birding patch, write about it and tell us why it's worth visiting.*

Wayne wrote for this magazine throughout its existence, starting the Listers' Corner column amongst others, and in recent years always supplied the *Upcoming Meetings and Events* column. His understanding of the concept of a deadline was not quite as pellucid as the current Editor might have liked, but in all other respects he was one of the most important sustainers of this magazine.

Wayne Weber

Vancouver Sun Obituary

Wayne Weber passed away on June 27, 2022 in his 75th year. Wayne is survived by his wife, Wendy, his children Ian (Jessica) and Larissa, grandson, Jack and his brother Robin (Irene). He spent his childhood in North Vancouver and then Penticton where his life-long passions of birding and music took root. After graduation from Penticton High School, he attended UBC where he received a BSc and a MSc. He taught at Capilano College before moving to Mississippi State University to pursue a PhD in Zoology to study comparative ecology of bird communities.

Wayne worked as a biologist in the Ministries of Agriculture, Forestry and Environment. Wayne devoted much of his time volunteering with organizations like the Vancouver Natural History Society, North American Breeding Bird Survey and the BC Breeding Bird Atlas. He was a founding member of the BC Field Ornithologists. One of his passions was contributing data to eBird where he was the Regional Editor for Metro Vancouver for seven years.

He is remembered by many birders as a big-hearted, compassionate, and astonishingly knowledgeable mentor and teacher.

Wayne also had a lifelong interest in botany and was an active member of several botanical societies. He loved photography and enjoyed taking wildflower and bird photos.

Donations can be made in his name to The Nature Trust of BC, or you can plant a tree in his memory via

vancouversunandprovince.remembering.ca/obituary/wayne-weber-1085609705

A Celebration of Life is to be held in September.

Reminiscences

Rob Butler, New Westminster

I don't recall if it was 1965 or 1966 when I participated in my first Christmas Bird Count but I have a vivid memory of Wayne dressed in a mackinaw standing in a bitterly cold easterly wind on Brockton Point in Stanley Park. With collar up buttoned tight around his neck, he was calling out the numbers of scoters, grebes, and gulls around the Point. I was frozen as the night closed in on us shivering at the Point, but Wayne had plans to count gulls coming to roost.

Wayne added much to our knowledge of birds in BC through publications. His Masters thesis, for example, was the first to describe and quantify urban birds in Vancouver. He also wrote, but never published, a report for CWS on the migration of songbirds at Alaksen National Wildlife Area that serves as a historic benchmark for the Fraser River Delta. His full contribution requires more space but for now, it is important to acknowledge Wayne's contribution. He was a unique individual with a unique perspective that I will miss.

Len Jellicoe, Abbotsford

A few years ago I was on a twitch for a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. While there I was chatting to Wayne. He reminded

me of a Sharp-tail I had found about five years earlier. I was amazed he remembered and I asked him how he remembered that. He said he remembered because I had found it in August and Sharp-tails are usually never seen in August in the lower mainland. That was just an example of the knowledge he possessed.

Barbara Begg, Sidney

I hitched a ride with Wayne and two other fellows back to Vancouver after birding in the Okanagan. We missed the last ferry to Swartz Bay so Wayne took us to his house to stay the night. Wendy was most gracious in welcoming us. I was supplied a mat to sleep on the floor in one of the children's rooms. I don't remember which child it was, but she/he was just a baby, sound asleep in a crib, so it was a long time ago. The next morning, we were fed breakfast and then delivered to the ferry.

Steve Baillie, Nanaimo

The first time I met Wayne was way back in the 1980s at Reifel Bird Sanctuary when I was a beginning birder. I was a student at UBC and I was spending a sunny day at the Sanctuary, at least it was sunny when I left Point Grey. By the time I got to Reifel the clouds had arrived and rain was just starting. I decided to carry on anyway but the usual thing happened and the skies opened up. As I was retreating back to my car, Wayne saw my binoculars and, realizing I would appreciate what he had in his scope, called me over to show me some of the night-herons that I recall were fairly novel to the area at the time. Did I say it was raining? I politely looked through the scope, saw grey on grey on grey with no definition of anything. I said something inane like "great view" and "I gotta go now." Wayne was enthusiastic about birding to say the least. He was quite a character.

David Fraser, Saanich

I had, of course, heard of Wayne long before I ever met him. Wayne's knowledge of BC and Washington State birds was legendary. Also legendary was Wayne's birding ear, able to pick up and identify an amazing number of species. I had the opportunity to see this skill in action on a boat trip from Oak Bay to Race Rocks in October of 1987. As we returned to dock, a noisy flock of about 100 Common Terns wheeled above us (a sight we no longer see around Victoria) and suddenly Wayne yelled out "I can hear a Forster's Tern!" One by one we located the bird in the swirling flock and everyone from the boat managed to see it… as I remember it took all of us gesticulating and shouting out directions for Wayne to eventually lay eyes on the Forster's Tern that he had heard long before any of us.

One of the last times I saw Wayne we were both chasing a Common Grackle on the Saanich Peninsula and Wayne asked me why I was no longer a member of the BCFO. I admitted that I just hadn't gotten around to renewing my membership for quite some time. To my surprise a few weeks later I received an email that Wayne had paid for my membership as a gift.

I promise you Wayne, that I will keep my membership active.

Wayne was a serious eBirder (the photo above appearing on his eBird page) and acted as the moderator for Metro Vancouver for seven years.

Dennis Leonard, Clearwater

Wayne was at all of the BCFO Conferences that I attended and made thoughtful interesting comments, points, or queries during any discussion on a great variety of topics. Often he was in the same field-trip group I joined and always amazed me by identifying the species and location of a bird song or call

One of the many BCFO roles played by Wayne was chairing the Steve Cannings Award Committee. The photo below shows Wayne (right) presenting the inaugural award on July 8, 2007 to Ian McTaggart-Cowan (centre). Martin McKnicholl is to the left. Photo by Andy Stewart.

while I struggled with each of those aspects. He kindly assisted me to improve my birding skills. At the same time he also amazed me with his knowledge of the plants in each area. I will dedicate my next birding outing to Wayne to listen to the birds chattering and singing in his honour glorifying all his work on their behalf.

Alan Burger, Logan Lake, on behalf of the Nicola Naturalist Society

Wayne initiated the Merritt Christmas Bird Count when he lived in the area. For many years after he moved away he continued to coordinate and participate in this count, even though it meant traveling 300 km in winter conditions. This past Christmas (2021) was the first time he did not participate and his presence was sorely missed. Wayne was also a great source of information about birds and their identification and a sharp monitor during the Breeding Bird Atlas and more recently on eBird. He very quickly let one know if the identification was suspect or of unusual interest, and he was always very generous with passing on information about interesting birds in the Nicola Valley.

Carlo Gianovella, Surrey

Wayne C Weber, or "Dubya-Dubya" as some of us affectionately referred to him, for over half a century was nothing less than a fixture on the local birding scene, throughout BC and also Washington State. I recall one time when I was birding "down under," and chatting with a few of the local bird folk. On mentioning that I was from Canada, they got the idea that I might be Wayne, and hopefully asked "Are you Wayne Weber!" Their tone, expression, and disappointment was indicative of the reverence that was held for Wayne among Washington birders.

To Wayne's credit, he was exceptionally willing and ready to give his time to anyone interested in birds and/or birding. Whether it was sharing and exchanging some of his vast knowledge with other experienced birders, or helping the less experienced ones – he always had time for us.

Although best known for his encyclopedic knowledge of birds and bird records, his expertise was not limited there. I was particularly impressed by his familiarity with local botanical species. On several occasions he dazzled me with a discourse on some unremarkable plant that most would have paid no attention to, in which he would provide its name, botanic pedigree, and where it was most often encountered.

Wayne on a Wildresearch pelagic trip. Photo by Christine Rock.

Those who knew him well would likely agree that he could be described as occasionally "argumentative." When I met him for the first time, he was between sessions of lecturing at Capilano College, and pursuing his PhD in Louisiana. My most salient recollection of that long-ago meeting was that we had had a lively argument on some now-forgotten and irrelevant topic. Over the years since, Wayne and I engaged in numerous such spirited arguments. I cannot claim to have won many of them, but I certainly enjoyed them all!

Brian Self, Delta

WCW – By the Numbers

Wayne would have approved of the title of this note; he was all about numbers.

I probably first met him in the early 1970s after his return from Mississippi where he did his PhD studies. We would be stood around waiting for the rarity to show itself when this guy turned up with these old beat-up-looking binoculars which I don't think he ever cleaned for as long as I knew him, and proceeded to tell everyone that this was the fourth or sixth record for the bird, but the first July record and the first female. And I would wonder who is this guy and is this just crap he is feeding us, or what! But if you took the trouble to check his data afterwards he was invariably correct.

Wayne kept notes on everything: species arrival dates, departure dates, seasonal notes, weather, species by site; and if he discovered you were also interested in data trivia, would generously share it with you. Remember this all happened twenty years ahead of eBird making an appearance and was all handwritten as we likely were not using computers then. He saw me writing something in a notebook and congratulated me on taking notes in the field and stressed that I should file the notebooks by headings and their year. "Don't lose track of your field notes." he said. I think he had an influence on the sort of birder I became.

Computers and eBird might have been invented with Wayne in mind; now he could write it all down, and other people and systems would organize it for him, so he spread his wings and blossomed. He complained to anyone who would listen that the Province had made a mistake in not introducing counties – you can keep much better track of bird movement using counties, he claimed. He birded a lot in Washington State and even down into Oregon and had made it a goal to have seen 100 species in every State County. There are 39 in Washington and 36 in Oregon and it was something he was working on until the end. I don't think he achieved it as I feel sure he would have told me

in one of our late-evening telephone calls. We talked a couple of times a month and always in the evening after 8:00 or 9:00 PM, often for an hour or more, mostly about birds as we did not have a lot more in common. I didn't like his music, he hated mine and we disagreed on art and sport.

I have about 52 years of world-wide data in eBird and have entered 11,400 checklists: Wayne has 64,952 checklists just for the ABA area; 40,000 of these are BC records! If you look on eBird and ask it to show you the top 100 birders by species for the ABA area, Wayne's name does not appear, but he is fourth in the number of checklists entered. Clearly he and I had a totally different philosophy on what constitutes a checklist. It's something I had been meaning to discuss on one of our evening calls; unfortunately now I've lost the chance. It's something I will come to regret, I feel sure.

Mark Phinney, Dawson Creek

I was surprised and saddened by the news of Wayne's passing, though I hadn't spoken to him directly in a few years. I always got along well with Wayne; he was very generous with his time. During our first meeting – when I was relatively new to BC – he personally guided me to one of the few remaining locations for Crested Myna, where we watched a few of the birds and agreed that their time was limited. On my first trip to Victoria a few years later, I saw Wayne at a biologist's conference. When I mentioned that I had never seen the island's skylarks, he suggested we skip out early, and soon after we were witness to the aerial display of Eurasian Skylarks over some daffodil fields.

My most recent field excursion with Wayne was during the post-conference birding trips of the 2017 BCFO AGM in Tumbler Ridge. We spent a couple days together in my truck, catching up with many of the Peace River specialties. Of course, much (but not all) of our discussion revolved around birds. Wayne's knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm were vast. But it was not a one-sided conversation, He was genuinely interested in my thoughts, opinions and experiences – even when these differed from his own. Our trip culminated on the top of a cold, foggy, windy Pink Mountain, where our group was treated to a cooperative Rock Ptarmigan. I was pleased to be able to show Wayne (and others) some of our local birds: a small payback for his efforts many years earlier. I very much enjoyed our times together. He will be missed, but his contributions to the BC birding community – both large and small – will long be remembered.

Mike McGrenere, Victoria

Barb and I moved to Vancouver from Ontario in 1979 and Wayne was one of the first birders we met in the field. He was involved with the Vancouver Christmas Bird Count and we participated in our first CBC, assisting his brother Robin who was the area leader for the east side of Stanley Park. Wayne was the area leader for the west side of Stanley Park.

I went on several pelagic trips with Wayne, most from Ucluelet but one trip out of Westport, Washington. In the early 1980s, Wayne, Doug Kragh, Brian Self and I (all of us founding members of the BCFO) participated in the Okanagan Big Day as part of the Meadowlark Festival. Wayne lived in the Okanagan during his youth and was very familiar with the bird sounds. He also had exceptional hearing. On the day, Wayne would only need a millisecond of the bird's song or call to identify the bird and would call out "Lark Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting, Long-billed Curlew...." Wayne had a loud voice and so all we could hear was Wayne. Not being from the Okanagan, the rest of us needed to hear the complete sound to identify the bird, often several times. I can't clearly recall but I think we asked Wayne to point towards the sound and to quietly call out what species he heard.

Wayne was not only a founding member of the BCFO but he was also the person who suggested the idea of forming the BCFO. He was a member of the Washington Field Ornithologists and thought that it would be great to have our own provincial organization in BC. It is now thirty-three years later and the BCFO is a strong and active organization in BC birding.

Chris Siddle, Vernon

Wayne was one of British Columbia's great birders of the 1960s–2020s. His questioning attitude about sightings and his dislike of theories unsupported by strong evidence sometimes rubbed other birders the wrong way (Wayne would say that he ruffled feathers) but he lived to keep BC birding history accurate. His memory was a vast storehouse of verified sightings of BC and Washington State birds. Rain, snow, wind, heat, nothing stopped Wayne from birding, and he birded more sections of BC and Washington than most birders will visit in their entire lifetimes….

See page 33 for the full reminisdence.

Below: Wayne was not a great bird photographer – he was better at flowers – but some of his shots would pass muster, like these Snow Geese on a Westham Island lawn.

Birding News

New Award for Art Martell

Long-standing BCFO Director Art Martell (Courtenay) has been given the *IBA Caretaker Of The Year Award* by BC Nature. The nomination includes the following:

> *"Art Martell has easily one of the most impressive bird conservation resumes in our provinces, from the first Canadian National Coordinator for the North American Bird Conservation Initiative to Regional Coordinator for the BC Breeding Bird Atlas to his career with Canadian Wildlife Services. Mention his name in ornithology circles and you'll likely be met with familiarity and praise…."*

The Canada Jay Campaign

A copy of a promotional book entitled *The Canada Jay as Canada's National Bird*? has been given to each of Canada's 338 federal Members of Parliament. The prime purpose of the book is to encourage the federal government to take steps to create a National Bird for Canada, preferably the Canada Jay.

David Bird (North Saanich) is the leader of the campaign, and his unanswerable argument was included in the March 2022 edition of this magazine. You can see that argument and sign a petition at:

www.canadajay.org/why-a-national-bird

At the time of writing, 16,063 people had signed the petition, and quite a few had chipped in to help finance the campaign.

The 2022 Long-billed Curlew Survey

Blaire Smith (Nelson) was the winner of the contest to guess the total number of curlews that would be detected in this year's curlew-survey project by Bird Studies Canada. In all, 268 curlews were found by the 150 volunteers, and Blaire's estimate was closest.

1,600 point-count stations had been surveyed in 95 routes, all in grassland habitat that seemed suitable for curlews. All routes but one detected at least one curlew. 41% of the curlews were detected in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region (24 teams); 31% in Prince George-Nechako (11 teams); 20% in the East Kootenays (19 teams), and 8% in the Thompson-Nicola and Okanagan-Similkameen regions (21 teams).

On average, 0.17 curlews were detected per point-count station, which represents a density of 0.34 curlews/km^2. Curlew density decreased along a north-south gradient, with the highest density by far in the Prince George–Nechako region (0.70/km^2), followed by Cariboo-Chilcotin (0.41/km^2), East Kootenays (0.33/km^2), Thompson-Nicola (0.10/km^2), and Okanagan-Similkameen (0.06/km^2).

Based on a statistical model that takes into account the probability of detection of curlews, Birds Studies Canada will be able to calculate a rough estimate of the population size in British Columbia. The results will be given in a future edition of this magazine.

Black Swift Colony Found

The Black Swift project described on page 21 has already produced an exciting find. On August 11 a Black Swift colony was found with at least six nests, and four big chicks were seen on four nests. Project Coordinator Rémi Torrenta believes that this is the first colony found in BC.

The results of the summer's search and summary of the season will be included in the next edition of this magazine or in *British Columbia Birds*.

Lumpers Aren't Happy

The latest AOS Supplement has been released, and listers and splitters will rejoice because Hoary and Common Redpolls have not been lumped as many expected, and a new species has been added to the ABA checklist. Welcome, if that is your inclination, the Chihuahuan Meadowlark (*Sturnella lilianae*), which has been split from Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) The bird previously called "Lilian's Meadowlark" by some is found in high-elevation desert grasslands of the southwestern U.S.

A less weighty matter for BC Birders is that the Mottled Owl and Violet-crowned Hummingbird have had their genera changed. Birders need take no action: it just means that the birds sound different in Latin.

South of the US border, though, there are plenty more changes. For details head to

www.aba.org/aos-supplement-redux-2022/

Red-tail Raised by Bald Eagles

For the second time in BC that we know about, a pair of nesting Bald Eagles has successfully raised a Red-tailed Hawk chick. In 2018 this was reported at a site in Sidney. On the latest occasion, it was a pair of eagles on Gabriola Island near Nanaimo that repeated the feat.

In 2018 there was considerable debate as to how the baby hawk found itself in the eagle nest, but the most likely explanation was that the bird had been taken from a Red-tailed Hawk nest as food for eaglets. It was suspected that after the young hawk was deposited in the nest unharmed, it began begging for food, which charmed the adults, saving its life.

Fortunately, the 2022 case was closely monitored, so we now know that this theory is correct. Pam McCartney, one of the volunteers with *Growls*, a wildlife rescue society on Gabriola Island, monitors more than two dozen Bald Eagle nests, including the one with the adopted hawk, and she has footage from a webcam on the nest showing the actual moment that one of the adult eagles dropped the young hawk into the nest. The webcam was then used to monitor the young hawk's progress – it came to be named *Malala*, which means "survivor" – until it successfully fledged and left the nest. The young hawk was even frisky and confident enough to steal food from its foster siblings.

You can find more information at www.growls.ca/eagle-nest-cam and see the young hawk at

youtu.be/veERPaz2mSA.

There is also a later tale, regarding Malala's foster sibling, at:

vancouversun.com/news/local-news/gabriola-island-bald-eagle-dies-electrocution

Birdwatcher's Digest

BWD, having disappeared unexpectedly, has now reappeared just as unexpectedly under new owners. The format has changed to full size rather than booklet, which seems an improvement, at least to those of us with older eyes, and the colour photographs certainly benefit from the enlargement.

Subscription is $US26 for a year (six editions). In spite of the new format, it won't appear on newsstands, so you'll need a subscription if you want to read it. Details are at bwdmagazine.com.

BC Bird Alerts

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

- BROWN THRASHER, Saanich, Aug 11–14
- BLACK PHOEBE, Richmond, July 29
- NAZCA BOOBY, Victoria, July 23
- LITTLE GULL, Newgate, July 18
- SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER, Lardeau, July 18
- SEDGE WRENS CONFIRMED BREEDING, near Fort St. John, July 4–12
- MANX SHEARWATER and SCRIPPS'S MURRELET, off the Brooks Peninsula, July 3
- CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, Pitt Meadows, June 25–July 10
- CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, Kelowna, June 23–July 7
- CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, near Nakusp, June 12
- INDIGO BUNTING, near Quesnel, June 6
- SNOWY EGRET, North Cowichan, June 5–6

Letter

Dear Editor,

For the past year or so I've been noticing much more content about and by young birders in *BC Birding*. Congratulations! It's very uplifting to experience the young birders' impressive skills and expressive writing.

Specifically, in the June issue, I enjoyed reading Evan Harlos' "Iona Treat for a Young Birder" and Josh Yiu's "Welcome to BC." As an immigrant myself – although anything but young – I wish to echo the title of Josh's article: Welcome Josh! We're lucky to have you.

Ana Simeon, Victoria

- ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER, Richmond, June 4
- SCARLET TANAGERS, Vancouver, June 4–6
- MANX SHEARWATER, Ucluelet, May 28
- BROWN THRASHER, Dawson Creek, May 26
- MANX SHEARWATER, near Calvert Island, May 25
- MANX SHEARWATER, off Haida Gwaii, May 24
- INDIGO BUNTING, Elkford, May 23
- SNOWY PLOVER, Chilanko Forks, May 20

See bcbirdalert.blogspot.com

The Nazca Booby

The Vancouver Island Nazca Booby was featured on CBC News on August 14.with an interview with the finder, Tasli Shaw. See www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/nazca-booby-sighting-1.6550109

Snow Geese of the Salish Sea

A fine video entitled *Snow Geese! Fraser and Skagit River deltas, Salish Sea* is now available on YouTube. Producer Bob Turner writes "To be near a flock of Snow Geese lifting off, or landing, immersed in their overwhelming chorus of honks, is for me one of the great magical moments in nature." The Editor agrees wholeheartedly. Take a look at this beautiful and informative video about one of the great BC spectacles:

youtu.be/XJ4WyRy0oQg.

Scott Edwardson (Delta) spotted this Three-toed Woodpecker on the BC / Alberta border between McBride and Banff. It was one of a pair. The male was quite active, going from tree to tree feeding, while the female was more stationary, hiding on a densely covered pine branch. After the male grabbed the beetle larvae he went up to where the female was resting and deposited the larvae with her. Scott used a Canon R5 with an RF100–500 lens.

Upcoming Meetings & Events

Note: For many years Wayne Weber produced the Upcoming Meetings and Events column for this magazine. Before his death in late June he had prepared lists including the following; he would have added another three months of meetings, for the first quarter of 2023, if he was still with us.

It would be a fine gesture in remembering Wayne if someone would step in and take over this column, which will otherwise need to conclude. Just contact the editor (clive_keen@hotmail.com) if you are willing to take on the role.

2022 Events

Compiled by Wayne C. Weber, Delta

Sept. 10-11: PUGET SOUND BIRD FESTIVAL, Edmonds, WA. For information and to register (starting Aug. 1), see www.pugetsoundbirdfest.com or contact Jennifer Leach at the City of Edmonds Parks Dept. (phone 425-771-0227), or email jennifer.leach@edmondswa.gov.

Sept 14-17—Annual meeting of the WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION at the Putah Creek Lodge on the campus of the University of California campus at Davis, CA. For information and to register, please visit the WBBA website at www.westernbirdbanding.org.

Oct. 1: BIRDS AND BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL, Ridgefield NWR, Ridgefield, WA (near Vancouver, WA). For information, visit the Friends of Ridgefield website at ridgefield-friends.org/birdfest-bluegrass. A more complete list of events and registration info will be posted sometime this summer.

Oct. 4-9: RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION annual meeting (jointly with Florida Ornithological Society), Fort Lauderdale, FL, USA. For details see raptorresearchfoundation.org/events/current-conference.

Oct. 10-13: Annual meeting, ASSOCIATION OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS, Plymouth, Massachusetts. For details, visit the AFO website at afonet.org/events .

Nov. 5-9: RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION annual meeting, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA. For further details, visit the society website at raptorresearchfoundation.org/conferences/upcoming-conferences.

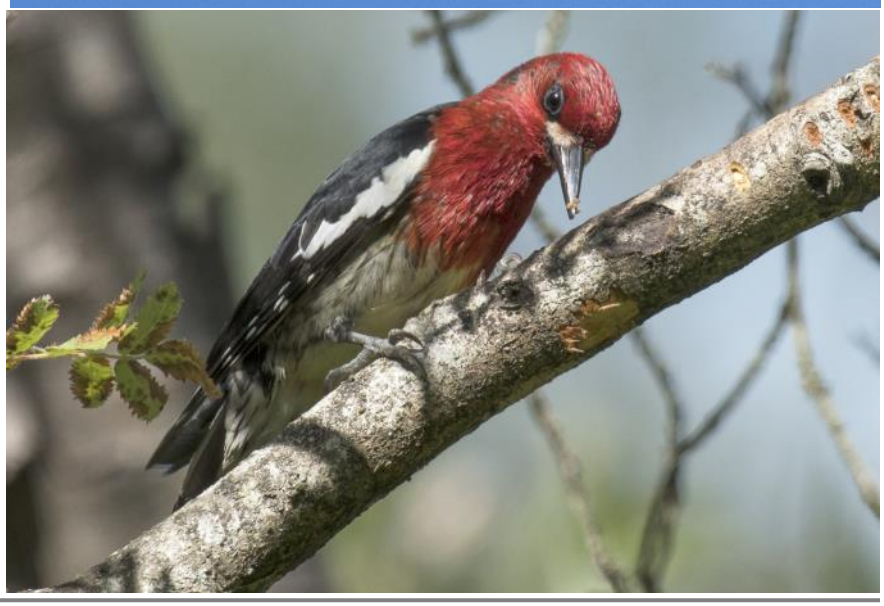
Oct. 24-27: TRUMPETER SWAN SOCIETY, 26th conference, along with 7th International Swan Symposium, Snow King Resort, Jackson, WY, USA. For details see www.trumpeterswansociety.org/what-we-do/symposium-conference.

Oct. 31-Nov. 4: 46rd ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WATERBIRD SOCIETY, at the Omni Corpus Christi Hotel, Corpus Christi, Texas. For details, check the society website at https://waterbirds.org/annual-meeting .

Nov. 6-10: Annual conference of THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY, the professional society for wildlife biologists, to be held in Spokane, WA. See wildlife.org/2021-conference

Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 (2023): CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS. For information on dates of counts and contact information for count organizers, please check the BCFO website in November and December.

Two of John Gordon's photographs appeared in the July 28 edition of The Narwhal. *Immediately below: a Merlin carrying food for two hungry chicks, photographed at Monck Park just out of Merritt.*
Bottom: a Red-breasted Sapsucker, found in the Skagit Valley west of Hope, and used as the banner for the Narwhal *story on the effect of heat and global warming on birdlife.*



Tangled Tales of Raptor Rescue

Shawn Mason, North Vancouver

I have always enjoyed watching birds, especially raptors. I love to watch them lazily play in the thermals circling higher into the clouds. In my retirement I have been able to expand my birding experiences by volunteering with Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation (OWL). OWL is a government-licensed, non-profit organisation that cares for and rehabilitates raptors in need, from the smallest (Pygmy and Saw-whet Owls) to the largest (Bald and Golden Eagles) from all over BC.

As a volunteer, I get dispatched by an OWL representative to a location to retrieve an injured raptor, and safely bring the injured bird into the facility in Delta, BC. I always enjoy observing the admission examination of the injured bird and seeing a broken wing get supported with a splint, or a few sutures strategically placed to close an open wound. Later, if the bird rehabilitates to a proficient level of hunting live mice in a flight cage, I am asked to repatriate it to its original territory. I sometimes see myself as a "raptor ambulance driver" without speed or siren! Over the years I have gradually been entrusted to rescue larger birds after having successfully transported the small ones.

When capturing birds in the wild, my technique is simple: throw a blanket or towel over the head, then grasp the talons with a leather-gloved hand, wrap the body and wings in a towel and finally put the bird into a kennel carrier (or some secure and vented container). Rather than have my ski gloves destroyed, I invested in a pair of thick leather gloves (barbecue gloves to be exact) to protect myself when the size of the talons got larger. Then came the big leap to Bald Eagle rescue.

Bald Eagles command respect. They are very large birds; females are almost a metre tall and weigh in at an average 4.3 kg. Males are slightly smaller. They are pugnacious and basically hate human handling. Their beaks are threatening, but nothing strikes more fear than their mighty talons. Their legs are powerful, and it is reported that a Bald Eagle's talons can exert pressure to 400 psi. One eagle I picked up managed to pierce through the barbecue glove and imbedded a talon in my hand while simultaneously managing to puncture my partner's arm with the other talon. A fascinating and detailed history was requested by the physician when we both reported for our tetanus shots later that evening.

On a cold and rainy late afternoon in January of 2022, I was called to retrieve a Bald Eagle in distress in West Vancouver. The BCSPCA was first notified then asked OWL for raptor support and transport. The bird was somewhere on a muddy, steeply sloped construction site. It was getting dark. Rain had just stopped. We could hear the distress call of the eagle when we arrived but had trouble finding her in the dark. We trekked down a muddy hillside, about 200 metres, when our flashlights illuminated a white head. The eagle was caught in blackberry brambles. As we approached, we were horrified to see not one but two mature bald eagles with their talons interlocked. Eagles are known to be territorial and very combative. These two probably locked talons in the air and fell to the ground. The brambles most likely cushioned their landing while their feathers protected them from thorns.

My SPCA partner was terrified, citing that she had never picked up a bird any more imposing than a chicken. Taking deep breaths, I realized I was the lead in this situation and called OWL for advice on how to disentangle the talons. I was told, "Just give them a tap and they should let go." We chopped our way into the brambles by flashlight and got to the eagles. I gave each one a tap on the back; they didn't let go. Both eagles were gaping their beaks and were threatening us with hisses. The one eagle had a talon pierced through the leg of the other. This required strategy to keep the birds safe and avoid injury to the two of us to get them into the kennel. Now completely dark, the neighbouring residents were gathering and offered to help. They came with flashlights and pruning shears. I directed a young energetic teen with shears to carve out a wider path from the birds to a flat landing on the slope about 20 metres upward. Luckily, the SPCA vehicle was equipped with a kennel, large enough for a massive dog, that would accommodate two co-joined mature Bald Eagles. We brought th

Kristina Swerhun releasing a Barred Owl at Whistler in March 2021. Photo by Bob Brett.

large and awkward kennel down the hillside to the landing, now dark, with some difficulty and placed it on flat ground with the door open. We gathered blankets and covered both eagles to quieten them down. We, in coordination, gingerly lifted both birds together, brought them uphill to the kennel and put them inside, only to find the door lock was broken. Zap straps solved that problem. I could not have managed that rescue without the teamwork of the residents, and the SPCA volunteer. I was grateful for such willing help.

On my drive to Delta to deliver the eagles, they kept fighting in the carrier. I figured they had disentangled themselves by the sound of things. The battle was so fierce the kennel was shifting side to side in the back of the vehicle. I hoped they wouldn't kill each other before the hour-long drive was over.

Both eagles lived to be examined, and managed to withstand a few sutures. They both thrived to be released a few weeks later after both getting a leg band. Now when I drive through West Vancouver, I see eagles high in the thermals and wonder if I know them.

A de-tangled Bald Eagle after release in West Vancouver, February 2022. Photo by William Caulfield.

Briefing 1

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Follow Yer Dad

Migration is arguably the grandest collective phenomenon in the animal world. Many of us intuitively think of migration in terms of the great seasonal movements of birds. Migrating groups of birds may vary from a few to many tens of thousands of conspecifics. Advantages of large groups may include more assured navigation, protection from predators, and shared knowledge of food resources en route. But how do the birds acquire the knowledge to achieve successful migration in the first place?

Researchers used radio-GPS tags to follow the migration of 31 Caspian Terns, comprising eight families, from their summer range in the Baltic Sea to their winter grounds in the African Sahel. Caspian Terns migrate in family groups so the question reduces to the behaviour of the naïve young of the year.

The southward migration occurs between mid-July and mid-August. The parents do not migrate together; male and female differing in their departure date by up to two weeks with no apparent preference for who goes first. The young almost invariably departed and flew with the male parent. However, in one case a young bird migrated with the female parent, and in one observed case a young bird traveled with a male foster parent. Four young that became separated from the parents were quickly predated by White-tailed Sea Eagles or by a Northern Goshawk. All surviving young remained with an adult guide throughout the migratory journey.

The terns recongregate at stopover points, so a young bird that loses track of its parent-guide has the chance to find a foster parent for the onward journey. Because the young need more rest than the adults, migrating family groups travelled more slowly than unaccompanied adult birds.

Once on the winter ground, the young separate from the guiding parent after about two months. In the spring they undertake the northward journey independently, following precisely the course they travelled with their parent (or foster parent) in the preceding autumn. They remain faithful to this route throughout their lives. Knowledge of the migration route is, then, an example of "cultural knowledge" acquired during the initial migration. Remarkably, it requires only the single experience of first migration for the route to be firmly implanted in the birds' memory.

Reference

Byholm, P. + 4 others. 2022. Paternal transmission of migration knowledge in a long-distance bird migrant. *Nature Communications* 13: doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-29300-w.

Unravelling the mystery of the Black Swift in British Columbia

A project in collaboration with British Columbia Field Ornithologists

BIRDS CANADA OISEAUX CANADA

THE BLACK SWIFT, A DECLINING SPECIES

- **Large** swift, **long and pointed wings**
- Mostly black, variable white spotting
- **Fast flying** at high altitudes, **slower and shallower wingbeats** than other swifts

Black Swift individuals feeding/aerial roosting

- Global decline of the **Aerial Insectivores** group
- **Migratory** species, **difficult to study**
- Status: **Special Concern** (BC), **Endangered** (Canada)
- Threats: **Pesticide use** (= lower prey availability) + **Climate change** + **Habitat loss/degradation**

HABITAT AND BREEDING BEHAVIOR

- Nests **near waterfalls and canyons**:
  - ✓ Niches and crevices
  - ✓ Flowing water, humidity
  - ✓ High relief
  - ✓ Inaccessibility to predators
  - ✓ Unobstructed flyway
- **Cryptic nests** and **low rates of nest attendance** (spend lots of time feeding), but **high nest site fidelity**

- **Egg laying** (1 egg): mid-June to mid-July
- **Incubation**: mid-July to mid-August
- **Nestling**: end of July to end of August

GOALS/RESEARCH GAPS

- **Traditional knowledge, cultural significance** for First Nations?
- New **nesting sites** in BC?
- **Monitoring** of breeding activity/success?
- Causes of population declines?

DATA COLLECTION

- Waterfall site surveys (x3, sunrise period)
- If confirmed sighting: nest searching, nest monitoring (frequent visits)

CONSERVATION ACTIONS

- Community engagement/outreach
- Habitat protection
- Watershed advocacy and stewardship (pesticides, climate action)

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Our team is looking to build **valuable partnerships** and **long-term funding options** for this project, especially in collaboration with:

- Indigenous communities
- Industry partners (BC Hydro, forestry)
- Land managers, governments and tourism
- Outdoor enthusiasts and professionals
- Other naturalist clubs and organizations
- Birders and volunteers across BC

Please find our free **webinar** on our Birds Canada YouTube page HERE. www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP8idKPbxX8

If you are interested in **knowing more about this project**, **sharing knowledge**, or **getting involved**, please **CONTACT US** and send an email to:

- Rémi Torrenta (BC Bird Biologist and Projects Coordinator): rtorrenta@birdscanada.org
- Alicia Krupek (Indigenous Bird Conservation Coordinator): akrupek@birdscanada.org

Urban Gulls

Kevin Krebs, Vancouver

The winds of an approaching storm pick up, streaming into English Bay. Soaring high, Glaucous-winged Gulls glow in the setting rays of the sun. Rosy amber embers flame, winging against the heavy clouds of wet slate.

Gulls live close to us, trade their hardened gaze with ours. Perhaps they see us more clearly, more fully, than our own furtive human eyes see them. They live close to us, but a chasm of ideas separates them, a distance our wingless forms cannot traverse.

For many, there are only "seagulls" – a flattened black M on a child's drawing of the beach, a lifeless symbol of the seaside. Otherwise, an urban pest allied with crows, scheming and intimidating, desperate to pilfer a French fry. Only a small number of us pay attention to the gulls, to their often-subtle differences: shapes, sizes, and colours. Seasons change as numerous gull species appear and disappear, leaving no trace of their passing in the sky.

We live in part of the home territory of the Glaucous-winged Gull. They watched us arrive in the late Pleistocene, undoubtedly with their recognizable curiosity and cautiousness. Trees fell and cities grew; bricks, roads, and glass towers – guns, dogs, and rat poison. No memories exist of hushed evenings at the water's edge with the sound of pine cones falling onto soft earth in the distance.

For countless generations, isolated island colonies were the periphery of the known world for Glaucous-winged Gull chicks. Rocks, grass, and the sea's harsh wind blowing through speckled down. Rooftops now extend across the city's horizon, inviting gulls to settle and breed on these rectangular islands. These gravel rooftops are safer places than the colonies – no neighbours to contend with and fewer predators.

A vicious sun blazes on a late July morning. Three chicks rest languidly on a small piece of rooftop off the western edge of the Granville Street Bridge. Across the city, gull chicks take refuge in the shade of AC units, exhaust vents, and aluminium ducting. Unlike the colony-born chicks, the first sounds these urban gull chicks hear is the drone of traffic. Few of us see or visit these rooftops, and fewer have the patience or inquisitiveness to scour the gravel-covered roofs for gravel-coloured chicks.

The wind comes in off the ocean with the twilight, and the twilight seeps into the chick's juvenile feathers. Streetlights flare their warm light into the dusky roads and alleyways. Before night settles onto the city, a young gull tests its wings then tucks in beside its siblings in a quiet corner.

Photos by author.

Close Encounters of the Prairie Grouse Kind

Doug Cooper, Vancouver

This May I was fortunate enough to add two long-desired and related birds to my life list. The birds involved were Greater Sage-grouse and Sharp-tailed Grouse, and the sightings were given an added luster by occurring at leks, or dancing grounds, with both species in full spring-fever mode. Both are striking examples of how evolution, working through the dual engines of random genetic variation and sexual selection, can produce what seems on first observation to be rather bizarre and excessive end results.

It was a casual enquiry at the end of a telephone conversation with an organizer of the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek tours that are run by the Wainwright Wildlife Society that led to my visit to a Greater Sage-grouse lek in eastern Montana. At the end of organizing a place on one of the Sharp-tailed Grouse tours, I asked him if he had any suggestions as to where one might see Greater Sage-grouse. It turned out that he had seen his "bucket list" Greater Sage-grouse in eastern Montana through the assistance of the Glasgow, Montana field office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). I made prompt contact with the field office and was given permission to visit the same lek, as well being provided with detailed and complete directions as how to locate it.

It was with cautious high hopes, as my twitching batting average is not that great, of seeing both species, that I headed east in early May in my small truck-and-camper outfit. I drove the southern route through British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, enjoying the sights and sounds of the Prairies in the spring. I crossed the border into Montana just south of the east block of Grasslands National Park and headed towards Glasgow. What I interpreted as a good omen was my second-ever sighting, and first since 2006, of a Ferruginous Hawk, wading in a muddy roadside puddle just before the Canada-USA border.

A sign on the outskirts of Glasgow proclaims it is "The City in the Middle of Nowhere," apparently a reference to an article in 2018 by the Washington Post that used data from Oxford University's Big Data Institute to identify Glasgow as "the middle of nowhere" for the contiguous United States. The article stated "Of all towns with more than 1,000 residents, Glasgow ... is farthest – about 4.5 hours in any direction – from any metropolitan area of more than 75,000 people." The Post would not get any argument from me on the point.

It was late in the afternoon when I followed the directions given by my BLM contact and found myself in the middle of a sage grouse prairie. I found the lek by the scattering of feathers for which I'd been told to look and set up my portable blind. I'd been given additional permission to park my camper overnight near the lek.

At about 5:30 PM, and with a lovely prairie evening being promised, I settled myself in the blind, where I was surrounded by the lovely smell of sage and the equally-lovely songs of Horned Larks and Western Meadowlarks.

It was about an hour later when the magic started to happened. I could see a pale object approaching the lek, which turned out to be a male Greater Sage-Grouse sporting two large yellow inflated neck sacs that brought to my mind Bianca Castafiore, a character from the Tintin comic books. Slowly other males began to gather until there were about fifteen or so puffing out their neck sacs, making strange low double-hooting sounds and strutting about, with the occasional dust-up between two participants revealing the source of the scattered feathers. They seemed to take little notice of the blind or the sounds of my camera. Alas, no females were present at the dance ground. I was warned of this by the BLM as it was getting towards the end of the courting season and the local females had chosen their partners.

The lack of possible mates did not seem to dampen the enthusiasm of the males that were present. After about an hour and a half the light began to fade, the grouse deflated their neck sacs and flew off into the growing dusk. It was truly the most outstanding

Photographs of the Greater Sage-grouse and Sharp-tailed Grouse (next page) by the author.

birding event of my life so far, made even more special by the fact that it was just me who was being treated to the display. To add to the drama, there was a spectacular thunder and lighting storm during the night. The grouse display was repeated the next morning but featured fewer participants and lasting less than an hour, and felt decidedly anticlimactic after the previous evening's show.

Later that day I headed north and west back to the Canadian border and towards Wainwright. On the way my birding luck continued to hold. A long-legged bird that I glimpsed out of the corner on my eye standing on a fence post north of the Drumheller badlands turned out to be my first Upland Sandpiper. The next morning dawned clear and cool, and I was led with a few other participants to a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek. At this lek both males and females were present. The males proceeded with their sudden and intermittent imitation of clockwork creations and the females made their choices. It was a very successful experience but couldn't really hold a candle to the sage-grouse experience.

I have also posted a couple of short videos on YouTube of both species dancing:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHjxwt08x4k

www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUqnU-vT6S4.

The BLM can be contacted at: BLM Glasgow Field Office, 5 Lasar Drive, Glasgow, MT 59230. PH. (406) 228-3750), and the Wainwright Wildlife Society through Sheldon Frissell, frissell4@gmail.com.

Briefing 2

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

How the Birds Really Got Their Feathers

(Being a sequel to "How The Birds Got Their Feathers," *BC Birding*, June, 2016, p.18.)

Until about 30 years ago (1990s) it was generally thought that feathers evolved with the birds, notably on the evidence of fossils of Archaeopteryx, which flourished in the region of Germany about 150 million years ago (late Jurassic Period). This feathered avian dinosaur has until recently been widely regarded as the "first bird." But new fossils discovered since the 1990s (mostly from China and Canada) have shown that many of the dinosaurs in fact possessed primitive feathers. Birds are small dinosaurs that have survived to the present and have developed spectacularly varied feather morphology.

There appears now, from Brazil, a fossil Pterosaur, a primitive flying (or aerially gliding) reptile related to, but distinct from the dinosaurs. It exhibits well-formed feathers. The fossil, formally named *Tupandactylus imperator* was, as the specific name implies, large, with a five-metre wingspan and a prominent bony crest on top of its head. On the back of this crest, true feathers up to 30 mm long were found. The feathers include "melanosomes" – structures that contain melanin, the substance that controls feather (or skin) colour and are

an important confirming feature of true feathers. Pterosaurs and dinosaurs flourished from about 230 million years ago (early Triassic Period) until 66 million years ago (end of the Cretaceous Period), when a major asteroid collision with Earth extinguished all the pterosaurs and dinosaurs except the small birds. *T. imperator* is about 113 million years old (mid-Cretaceous Period – the heyday of the dinosaurs).

Inasmuch as feathers are now known to have evolved in pterosaurs, dinosaurs and birds, important questions are whether feathers evolved more than once and what was their original purpose. Two types of feathers are found: fluffy, single-strands against the skin, and overlying stiff feathers with the familiar central shaft and barbs. Modern feathers serve as insulation, body shaping, protection, signalling identity (for example, in courtship) and defence. Their origin in several creatures – both ones adapted for flight and non-flyers – suggests that their original purposes were insulation and signalling. For cold-blooded or faintly warm-blooded creatures such as the dinosaurs and pterosaurs, insulation confers significant survival advantage. Heat conservation is equivalent to energy conservation, which confers advantage in speed and persistence of actions.

As to their evolution, the appearance of feathers in three major animal groups: pterosaurs, dinosaurs, and birds (descended from theropod dinosaurs), suggests a single, more ancient origin. The British palaeontologist, M.J. Benton, has grouped all three in a clade (a group of organisms considered to be derived from a common ancestor) that he called Avemetatarsalia, which presumably originated in early Triassic times, c.230 million years ago and 100 million years before Archaeopteryx. It is now supposed that feathers originated in this ancestral group.

References

Cincotta, A. + 10 others. 2022. Pterosaur melanosomes support signalling functions for early feathers. *Nature* 604: 684–688. (a highly technical article: the following commentary is much more clear).

Benton, M.J. 2022. A colourful view of the origin of dinosaur feathers. *Nature* 604: 630-631.

Briefing 3

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Epidemic Birds – Again*

Highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses (HPAIVs) periodically infect bird populations around the world. While some wild birds appear to tolerate the viruses, they are fatal to others. They can also cause great misery and even death amongst humans, and large economic costs due to the infection of domestic fowl. Avian influenza viruses appear to be endemic in some wild birds, but are thought to originate in poultry populations in southeast Asia.

An instructive case occurred in 2014 –15, when the influenza type H5N8 erupted from its apparent place of origin in southern China and rapidly spread across the Northern Hemisphere. (H stands for hemagglutinin and N for neuraminidase – defining molecular constituents of influenza viruses.) The 2014 –15 virus apparently originated in the 1990s in domestic chickens or ducks in southeast Asia. It eventually spread into wild fowl – largely freshwater ducks – that spread it to many more ducks and geese, and their predators, via contacts on Siberian summer range. Many of these birds migrated to Europe and North America for the winter, carrying the virus with them. The virus reached Africa in 2017. Only South America, Australia and Antarctica still remain HN-virus free. In Europe and North America it has caused major flu epidemics amongst domestic fowl. To stop the disease has required the culling, at great cost, of many millions of domestic chickens.

In 2021 a new, more aggressive, variant – H5N1 – spread out of Asia. This has led again to drastic culls of domestic chickens in western Europe, particularly the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. It also has killed 10,000 common cranes in migration through Israel and 10% of the Svalbard breeding population of Barnacle Geese. In December, 2021, the H5N1 variant was detected in a Great Black-backed Gull at St. John's, Newfoundland, and since early 2022 it has rapidly spread across Canada and the USA. Up to this August the disease has killed or prompted the cull of 2,092,000 chickens in Canada, of which 160,000 (7.6%) have been in British Columbia (the provinces most affected are Alberta, Quebec and Ontario). In Europe the situation has become so dire that authorities are considering the use of vaccines to stop the spread of the disease. This is considered to be a desperate measure because of the perceived difficulty to market vaccinated birds (even though there is an effective Chinese vaccine exists that apparently is harmless to humans).

On the farm, the disease spreads not only by direct contact among the animals, but also via animal droppings, airborne droplets ejected by vigorously vocalizing birds, and by contaminated soil. Droppings and soil may be carried from one barn or farm to another on boots, implements and vehicle tires. It would be very difficult to eliminate these pathways, but those involving human activity certainly may be minimized by careful attention to cleaning potentially affected surfaces.

Humans acquire the disease directly from the birds, almost always by direct handling of them, hence farmers and poultry workers are the overwhelming number of victims. There is no evidence of human-to-human transmission. Between 2005 and 2019, 18,620 outbreaks of HN-viruses have been reported from 76 countries. Since 2003, H5N1 has sickened 863 individuals, principally in Europe and China, of whom 456 (53%) have died, mainly before 2016. The numbers appear large but, in light of the order of a million farmers – both commercial and subsistence – poultry workers and butchers (including, in parts of the world, live bird sellers), they are actually relatively small.

References

Wille, M. and Barr, I.G. 2022. Resurgence of avian influenza virus. *Science* 376: 459-460.

Stokstad, E. 2022.Wrestling with bird flue, Europe considers once-taboo vaccines. *Science* 376: 682-683.

Both articles are "news reports."

*See *BC Birding*, 2016(4) "Epidemic birds" and 2017(1): "Update on epidemic birds."

UVic Birding Club Hesquiat Harbour IBA Marbled Murrelet Survey

Liam Ragan, Aiva Noringseth, Emma Reader-Lee and Hannah Hickli

Hesquiat is located approximately 50 km north of Tofino on the ancestral lands of the Hesquiaht people. Hesquiaht have inhabited the area for thousands of years and have an intimate and unique knowledge of the birds and other organisms who live there. Quantitative information and standardized surveys of the area have been few and far between, making it a blank spot for Marbled Murrelet breeding site and citizen science (eBird, iNaturalist, etc.) data.

Hesquiat Lake Area Important Bird Area (IBA) was established based on surveys from 1992–97, which indicated it could be a significant North Island refuge for nesting Marbled Murrelets. A lack of subsequent surveys mean we are unsure of how the population has fared in the preceding quarter-century, as well as how it may have changed due to logging pressures in the area and recent landslides. Furthermore, to crosslink the site to a Key Biodiversity Area, data is needed from the past decade to justify its continued significance. Members of the University of Victoria Birding Club (est. 2020), with the support of the IBA Provincial Coordinator and BC Nature, were hosted by IBA Caretaker Dianne Ignace for six days in Hesquiat with the aim of providing an updated murrelet count. Alongside this objective, a marine debris clean-up for World Oceans Day, collection of faunal and floral observations in an iNaturalist trip report, and 30 eBird checklists were performed.

To ensure the survey was comparable to previous population estimates the group received training in current provincial survey methodology from Dr Doug Bertram, with equipment graciously provided by Environment Canada. Using this method in Hesquiat, we were able to conduct a single dawn survey that resulted in a total of 281 murrelet detections. Of these, 157 were incoming, which represents a 59 individual disparity from the average of the 1990s surveys. Our initial plan to do three surveys was impeded by the combination of a major storm and subsequent disruption to our vessel. While a single survey does not allow robust comparison to previous data, we can confirm that Marbled Murrelets continue in significant numbers in the Hesquiat watershed. Furthermore, an at-sea survey performed on the boat ride into Hesquiat harbour also returned a high murrelet count, with a minimum count of 201 individuals. Thankfully, these counts both surpassed the national IBA/KBA threshold of 149 individuals, representing ≥ 0.2% of the national population (see KBAcanada.org for details).

Our group was lucky enough to record other notable avian observations alongside Marbled Murrelets. Most significant was a minimum count of 65 Black Swifts observed from the pier at Hesquiat feeding on an insect hatch. This count is above national IBA/KBA thresholds, though requires more than one year of data to determine whether this was a unique phenomenon or a seasonal feeding strategy. Discussions with the former Hesquiaht Indigenous Fisheries Manager revealed a number of potential breeding habitats within the territory, making it a potential subject for further study. Other highlights of the trip included Red-Breasted Merganser, Cliff Swallow, Purple Martin, and Marsh Wren, all unusual for either the season, region, or both. The latter two sightings were the northernmost records of their species for the west coast of Vancouver Island, both found at Village Lake in Hesquiat. Furthermore, discussions with local Hesquiaht revealed historical records with photos of rarities including Brown Pelican, American White Pelican, Snowy Owl, and a potential sighting of eleven egret of indeterminate species. Permission is being sought to share these images. Additionally, local stories and photos revealed a previously unsurveyed bird aggregation in March coinciding with the harbour's Pacific Herring spawn event. This is a subject of great interest as it could easily prove to include populations occurring above IBA/KBA thresholds as at other spawning sites along the coast.

During the expedition we made a

Below: Emma Reader-Lee (left) and Liam Ragan (right) using marine radar to detect outgoing Marbled Murrelets during a dawn survey, supported by audio/visual detection by Hannah Hickli (centre). Photo by Aiva Noringseth.

point of surveying for non-avian species of interest. Cataloguing these on iNaturalist, this effort amounted to 1,046 observations of 371 unique taxonomic entities. Alongside the abundant bird life, these highlights included camel crickets, round-leaved sundew, and several hundred sea otters.

When evening conditions allowed, attempts to detect bat species with an Echometer Pro 2 indicated a minimum of three species in the area; Yuma Myotis, Little Brown Myotis and Silver-haired. These species are among those in Canada which have faced recent increased status assessment in wake of White Nose Syndrome and other threats.

This trip was undertaken with the understanding that Northwestern Vancouver Island remains a largely undersurveyed area where conservation questions abound. Difficulties in accessing this area makes surveys uncommon and costly. Our small group of youth bird fanatics were able to provide a renewed glimpse into the Hesquiat Harbour IBA status thanks to funding from BCFO, BC Nature, and BC Marine Trails. Perhaps the most exciting takeaways are the questions the trip raised. Are Black Swift using the area in meaningful numbers? What kind of aggregations are occurring here in tandem with the herring spawn? How are Marbled Murrelet in the area responding to increasing pressures? We hope to have the privilege of playing a hand in continuing to investigate these questions.

Above: The target species – two adult Marbled Murrelets in Hesquiat Harbour, June 1, 2022. Photo by Liam Ragan.

Below: A Black Swift gapes for insects in mid-air, one of 65+ individuals counted in the area on June 5, 2022. Photo by Liam Ragan.

Oddnotes

Readers have been discussing bird collective names. Some of the following are "real" – i.e. established – but others are new suggestions. See if you can tell which is which.

- A bouquet of hummingbirds
- A pandemonium of parrots
- A fall of warblers
- A squabble of siskins
- A mewing of catbirds
- An exultation of larks
- A flamboyance of flamingos
- A gross of grosbeaks
- A tangle of knots
- A wake of vultures
- A coronation of kingbirds
- A screech of gulls
- A scold of jays
- A twitch of birders

Do you have a favourite not mentioned, or suggestions for additional names? Perhaps "A manslaughter of crows" for a group too small to be called a *murder*? Send them in for the next edition.

For Your Ears Only

Corey Mazurat, Kelowna

Welcome to *For Your Ears Only*, a column about learning birding by ear. I would love to introduce myself as a master birder with stunning aural recall of 1,874 bird species, but sadly that would be entirely a lie. I'm practically a novice birder – I began formal birding at the beginning of COVID although I'd been an avid birdwatcher for many years previously – and my ability to identify birds by ear is by no means exceptional or honed.

What I do have is a background in documentary film and soundscape recording, an insatiable curiosity, an affinity for technology with concomitant (and expensive) addiction to gear, and a great desire to Know The Birds. We are all aware that during a typical birding session we hear far more birds than we see — think soras, orioles, or even owls — and learning what to listen for, what the sounds mean in terms of bird behaviour, and how to record those sounds for further education, will immediately enhance our time spent birding.

This column will serve as an introduction to the theories, processes, and techniques of identifying birds by ear. I will explain why I tried to bird with a blindfold, direct you to useful web resources, explain techniques and gear options that may assist you in hearing and/or ID-ing birds, and teach you how to read spectrograms. I will also try to convince you of the value of capturing and sharing recordings with the birding community at large.

Of course no written material will ever supplant actual time spend listening to and identifying birds, but it is my hope that the knowledge gained here will inform and enhance your field practice.

I first became truly interested in bird calls when I lived in Kampala, Uganda in 2013–2014. This beautiful sub-Saharan country is acclaimed as a birder's paradise and our urban backyard was routinely visited by sunbirds, turacos, go-away-birds, plantain eaters, bee eaters, ibises, hornbills, mannikins, and bulbuls. Lots of bulbuls, actually, and they were so ubiquitous while also appearing in such varied locations and with multiple colours depending on the light that even now, nearly a decade later, my wife and I use "bulbul" as a shorthand when we corner-eye a possibly unusual bird only to have it turn out to be a Black-capped Chickadee or American Robin.

I would commonly count thirty or forty species visible in the surrounding trees during the afternoon G&T ritual on our balcony after work. Two Eastern Grey Plantain-eaters, nicknamed Bert and Ernie by my wife, would appear with clockwork precision each morning at dawn on the balcony railing outside our bedroom window. For anyone who's never heard this bird, I urge you to check out clips of their calls online — and then imagine them ten feet away from you, through an open window, at 5:00 AM each morning.

I was in Uganda to gather footage for a video project and so I had recording gear with me. It is common to layer multiple sound tracks in a scene in order to create the audio soundscape desired, and thus I frequently recorded audio to build a library from which to choose. I wanted some bird calls and began capturing the morning chorus outside my window. I became interested in identifying the birds I could hear but not see.

Even as late as 2018, but certainly in the dark times of 2013, the only real ways to identify an unknown bird call were to (A) have a more knowledgeable person with you whilst birding, (B) record the sound in the field and play it back for someone who could ID it, (C) use the notoriously inaccurate and buggy commercial software packages available for identifying bird songs ("We think this is a marmot," one app confidently IDed a White-crowned Sparrow), or (D) record it, load the recordings into a computer, and use specialized audio software to view the spectrogram of the sound and compare it to known data.

In 2013 Uganda, this last option was my best choice. I loaded my recordings into software and processed the songs to remove human-made noises, enhance clarity and boost gain. I next compared my recordings to the great library of sound that is Xeno-Canto (xeno-canto.org). The entire process was tricky, slow and laborious, certainly, but it fired my curiosity and started me on the journey to where I am now.

Today, of course, there is the nearly magical Merlin Sound ID app, which frequently IDs birds I can barely hear with my bare ears. It's a great place to start, and I urge you to download it to your phones. Like eBird, which has supplanted pencil and paper for many listers, some will argue that Merlin is an endpoint in itself and are content to offload the task of ID-ing to an app.

It's not infallible, though, especially when it can't connect to the internet. In late July at Mirror Lake and Lac du Bois, both in Lac du Bois Protected Grasslands near Kamloops, it suggested that we were hearing American Oystercatcher, Dickcissel, and White Wagtail when in fact we were hearing Sora (one adult and four chicks) and a busy Orange-crowned Warbler. It also requires you to pull out your phone and activate the app whereas your ears are always on and ready to go. I also suspect that part of the richness of birding comes from the moment when you Know The Birds, or at least Bird, in your area. While an app can help and confirm, ultimately ear training is the more profound way to go.

Before we can begin to ID birds by ear, though, we need to know what to listen for and how to describe it. In our next column we'll do exactly that – build a vocabulary of sounds, learn how to describe and transcribe them into a universal format, and begin the process of understanding the sounds we hear while birding. Until next time….

The Paleo-Ornithologist

Charles Helm, Tumbler Ridge

Ninesting Creek: The Largest Mesozoic Avian Tracks In North America

It was one of the few silver linings to the dark clouds of Covid: because of lockdowns I was unable to travel to South Africa for my annual September-December palaeontology field season. This created an opportunity for late-season fieldwork in the Tumbler Ridge area, in particular to an intriguing site identified in 2015 and not visited since, named "Ninesting Creek." As related in a previous issue of *BC Birding*, repeated attacks by yellow-jacket wasps had made research at the site unfeasible. But October, after frost had rendered the wasps quiescent, and before the site was blanketed in the first snows, seemed to present an enticing gap, and we prepared to take it.

Our brief 2015 foray had identified several large tracks which appeared to have been made by birds about 112 million years ago. On our two return visits in the fall of 2021 we were not disappointed. Not only was there a total of 20 vertebrate tracks in six trackways, more than we had anticipated, but they clearly represented three very different types of trackmakers.

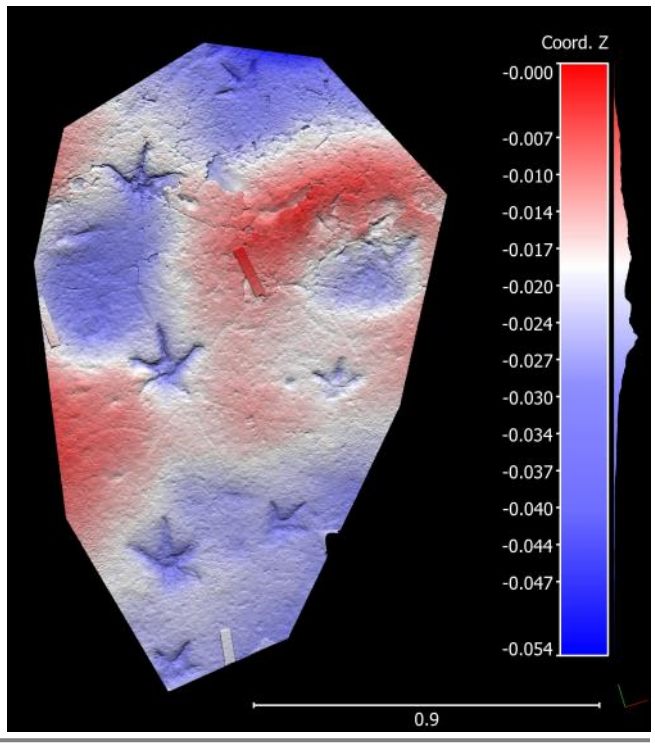
Firstly, there were tracks with three digit impressions (tridactyl) that clearly resembled those of birds (photo at top). In addition there were larger (tetradactyl) tracks with four digit impressions (bottom left). Finally, there were a couple of tracks of a type we had never encountered before, which turned out to be the first pterosaur tracks in BC and the oldest thus far identified in Canada (these will be described in a subsequent article).

In brief summary, the bird tracks were assigned to the ichnogenus Wupus, which has previously been identified in Korea. Interestingly, the Korean tracks were also found in association with pterosaur tracks. Just over 10 cm in length, they are the largest tracks that have been confidently assigned to avian trackmakers in North America in the Mesozoic Era (the "Age of Dinosaurs"), and are among the largest in the world from this time period.

The larger, tetradactyl tracks were assigned to Saurexallopus. While some authorities think these may also be avian tracks, the commoner interpretation is that they were made by oviraptosaurs. These bipedal, non-avian theropod dinosaurs were perhaps the size of an emu or ostrich. They too are the oldest of their kind thus far identified in Canada. Photogrammetry (bottom right) highlights the different types of tracks and trackways.

At the time the tracks were made, the area was likely at the margin of an open lake basin or a floodplain pond. Traces made by freshwater mussels were also present on the surface, suggesting that the birds, oviraptosaurs and pterosaurs might have been interested in a meal of molluscs. At the time the area would have been located close to the Arctic Circle, with long periods of winter darkness.

The novel findings at Ninesting Creek were recently published in Cretaceous Research, with Dr Martin Lockley of the University of Colorado as lead author. The findings confirm the importance of northeastern BC as an area rich in fossil tracksites, and of global importance for palaeo-ornithology.



Bird Photographers' Corner

Clive Keen, Prince George

Back-Button Autofocus

Many cameras have a button on the back with a label such as "AF-ON." This is for back-button autofocus (BBAF), which allows you to focus by pressing that button rather than half-pressing the shutter release. Probably few people ever use it or even think to do so. If they notice it at all, they'll likely view it as redundant. Why bother, when the half-pressed shutter release does a perfectly good job?

There are in fact compelling reasons to use BBAF in bird photography. Before it can become useful, though, you first have to go through your camera's menus to uncouple the shutter release from the autofocus. (It's fairly easy.) There is little point using the back button if you don't do this.

The main advantage of BBAF is that it allows you to switch instantly between single autofocus (AF-S) and continuous autofocus (AF-C). AF-S is designed for stationary subjects. In ordinary (non-BBAF) mode, AF-S will lock focus on your subject while you keep the shutter release half pressed, allowing you to recompose the scene. This is needed if, say, you focus on a bird, but then don't want the bird to appear in the centre of the image. If the subject is in motion, though, you need instead to use continuous autofocus (AF-C), so the camera can correct its focus as the subject moves. Bird photographers need both modes, but switching between them is a bit of a fiddle, and the time taken can mean missing out on a sudden opportunity.

This is where BBAF steps in. With your focus mode set permanently to AF-C, and the shutter release disconnected from autofocus, you in effect have both modes. If you want AF-C, you just keep your thumb on the back button (AF-ON). If on the other hand you want AF-S, you focus, just take your thumb off the back button, and recompose – then when you press the shutter release, the camera doesn't undo your good work by refocusing.

Obstructions too often fool your autofocus. Without back-button autofocus your camera might decide to switch focus to the blades of grass waving in front of the Burrowing Owl when you re-press the shutter release. Photo by author.

This is seriously handy, and one of its unsung merits is allowing you to focus specifically on the bird's eye and then recompose – yes, you could move the AF point instead, but that takes time that you might not have.

And there is another really good reason to switch to BBAF. Far too often in the past I've been stymied trying to focus on a bird ensconced in foliage. Eventually I get the focus and take a shot, but then lose that hard-won focus on re-pressing the shutter release, perhaps because the wind has shifted some foliage and the autofocus prefers that to the bird. I then have to go through the whole find-the-correct-focus rigmarole again. This is not a problem with BBAF. Once you've got the focus, you just keep your thumb away from the back button and shoot away without the camera reconsidering its focus whenever you touch the shutter release.

Incidentally, if you find that the autofocus won't work at all in this situation, or keeps on hunting, simply switch to manual focus and use the great manual-focus aids in today's cameras. Sometimes you only have to get the focus in the right ball park, and you can use autofocus again for fine tuning. Some camera/lens combinations make this really easy by allowing instant manual override, with autofocus switching off while you turn the focus ring and switching on manual-focus aids.

But do try BBAF. You might wonder how you ever did without it.

Bird Photographers' Corner, continued

Another Reason to Go Mirrorless

For those wondering if they should make the mirrorless leap, be assured that there really are reasons to do so other than keeping up with the Joneses. An advantage that I am becoming profoundly grateful for is the ability of mirrorless cameras to cope with deep shadow.

On a recent noonday walkabout I did not expect to photograph any birds in the bright sunlight, as the harsh glare does nothing at all for photographic quality. Overcast light is acceptable for bird photography all day long, but if it is a cloudless day, you are mostly restricted to shooting in the early morning and early evening. The finest photographs, indeed, are taken in the "golden hour" after sunrise and before sunset, but it's tough to hang up the camera for the rest of the day.

I always carry my camera, anyway, even when lighting makes for poor prospects, so although I was ignoring the birds sitting in the sun, I wondered about the possibilities of a White-tailed Jackrabbit sitting under a tree in deepest shadow.

With my DSLR, I'd have taken a guess at the correct exposure for a beastie that I could hardly see in the viewfinder, and then bracketed for a while in the hope that one of the exposures would give me something worth having, I'd certainly have moved on quickly to something less problematic.

The game changed, though, with the electronic viewfinder (EVF) of my Nikon Z7, which offered two advantages. First, by adjusting the exposure I could see the animal very clearly through the viewfinder. EVFs automatically "turn up the light" when you are looking at something dark, and you can turn up the light even more if you wish, allowing you to see clearly what is in deep shadow. DSLRs are entirely incapable of this.

By adjusting my exposure setting, I had beautiful views of the jackrabbit and could watch as its expression and posture changed. That gave me a reason to hang around until it did something more interesting than snooze, like waking up for an ear scratch.

The second advantage of the EVF is that you can see exactly you will get after pressing the shutter. I didn't want to burn out the background completely, but equally didn't want to lose fine details of the hare's coat. Twiddles of the exposure-compensation dial quickly delivered the sweet spot. Reason alone to jump into the 2020s.

The Focus-limit Switch

The long lenses used in bird photography often have a focus-limit switch which allows you to restrict the focusing range. This will allow you, say, to limit the focusing range from five to ten metres, or from ten metres to infinity. The benefit, we are usually told, is that it allows faster automatic focusing. If you're photographing nearby birds, you don't want the camera to waste time by checking on objects a long way away. OK, fair enough, but since that would save only a few microseconds, it wouldn't seem that vital.

There's a better reason for making use of the switch, though. Sometimes focusing on nearby birds, particularly ones in foliage, is a bit of a challenge for the autofocus. When it struggles to find the nearby focus, it might spot a nice feature in the distance which makes for much easier focusing, and off it will go, leaving you floundering. You can prevent the camera changing focus to the background simply by restricting the range. It saves far more than milliseconds, and makes a minor fiddle with the switch well worth while. Make a habit of restricting the range, and there will be times when it rescues the shot.

One of the best things about birding trips is spotting more than just birds along the way. This time, it delivered a fine White-tailed Jackrabbit.

Featured Species No. 18

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

Sooty Grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*)

Status: Uncommon to locally common resident. Breeds.

This bird was formerly known as Blue Grouse. When the species was split, birds in the interior were named Dusky Grouse (*D. obscurus*) and coastal birds became Sooty Grouse. Sooty Grouse occur from the Sierra Mountains and north coast of California north though western Oregon, western Washington, and coastal British Columbia to southeast Alaska. In many areas, Sooty Grouse spend the winter months in trees at high elevation and move down the mountain in early spring. In our west coast region, birds are usually found at higher elevation even in summer. The best time of year to find Sooty Grouse is late spring and early summer, when males are on territory, vocalizing with low, booming hoots repeated five or six times.

Sooty Grouse are sometimes found at low elevation in bogs. In the summer of 1980, a bird was found hooting from a copse of trees in a large bog at Cape Scott Provincial Park, and birds were seen beside the highway in boggy areas of Pacific Rim National Park in the 1970s, though rarely in recent years. These were likely young males born in a logged-off area nearby, looking for a territory of their own. Birds have also been recorded from the hills and low mountains southeast of Barkley Sound in recent years, which is not surprising in a landscape altered by logging activity. In the early 1970s, three males were heard vocalizing in logging slash near Lost Shoe Creek in what is now Pacific Rim National Park. This species is resident on Brooks Peninsula, and females with one or two young were found in August 1981. On 6 May 1976, an adult female was seen on Solander Island, 1.7 km west of the peninsula.

As a logged-off area becomes a young forest, it becomes unsuitable habitat for this species. Lacking clearcuts, however, birds may be encountered at higher elevation, such as at the top of Lone Cone on Meares Island, at the top of Radar Hill near Cox Bay, and on ridges where forest cover is sparse. For example, Sooty Grouse are often heard hooting on the mountain ridges high above the mouth of the Sydney River estuary, where bare areas devoid of trees are scarce, and they may be heard in the high country near the lower Kennedy River.

The following records show that birds are also found in the subalpine zone of the higher mountains. On 27 July 1986, two birds were encountered at high elevation on Mount Klitsa, and on 13 August 2008, six birds were found there. On 27 August 1990, a bird was found in the sub-alpine zone of Steamboat Mountain (Clayoquot Plateau), and on 1 September 2008, three birds were found on Halfpipe South.

Sooty Grouse also frequent mountain slopes at lower elevation when open areas are present. During a birding expedition on Adder Mountain on 2 October 2016, a total of 10 birds were flushed from the ground in such habitat above 750 m (2,460 ft) elevation.

Note

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

Sooty Grouse photo by author.

Gone Fishing

Wayne's Bird

Chris Siddle, Vernon

Wayne was one of British Columbia's great birders of the 1960s–2020s. His questioning attitude about sightings and his dislike of theories unsupported by strong evidence sometimes rubbed other birders the wrong way (Wayne would say that he ruffled feathers) but he lived to keep BC birding history accurate. His memory was a vast storehouse of verified sightings of BC and Washington State birds. Rain, snow, wind, heat – nothing stopped Wayne from birding, and he birded more sections of BC and Washington than most birders will visit in their entire life times. A sloppy, lackadaisical approach to birding was anathema to Wayne. Birding was always fun but it was also serious fieldwork.

When Sonja and I were raising our children in Fort St. John (1975–1989) Wayne was one of the only Lower Mainland birders who ever visited in the off season (January to mid-May and mid-July to December) putting in very long days scouring the spruce, aspens, marshes, ponds and rivers for precious late records of warblers, sparrows, hawks and shorebirds. When I began teaching, I found the job so time-consuming that I would stop birding after the Labour Day weekend and not resume after-work birding until spring began. Essentially, autumn was a write off. I didn't realize the good birding I was missing until Wayne started visiting Fort St. John in the fall. From his example of rigorous field work from the early 1980s onwards I learned to stop being a fairweather birder and started collecting data for my own study of the birds of the North Peace, eventually published many years later.

Wayne always encouraged birders to push past their self-imposed restrictions. Although he was a good ear birder, he would admit that he hadn't been blessed with good eyesight. A weakness that would discourage lesser beings from pursuing birds only made Wayne push himself harder in the field to get a better view of his quarry. If he hadn't seen the bird he wanted, he would return time after time to search for it. And his searches were long and methodical. Above all else he was a very careful observer who would never dream of fudging a record.

Wayne was a lister. I don't suppose that there's anyone outside of his family that knows how many different lists he kept, but I know that his Washington State, Oregon, and Canada lists were precious to him. Of course, very high on his list of favourites was his BC provincial list. To be a birder who discovered a species no-one else had ever seen in British Columbia was pretty close to finding the Holy Grail. A grail obtainable by very few, the ridiculously lucky who had the bird fall into their laps, so to speak, but more importantly and more admirably, the expert birder informed with encyclopedic knowledge who knew when and where to look for something previously undetected, a super birder who narrowed down the list of possible bird candidates, searched a suitable but under-visited area and found a new bird for the provincial list. To be that person who added a bird to the official BC list was a dream Wayne entertained as so many of us do.

Late one Friday evening in June 1989 Wayne phoned me to tell me that he was listening to a Yellow Rail on the BC side of Boundary Lake, east of Fort St. John, about 80 kms from our home. With his encyclopedic knowledge of bird records and distribution, Wayne knew that the Yellow Rail was listed as hypothetical in the province. None of the previous half-dozen reports had met the rigorous standards set by the bird and mammal curators at the Royal BC Museum, who at that time were compiling *The Birds of British Columbia* (1990–2000), a multivolume account of BC's birdlife. No one knew better than Wayne that the rail at Boundary Lake had the potential to be the first verified BC provincial record for the species. Wayne was going by the rules of establishing genuine provincial records; he wanted someone to be a second credible observer.

The Yellow Rail is stocky, short ailed, and sparrow-sized, extremely well camouflaged in straw-yellows, browns, buffs, and blacks . Of the seven rails regularly occurring in the United States and Canada, the Yellow Rail is one of the hardest to see. In fact, Virginia Rails, Soras, Clapper Rails and King Rails are bold exhibitionists compared to the Yellow. It winters around the Gulf Coast and migrates to its breeding range from New Brunswick, southern Quebec, Ontario, and the southern half of the Prairie Provinces. The northern limits of its range are poorly known because so few birders are found in those parts and because the rail is at least partially nocturnal. Also, in breeding season its habitat, sedges meadows and flooded fields are home to humming hordes of mosquitoes. Nobody goes for a casual walk in Yellow Rail country without hip waders, or at the very least tall gumboots, and liberal applications of mosquito repellent. It calls its diagnostic tik-tik; tik-tik-tik mostly at night but also occasionally at other times of the day. The rhythm is always the same – one-two; one-two-three – and sound quality is commonly and accurately compared to a person tapping two small stones or pebbles together. It can be attracted closer by imitations and recordings of its sound, but it's so well camouflaged and moves so stealthily that birders have lured the bird within touching distance and still failed to see it. Its habitat is so specific and its call so distinctive that "Heard Only" records of the species are more readily accepted as verified records than for almost all other species of birds.

It was very close to being the year's longest day. The Peace River evening lingered as I drove east from Fort St.

Below: A skulking Yellow Rail, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository.

John past the tiny farming communities of Cecil Lake with its little log church and Goodlow with its late singing White-throated Sparrows and Swainson's Thrushes. Boundary Lake is a small shallow lake half in Alberta and half in BC. Petroleum companies had constructed three gravel causeways that crossed the western marshes to service natural gas rigs that stood out in the lake on their little almost-islands. Night was slowly drawing on; it was well past ten by the time I stopped along the southern causeway and slathered on mosquito repellent before starting my search for the rail.

This was a spot I knew well. I had started coming for its waterbirds and for Broad-winged Hawks and Le Conte's Sparrows about six years earlier and had shown Wayne how to get there. However, I had always visited in the early morning so I had yet to experience the busy routine of a Boundary Lake evening. Peace River summers are short and intense with bird activity. Birdlife was all around me: drake Blue-winged Teals, American Wigeons, and Lesser Scaups loafed and moulted as females of the same species incubating large clutches of eggs in down-filled nests hidden in the weeds around the petroleum pump jacks, pairs of Eared Grebes tending their soggy cattail nests holding their chalky white eggs, and a scattering of Black Terns calling sharp "kips" as they cross and re-crossed the lake. As darkness rose from the boreal spruce, Labrador tea, willows and aspens surrounding the marsh, the rail resumed his pebble ticking. The source of the sound was invisible but pretty close, somewhere in the flooded sedge meadow just south of the causeway, maddingly close to the gravel road but separated from it by a deep ditch that ran the length of the causeway.

Wayne had put in a very long day, birding since sunup. His discovery of the rail had come late in the day. Now he was back in his hotel room in Fort St. John. I had the place to myself, just me, a thousand birds and the invisible rail.

The night was short. The rail tapped his signature rhythm off and on through the darkness. Soras and Eared Grebes never really stopped calling. By 3 AM Nelson's Sparrows were starting to sing their hissing songs from sedge tussocks and willows as the sun rose out of the aspens of Alberta and light stretched across the shallow lake.

I never saw the Yellow Rail, but its distinctive vocalization was enough for me and for whoever at the time was compiling the provincial bird list. The sighting was just a little too late to appear in the first volume of the Birds of British Columbia but ten years later there it was in the fourth volume as an accepted species. I am happy that I was able to independently hear the bird, but I am happiest that it was truly Wayne Weber's bird, a bird secretive, difficult and unreliable, appearing at certain remote marshes some years and not at others, a tribute to Wayne's outstandingly contribution to BC ornithology and birding, a bird I for one will always associate with the late Wayne Weber, now sadly gone but not forgotten.

Briefing 4

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Technicolor – And More

Hummingbirds are a colourful bunch – just how colourful is made clear by a new study of the light reflected from hummingbird feathers. The apparent feather colour of a bird may arise from the actual colour of the feather or from the effect of light refraction from the barbs and barbules of the feathers (barbs are the principal strands emanating from the quill; barbules are secondary strands near the tip of the barbs, including hooks that hold the barbs together). The effect of refraction depends on the shape of the barbules, the chemistry of their surface coatings, and the angles of incident and reflected light, hence the resulting colour appears to vary depending upon the positions of bird and observer. Researchers classify the light (hence, the apparent colour) according to the sensitivity of the retinal cones in the birds' eyes, leading to a four-fold classification including long wave (red – r), intermediate (green – g), short wave (blue – b) and very short wave (ultraviolet – uv) wavelengths. The first three classes comprise human visible light. The hummingbirds (and spectrophotometers) can also see the ultraviolet – invisible to us.

In a new study, researchers have examined 1,600 plumage patches from 114 hummingbird species (31.6% of all hummingbirds) and compared the results with a previous study of 111 bird species varying from parrots to penguins that had served to define the "gamut" (read "range") of bird colour. The data were analyzed in a four-sided graph forming a tetrahedron with one principal colour (r, g, b, uv) at each corner. The range of observed colours is summarized by the proportion of the total volume of the graph occupied by data. The range of visible colours is also measurable as the proportion of the area occupied on the triangular surface defined by the r, g, b vertices.

The measured hummingbirds occupy 34.3% of the full graph space. When combined with the prior multi-species study, their contribution expands the visible colour gamut for all birds by 56% of the total volume. The most colourful individual hummer is the Velvet-purple Coronet, which inhabits the Pacific slopes of the Andes in Colombia and Ecuador. It alone expresses colours that occupy 13.8% of the visible colour range. (The previous high record was the Papuan Lorikeet at 4.7%.) After the present survey, the nine most variably coloured of all birds are hummers. The hummingbirds notably display saturated greens and blues, which are rare in all other species. (In fact, the colour blue is comparatively rare in all nature, there being no common blue pigment.) The greatest colour variation among hummingbirds occurs in their crowns and gorgets, suggesting that mating displays and communication ("who am I?") are the purposes of this variety. The least variable area is undertail coverts.

With 225 of around 10,000 species analyzed (2.25%) it is clear that there is much additional data to be gathered, including for many more hummers. One guesses, however, that the hummers will not be displaced as the most colourful of all.

Reference

Venable, G.X., Gahm, K. & Prum, R.O. 2022. Hummingbird plumage color diversity exceeds the gamut of all other birds. *Communications Biology*. https://doi.org/10.1038/s42003-022-03518-2

The Reflective Birder

Clive Keen, Prince George

Note: After drafting this essay, it struck me (Editor) that aural birding was now ripe for its own column. I struck lucky by getting in touch with Corey Mazurat. See his inaugural column on page 28.

Merlin – Game Changer

Springtime birdsong is a great joy for many but a mixed blessing for the aurally challenged birder. All those birds hiding in the foliage but singing their heads off can lead to frustration and an unbalanced day-count. I just returned from a walk around my usual patch having tallied 42 species – not too bad for an old guy with lousy eyes and ears – but it usually means a long-drawn-out fight with my conscience. Which of the 42 could I confidently report to eBird? Half of those 42 were identified by ear alone, and often without the most solid assurance. Some birds are so easy to identify by sound – the delightful Olive-sided Flycatcher, for instance – that there's no need to hesitate in telling the world about them. But often enough when I'm wandering around I'll be noting down heard-only birds with limited degrees of conviction.

For instance, at my final listening-stop before heading home I was thinking "That's probably a Chipping Sparrow," and then "That might well be a MacGillivray's Warbler," and then "Oh, that's most likely a Swainson's Thrush." So, would I report any of them to eBird? But eBird doesn't allow you to put in "probably," "might well be," and "most likely." So I begin to agonize about whether I should report any or all of these three.

But halfway through this familiar stretch of agonizing, I remembered the Merlin sound-recognition app I'd installed on my cell phone but not yet used. I didn't have much expectation of it, as the general ID program is aimed at beginners rather than experienced birders, and the last sound-recognition app I'd tried was something of a dud. But I fired Merlin's Sound ID program up, and waved the phone in the air.

One of my birds sang again. *Chipping Sparrow*, said Merlin. Another piped up. *MacGillivray's Warbler*, Merlin declares. While I'm digesting this, the third of my birds gives its chip note – and *Swainson's Thrush* appears on the screen. If I were a cartoon character, my eyes at this point would be spinning in circles while my ears gave trombone impressions. My jaw certainly goes slack, and when another sound that I hadn't identified reverberates from the woods and *Evening Grosbeak* comes up on the screen (oh yes, of course it is, silly me), the jaw is slacker still.

Gorblimey. God's teeth. Strewth. This is too good to be true. But true it is. The Chipping Sparrow sings again, and *Chipping Sparrow* on my screen lights up, as does *MacGillivray's Warbler* when that guy gives another rendition. Merlin is, against all expectations, the real McCoy. I get the feeling that rather than slowly meandering along the path racking my brains in the struggle to clamp names to all those sounds, I could just waltz along holding up my cell phone in blithe assurance that I'd become a fount of eBird wisdom.

Well, perhaps not quite. Using Merlin to confirm one's tentative identifications is an extremely welcome step forward, but using it to replace those identifications wouldn't cut the mustard. Nobody could expect Merlin to be infallible, and of course it isn't, nor does it remove the need to make sense of the sounds with your own ears, with all the satisfaction that that can bring.

I'm actually rather glad that I didn't discover Merlin before I'd gone through the long struggle to train up my birding ears. That training must have been more successful than I thought, I'm delighted to discover, because as I continue to use Merlin, it confirms practically all my aural identifications. And the delight doesn't stop there. Now that all the hesitation and uncertainty over birdsong identification has been taken away, I can fully savour those sounds rather than fret over them. I'm also expanding my aural repertoire greatly, particularly after learning that it's not just pretty songs that can lead to an ID. For instance I have found that I don't have to squint in a vain attempt to distinguish between flying Rough-winged and Bank Swallows – Merlin showed that they are easily distinguishable by sound. The distant duck in eclipse that might or might not be a Green-winged Teal? Just switch on the app. Do it often, and you'll get invaluable assistance often.

Well done Merlin. Well done the Cornell Lab. It's such a great tool that I have no hesitation in making an enthusiastic donation to that thrice-worthy organization. I encourage you to do the same if Merlin works as much magic for you.

Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab can be downloaded for free from the various app stores. It has been downloaded more than a million times, and the average review gives it 4.8 stars out of five. The illustration below is a screenshot from the Apple app store.