

# BC BIRDING



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*One of the Liron Gertsman images which achieved a clean sweep of Audubon awards. See page 3.*

**Publisher**

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

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

**About the BCFO**

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

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

**Membership**

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

**Annual Membership Dues**

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

**Newsmagazine Submissions**

To submit material to this publication, contact the Editor by email ([clive\\_keen@hotmail.com](mailto:clive_keen@hotmail.com)) or by mail at 10790 Grassland Road, Prince George, BC V2K 5E8.

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

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

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## Front and Back Covers

Liron Gertsman has achieved the remarkable feat of a clean sweep in the Youth Category of the Audubon Photo awards.

**Front page** – Bald Eagle, Delta, BC  
 “This is the most cooperative Bald Eagle I’ve ever encountered.... I found this one perched on a tree stump beside a popular walking trail on a windy, rainy day. I took many photos, but I especially liked this one for the way it illustrates the power and awe of this emblematic species.”

**Back page, top** – Cobalt-winged Parakeet Yasuni National Park, Ecuador  
 “Three days in a row I waited in a blind near a clay lick .... When hundreds of the birds finally descended from the tree canopy to the mineral-rich forest floor on the third morning, I was ready. I used a slow shutter speed to accentuate the blues in their wings....”

**Back page, bottom** – Fawn-breasted Brilliant, Mindo, Ecuador  
 “... I noticed that it kept returning to the same perch .... The sky was bright, so the bird was beautifully silhouetted, and I knew the exact shot I wanted. I did my best to time my shutter finger with the bird taking off and landing....”

The announcement of the awards can be seen at:

[www.audubon.org/magazine/summer-2018/the-2018-audubon-photography-awards-winners](http://www.audubon.org/magazine/summer-2018/the-2018-audubon-photography-awards-winners)

See also page 6.

## Contents

### Notices & Notes

President’s Message .....	4
Welcome New Members .....	4
BCFO Notes .....	5
Steve Cannings Award .....	7
AGM Musings.....	9
AGM Pre-conference Trip.....	10
BCFO Two-day Trips.....	11
Upcoming Meetings & Events .....	12
IOCongress Photo Presentation .....	14
Avian Encounters .....	15

### Features

Harold the Hirundine Hero.....	17
YB Workshop Report.....	18
Funded Project Report: White Lake IBA .....	20

### Trip Reports

Birding Ghana.....	21
A Week in the Cariboo.....	24
YB Trip: Ptarmigan Hunt at Illal Mountain.....	26
YB Trip: Princeton.....	28

### Regular Columns

Featured Species #3: Savannah Sparrow .....	30
Gone Pishing: Bank Swallow .....	31

*Below: After their presentations (see page 6) left to right: Toby Theriault, Ian Harland, Liron Gertsman and Adam Dhalla. Photo by Jody Allair.*



## President's Message

Marian Porter

I would like to thank all organizers and participants for a thoroughly enjoyable and well-run Hope AGM. It was a special experience for me to reacquaint myself with EC Manning Provincial Park, and I appreciated the enthusiasm and expertise of my fellow birders on the two days I led tours. The Hope area had different habitats and I look forward to exploring them after reading field trip reports in future editions of the Newsmagazine.

Although there was no change in the individuals within the board, some changes were made in officer duties. Mike McGrenere stepped down as President and is now Secretary. Gary Davidson has taken on the role of Vice President and is also the new Chair of the Education and Conservation Committee. Josh Inman completes our list of officers as Treasurer. Art Martell remains a Director and Editor of the Journal. Jude Grass, Adrian Leather,

Monica Nugent and Clive Keen are Directors with Clive also the Editor of the Newsmagazine.

Preparations are now underway for an exciting AGM in Golden the weekend of June 14, 15 and 16, 2019. The venue will be the Great Hall of the Golden Civic Centre, in downtown Golden, adjacent to the Kicking Horse River. The hall was built in 1948 and restored in 2011 to retain its heritage ambience, with enough room to accommodate all who want to join us. Field trips will be organized to explore the mosaic of forest and wetlands in the Columbia River Valley. The Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey is in the process of conducting a five-year bird count to support the designation of the wetlands as an Important Bird Area. This is an international conservation initiative co-ordinated by Birdlife International and co-partnered in Canada by Bird Studies Canada and Nature Canada. Considered the largest wetland in Canada, the 15,070 hectare wetland in the Columbia Valley stretches from Golden to Canal Flats, with the area recording over 260 species of resident and migratory birds.

An unforgettable extension trip is in the planning process for a four-day tour through southern Alberta, led by Dan

Arndt of Bow Valley Birding and Wildlife Tours. Adrian Leather has employed Dan for previous tours of Alberta and was pleased to engage him again for 2019. Heading east of the Rockies will expand the participants' bird lists with species such as Sedge Wren and Cape May Warbler, and while exploring the prairie region we should expect Ferruginous Hawk, McCown's Longspur, Baird's, LeConte's and Nelson's Sparrow.

I hope many of you were able to attend the International Ornithological Congress at the Vancouver Convention Centre, as well as the Vancouver International Bird Festival. World-class wildlife art by Artists for Conservation was on exhibit at the convention centre and is an annual festival in the Vancouver area for those who missed it this year.

I would like to congratulate the BCFO Bird Records Committee for completing the updated Birds of British Columbia checklist to distribute at the IOC Conference. It will be available at the next AGM.

*Below: a Gray Catbird spotted east of Hope on the drive back from the AGM. CNK photo.*

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

**NICHOLAS CROFT – PENDER  
ISLAND**

**RACHEL L. DARVILL –  
GOLDEN**

**BARRY CASEY – WILLIAMS  
LAKE**

**KRISTA KAPTEIN –  
COURTENAY**

**VANCE MATTSON –  
WASA**

**VICTOR ALFONSO  
– VANCOUVER**





# BCFO Notes

## David Stirling

Dec 8, 1920 – Aug 11, 2018

David Stirling, a BCFO member since 1993, and second recipient of the Steve Cannings Award for Ornithology, has died at the age of 97.

David was a major force in the BC



birding and naturalist world, serving on the boards of the American Birding Association, the Canadian Nature Federation and the Pacific Northwest Bird and Mammal Society, and helping in the founding of the Federation of British Columbia Naturalists. He received the Victoria Natural History Society's distinguished service award, Parks Canada's Interpretation Award of Merit, and The Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal.

He taught bird identification courses, led scores of birding field trips, and toured Canada and the United States with the National Audubon Society's wildlife films and Jim Bowers' wildlife presentations.

David spent most of his career with BC Parks Branch, where he was involved with nature interpretation programs, including the hiring and training of seasonal park naturalists. He kept detailed records of birds in the parks that he visited during his work, and published bird checklists for many of the parks. He also became involved in the organization of overseas nature and wildlife tours, leading nature tours to Turkey, the Yukon, East Africa, the Galapagos Islands and other locations. After his retirement from BC Parks, he

## PROJECT FEEDERWATCH NEEDS DATA FROM YOUR BACKYARD

- ◆ Join thousands of FeederWatchers across North America who have turned their backyard hobby into research for bird conservation.
- ◆ Collect information to help scientists better understand North American bird populations.
- ◆ Put your bird identification skills to work – for the birds.

Simply count the numbers of each species of birds that you see at your feeder (s) over a two-day period every week from November through March. Count for as long or as short a time as you like during each day, then send your data to [www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/](http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/)

Watch the results come in on-line; read the summaries in the annual report and BSC's quarterly magazine.

To sign up, make a donation to Bird Studies Canada of any amount over the phone 888-448-2473 or online at [birdscanada.org](http://birdscanada.org), click on the Donate button and then select what type of FeederWatch kit you would like..

Project FeederWatch is a joint program of Bird Studies Canada and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

devoted more time to these nature tours and travelled to Antarctica, the Russian Far East, the North West Passage and China.

He wrote numerous articles for both scientific and popular journals and magazines, including many for this newsmagazine and *British Columbia Birds*. His books include *Birds, Beasts and a Bike*, *Where to Find Birds in Canada* (with Jim Woodford), *A Naturalists' Guide to the Victoria Region* (with Jim Weston) and *Birds of British Columbia* (with David Hancock).

A Celebration of Life is to be held at Sands Funeral Chapel, 1803 Quadra Street, Victoria, BC, on September 22, 2018 at 11:00 AM.

## New BC Checklist

A brand-new BC bird checklist has been created by BCFO in time for the International Ornithological Congress. 2,000 copies of a special commemorative edition have been printed, allowing each delegate to receive a copy in their registration package.

Printed in handy booklet form, the Checklist covers 522 recognised species, with an additional 12 on the provisional list. Against the name of each species, the status of the bird – breeding, wintering, introduced, accidental, etc – is shown for each of the nine

ecoprovinces in BC.

Nathan Hentze, Chair of the BC Bird Records committee, put in a tremendous amount of work to see the project through to completion. The publication also highlights the contributions of George Clulow, Art Martell and Larry Cowan.

The BCFO Board at its next meeting will discuss ideas for the distribution of regular copies. It is an invaluable publication and deserves wide circulation. In addition to its main informational function, it helps build understanding both of the BCFO and of species that should be reported to the Bird Records Committee.

## Young Birders at IOCongress / Vancouver Festival

Four BCFO young birders gave presentations during this summer's mega ornithological event. On August 23, speaking at the West Exhibition Hall, they were:

- Toby Theriault (age 14): "Seabirds and Plastic Pollution."
- Ian Harland (age 18): "The Artistic Side of Bird Photography"

- Liron Gertsman (age 18): “The Importance of Photography for Conservation.”
- Adam Dhalla (age 13): “Shade-Grown Coffee in Costa Rica & Its Positive Impact on Birds.”

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## Liron Gertsman

Having swept the Audubon Photography Youth Category Awards, Liron has been much in the news.

Vancouver Breakfast Television’s interview with Liron can be seen at:

[www.btvancouver.ca/videos/meet-a-nature-photographer-prodigy/](http://www.btvancouver.ca/videos/meet-a-nature-photographer-prodigy/)

Audubon have a feature on him at

[www.audubon.org/news/meet-liron-gertsman-talented-teen-who-swept-2018-audubon-photography-awards](http://www.audubon.org/news/meet-liron-gertsman-talented-teen-who-swept-2018-audubon-photography-awards)

And, when not being interviewed by others, Liron made a documentary called *Surf Scoters: People Living With Nature*, which can be seen at

<https://youtu.be/-H6FIvA3Kl4>

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## Ian Harland

In normal years, this newsmagazine’s covers would have featured BCFO Young Birder Ian Harland to celebrate *his* success in the Audubon photography awards. His photograph of an American Dipper was chosen as one of the year’s top 100 bird photographs.

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## Education & Conservation

The new E & C Committee has been getting down to work over the last couple of months. Meanwhile, it is worth noting (Art Martell writes) that over the past 20 years BCFO has granted over \$20,000 for bird research and conservation in British Columbia. Projects funded by regular grants included studies on cavity-nesting birds on Becher’s Prairie, Vancouver Island Sandhill Cranes, Barrow’s Goldeneye wintering on the Columbia River,

Western Bluebird reintroduction, bird surveys in the Nanaimo river estuary, and a Bird Atlas for the Peace River, as well as for educational and conservation activities in the Creston Valley, the Vaseux Lake Bird Observatory plus an eBird Protocol Count for Kilpoola Lake IBA. Major grants have also been given for the BC Breeding Bird Atlas and the International Ornithological Congress 2018.

We regularly offer Research Grants up to \$2,000, but may offer larger grants if approved at an AGM. Much of the money for grants comes from a surcharge included in the fees for the Annual Conference Extension trips.

The current grants policy is stated on the Website, but is now being reviewed.

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## AKA Canada Jay

The campaign to rename the Gray Jay “Canada Jay” has been successful – taking the Jay closer to being officially named as the National bird. Perhaps the IOCongress taking place in Vancouver as these words are written will further help focus some ministerial minds,

actually a Red-capped Manakin. It was, of course, to check that people were concentrating. Ahem.

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## Dowitcher Assistance

Anyone struggling with Dowitcher identification, which is probably a sizeable proportion of the BCFO membership, would do well to head to Melissa Hafting’s blog on the issue. It is probably the most detailed, and up-to-date, source of ID help on the long-versus-short-bill problem now available. See

[daretobird.blogspot.com/2017/08/dowitcher-identification.html](http://daretobird.blogspot.com/2017/08/dowitcher-identification.html)

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## Where Are the Briefings?

The Briefings Correspondent, Michael Church, has gone AWOL for this edition, but has promised to return. In fact he has a good excuse – he has been hijacked for the last ten months as an expert witness in a very complex trial, and his next batch of Briefings remained unfinished at publishing time.

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## Correction

Well done to all those readers who noticed that the Lovely Cotinga in the June edition of this newsmagazine was

*Members at the Hope AGM could be forgiven for staring out of the window during meetings – Yellow-bellied Marmots, including these youngsters, were putting on quite a show. CNK photo.*





# Steve Cannings Award

## 2018: RICK HOWIE

Wayne C Weber

The Steve Cannings Award has been presented every year by BC Field Ornithologists since 2007. It honours the memory of Steve Cannings, an outstanding amateur ornithologist, naturalist, photographer, and conservationist who was a lifelong resident of Penticton. The Cannings Award recognizes someone who has made significant contributions over a long period of time to ornithology in BC in any one or more

of the following three areas: (1) research on bird biology or ecology, or detailed documentation of the birdlife of any portion of BC; (2) conservation of birds or of bird habitats in BC; and (3) public education about birds in BC. The award recipient is chosen by a three-person Award Committee chaired by me. The other two members are Dr Art Martell and Dick Cannings, Steve's son.

The 2018 recipient of the Steve Cannings Award is Rick Howie of Kamloops. Rick grew up in Greater Vancouver, and credits his late father, Tom Howie, with first awakening his interest in birds. Tom was an avid hunter and fisherman all his life, and he would often take young Rick along with him on his hunting trips. However, Rick soon found that he derived more pleasure from just watching the birds than from shooting them. He joined the

Vancouver Natural History Society, and is grateful to Bill Rae, Verna Newson, and Marion Newson, who often took him on their birding trips. In 1971, Rick joined the American Birding Association, then only in its third year of existence, and was inspired to start a life list.

Rick attended the University of BC, and in 1970 he graduated with a BSc degree in Agriculture and Wildlife Management. He was inspired by two of his professors, Bert Brink and Ian McTaggart-Cowan, who also showed the way to many other promising young students.

After graduation, Rick embarked on a career in nature interpretation, working for many years for Parks Canada and the BC Parks Branch. In 1970, he worked as a seasonal naturalist in Banff National Park. The following year, he became the Chief Park Naturalist in Prince Edward Island National Park,

*Rick Howie (right) with BCFO president Mike McGrenere and the Cannings Award commemorative plaque, Hope, BC, June 2, 2018. Photo by Al Grass.*





and in 1972, moved to the same position in Kejimikujik National Park in Nova Scotia. From 1973 to 1975, he was an Interpretive Planner for all national parks in Ontario. In 1975, he moved back to British Columbia, and for two years he was the Chief Park Naturalist in Yoho National Park. Finally, in 1977, he moved to Kamloops, where he remains to this day. From 1977 to 1994, he was a Visitor Services Manager – in effect, a Regional Park Naturalist – for BC Parks. In 1994, after major organizational changes in the Parks Branch, he moved to the BC Ministry of Environment, also in Kamloops, and worked there as a Habitat Protection Biologist until 2004. Finally, in 2004, he left government service and started his own biological consulting firm, Aspen Park Consulting, and became a noted and respected wildlife consultant.

Rick has lived in Kamloops ever since 1977, and has been heavily involved with the Kamloops Naturalists and their activities for nearly all of that time. He has led numerous birding and natural history field trips for the Kamloops Naturalists and other groups, and has served as a naturalist-guide for trips to the Queen Charlotte Islands and for Kumsheen Rafting trips on the Thompson River, among other things. Rick is recognized as the top expert on the birds of the Thompson-Nicola region, and has been a leader in birding and ornithological activities in the Southern Interior. He has organized and compiled the Kamloops Christmas Bird Count for nearly all of the last 40 years, and has authored and published several editions of the Kamloops and area bird checklist, a carefully-researched and authoritative document. For more than 20 years, he has been the organizer and compiler of the midwinter Southern Interior Swan and Eagle Count (affectionately known as the “Sweagle count” to many of us). This count began as a count of swans on the South Thompson River east of Kamloops, but soon spread to become a region-wide count of swans and eagles covering areas all the way from Prince George to the Kootenays.

Rick has built up a huge database of his personal bird sightings in BC. He served as eBird regional editor for the Thompson-Nicola region for several years until stepping down from this volunteer job very recently. He has been a frequent contributor for

almost 20 years to the bcintbird email group, where he could be described as the resident sage, and he is universally respected as a voice of experience and moderation, and for his unique sense of humour. He is also known as a very entertaining evening speaker who is sought after as a speaker to birding and naturalist groups.

On a professional level, Rick has made several major contributions to ornithology and bird conservation. He conducted Breeding Bird Surveys for 25 years, beginning in 1974. He played a major role in the BC Breeding Bird Atlas project from 2008 to 2012, serving as the Regional Coordinator for the Thompson region, and contributing more than 300 hours of his own time to atlassing in the field. He prepared status reports for several species at risk, including the initial COSEWIC status reports for Flammulated Owl, Burrowing Owl, and Spotted Owl. Owls have always been a particular interest of Rick's. He prepared a booklet on Sharp-tailed Grouse habitat management. His consulting work has included a major multi-year bird inventory for the Highland Valley Mines property west of Logan Lake, and a variety of bird inventory projects for properties owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. He has published several scientific papers including an account of Flammulated Owls in the BC Interior and summary reports on the results of the BC Interior

swan count. He made a major contribution to the “Birds of British Columbia” book series by reviewing and commenting on every species account.

BC Field Ornithologists take great pleasure in presenting the Steve Canning Award for 2018 to Rick Howie, and we applaud the diverse contributions he has made to bird study and bird conservation in BC. Congratulations, Rick!

## Unusual ID Request

Subscribers to ncnbird, the listserv for northern-central birders, are used to being shown a picture with a request for identification, but the one below, sent in by David Stevenson, did not achieve a consensus.

Lee Foster said it looked like a nest of Tool Hens. Phil Ranson suggested that, depending on where it was taken, the adult could be either a Winter or a Pacific Wren. Clive Keen, by contrast, felt the youngsters were Nuthatchlings. Dan B believed them to be crescent-headed tool pigeons, but George Clulow concluded discussions by naming them Spannerkopf.

If anyone knows the identity of the artist – all web searches failed – please contact the editor so that due credit can be given.





# AGM Musings

M Barry Lancaster

Although I have given a talk to BCFO, I had never attended an AGM before. It was an interesting experience making the acquaintance of members whom I knew via Internet groups but had never met in person as well as becoming acquainted with “strangers.”

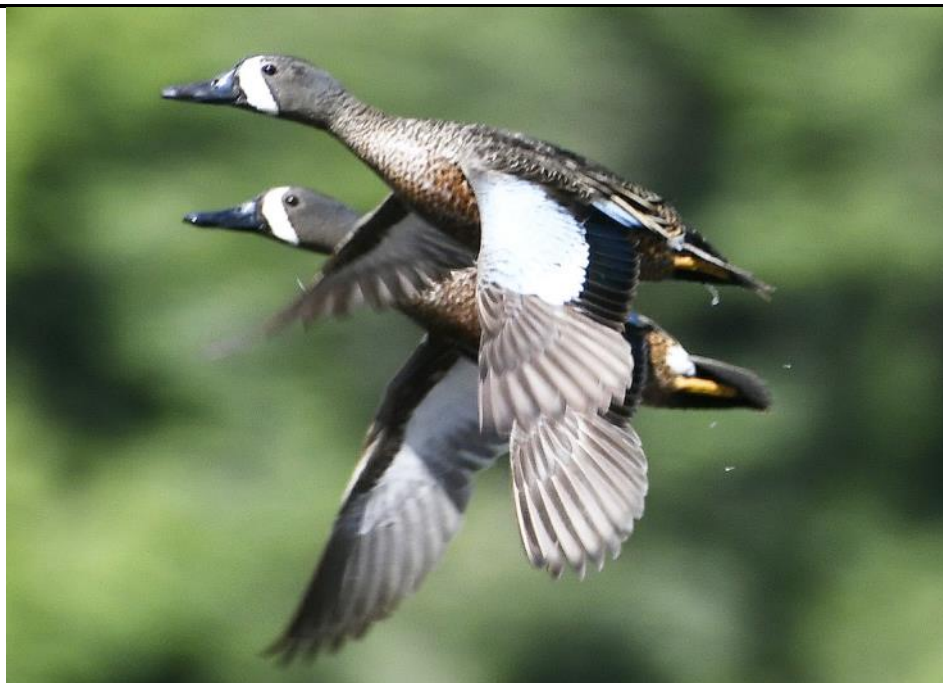
The town of Hope I knew from frequent passage on the way to and from Vancouver (I prefer Hwy 7 to the freeway). I had even once camped on the riverside RV site. Staying for a few days gave me the impression of a town not long departed from the horse-and-cart era and I found it somewhat difficult driving around on quite wide roads that never seemed to have road markings!

The venue for the AGM was very acceptable being situated on the golf course (quite decent birdwatching) and as it turned out, close to the field trip location I had chosen on the first day – Thacker Regional Park. It was a revelation being in the field with people who spent more time identifying birds by sound rather than sight. Some interesting discussions took place as to why a bird was what it was rather than what it was not – by sound. My skills in that direction are not good so I learned a lot.

Thacker Marsh was a good start providing a good diversity of species followed by Thacker Mountain where sound was all-important. Black-throated Grey versus Townsend’s Warbler. Hammond’s Flycatcher versus American Dusky Flycatcher, which does not occur there apparently! Well, two of us thought we had a possible by sound and sight but little was thought of that idea. It is down on my database as a possible!

Food at the golf course was plentiful and one could eat enough at breakfast to last all day if one wished. Root beer in a bottle was a new experience; A&W would be delighted. The caterers and their staff really did an excellent job.

For the second and final field trip I chose to go to Manning Park as then I would forgo returning for lunch (took a packed one from the table) and carry on



*Above: Male Blue-winged Teal on the Golf Course: 1/800 second at 7.1, ISO 400.*

*Below: Northern Rough-winged Swallow, 1/25 second at f8, ISO 800.*

to Oliver. I visited parts of Manning I had never been before. My lasting memory will be of the phenomenal hearing of Madam President. She had a list of ten species before most of us got started. A large number of Turkey Vultures awaiting the morning warmth was equally impressive. Finally, at my lunchtime I was tasked with finding a Calliope Hummingbird amongst the large number of Rufous visiting the feeders. I failed! However, Eurasian Collared-Dove was added to the list of birds recorded. Amazing how many visitors did not even notice the hummers until they saw me pointing a big lens at something.



My relatively new camera set-up – Nikon D500 with 200–500 Nikon lens – is rated highly as a wildlife photographer’s choice. I am still learning to drive it but a couple of images give some idea of the versatility. Both were handheld at 500mm which is the equivalent of 750 when the sensor factor is considered. Using the Cotton Carrier harness made carrying a big lump of metal quite easy and hands free to use binoculars or notebook.

So, I thoroughly enjoyed my first AGM. I look forward to Golden 2019.

## Thacker List

American Goldfinch, American Robin, Yellow Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee, Brown-headed Cowbird, Canada Goose, Cassin’s Vireo, Cedar Waxwing, Common Yellowthroat, Eurasian Collared Dove, Great Blue Heron, Northwestern Crow, Common Raven, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-winged Blackbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Song Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Violet-green Swallow, Osprey, Western Tanager, Warbling Vireo, Western Wood Pewee, Wood Duck, Sora, Steller’s Jay, Marsh Wren, European Starling, Black Swift.

# Pre-Conference Trip

**May 31 – June 1, 2018**

*George Clulow*

With the promise of some great birding, plus the prospect of revisiting many memorable locations from the very successful AGM held in Princeton in 2012, 17 BCFO members (including guides) headed off Thursday, May 31 on our first birding excursion to the Miracle Mile of the KVR Trail. And it didn't disappoint.

The Tulameen River was high, but even then everyone had good looks at an American Dipper seemingly resting from the torrent under the overhang of a shoreline boulder. Other notable birds included Vaux's and White-throated Swifts, Red-naped Sapsucker, Least Flycatchers, and Gray Catbirds. The hoped-for Harlequin Ducks, unfortunately, were no-shows.

Our second stop was a location that was new to many of us – Swan Lake Bird Sanctuary. This very attractive area of bunchgrass/ponderosa pine habitat, with marsh and lakes, was productive too. A couple of Lewis's Woodpeckers, hawking insects from a ponderosa pine snag, put on a show for the group. Both bluebird species were seen, and the marsh provided views of a Sora and a noisy colony of Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Another notable feature here was the large variety and number of butterflies that appeared and disappeared in synchrony with the alternation of sun and cloud.

Our Thursday evening get-together

for bird talk and beer was a lot of fun with wonderful food and service at the Little Creek Grill in Princeton.

Friday morning saw the group headed for the more familiar Princeton birding hotspot of Separation Lakes. Among other birds, eleven species of waterfowl graced the lake along with an Eared Grebe and a Red-necked Phalarope. Opting not to circle the lake, the group instead set off to Hembrie Mountain Road for some forest birding.

Ruffed Grouse were heard drumming soon after we arrived, and a Calliope Hummingbird made a close inspection of the group. Other birds seen here included Dusky Flycatcher, Cassin's Vireos, and a Townsend's Solitaire.

Our final stop also did not disappoint, and at least for me, provided the highlight of the trip. As we came down the hill, and August Lake emerged into full view, the lake's surface was absolutely swarming with a huge flock of swallows. At a distance they looked like mosquitos flitting low and criss-crossing the lake's surface. Low cloud was obviously keeping the hatching insects low over the lake's surface, and the swallows were in on the feast.

Tom Plath and I did a fairly careful estimate, and reached a conservative consensus on the following: 200 Northern Rough-winged Swallows, 400 Tree Swallows, 300 Violet-green Swallows, 1 Bank Swallow, 2 Barn Swallows, and 250 Cliff Swallows. Eight Vaux's Swifts were also enjoying the insect bounty.

Thank you Cathy, Ed, and Amanda Lahaie, our outstanding leaders, who made the two days possible and unforgettable for all.

## Species Seen (90)

Canada Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Green-winged Teal, Ring

-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Ruffed Grouse, Pied-billed Grebe, Eared Grebe, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Sora, American Coot, Killdeer, Red-necked Phalarope, Spotted Sandpiper, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Vaux's Swift, White-throated Swift, Rufous Hummingbird, Calliope Hummingbird, Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, Willow Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, Hammond's Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Cassin's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Steller's Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Bank Swallow, Barn Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, American Dipper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Western Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Veery, American Robin, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Orange-crowned Warbler, MacGillivray's Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Bullock's Oriole, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Evening Grosbeak, Cassin's Finch, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch.

*Group photo by George Clulow.*





# BCFO

## Two-day Trips

### Sunshine Coast September 15–16, 2018

#### Leaders

Tony Greenfield & John Hodges.

#### Registration

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

#### Itinerary

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

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

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

*Sunday PM:* Mahan Trail in Gibsons.

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

### How the Trips Work

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

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

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

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

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

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



*One of the expected species: Wood Duck. CNK photo.*

#### Expected Species

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

#### Accommodation

For overall convenience, the guides suggest:

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

Alternative accommodation:

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

### Spences Bridge May 25–26, 2019

#### Leaders

Brian Murland, Adrian Leather.

#### Registration

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

#### Itinerary

*Saturday AM:* Spences Bridge, Oregon Jack. Lunch at Ashcroft Bakery

*Saturday PM:* The Slough, Nicola Valley. Tally-up at The Inn at Spences Bridge (two dinner choices, plus a vegetarian option; please inform the inn of any food restrictions).

*Sunday AM:* Venables Valley. Lunch at Horsting's Farm, Cache Creek.

*Sunday PM:* Optional birding at Pavilion or Upper Hat Creek.

#### Possible Species

Say's Phoebe; Peregrine Falcon; Prairie Falcon; Golden Eagle; Clark's Nutcracker; Chukar; Lewis's Woodpecker; Harlequin Duck; Lark Sparrow, Nashville Warbler.

#### Accommodation

- The Inn at Spences Bridge, 3649 Hwy 8, Spences Bridge, Tel# 1-877-354-1997. Please call the inn direct when booking, and mention BCFO to receive a discount.
- Acacia Grove RV Park, 3814 River-view Ave, Spences Bridge Tel# 250-458-2227

### Other Possible Trips

Adrian Leather has been working on possible trips in 2019 to Port Alberni and the Southern Gulf Islands. Another earmarked as a possible trip for 2020 is to Nakusp.

As always, Adrian would be interested in receiving proposals for other two-day member-led trips. You can contact him at [q-birds@explornet.com](mailto:q-birds@explornet.com).

# Upcoming Meetings & Events

*Compiled by Wayne C Weber*

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

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

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

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

Sept. 4 – First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the summer from Westport, WA. Westport Seabirds will be operating nine trips in 2018 in September and October. For

the trip schedule and other information, please check the website at [westportseabirds.com](http://westportseabirds.com).

Sept. 6-9 – WESTERN BIRD-BANDING ASSOCIATION annual meeting, Fairbanks, Alaska, hosted by the Alaska Songbird Institute. For further information, check the WBBA website, [www.westernbirdbanding.org](http://www.westernbirdbanding.org).

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

Sept. 15 – First OREGON PELAGIC TOURS pelagic birding trip of the fall. Six trips are scheduled in September and October, plus one in December. Trips depart from Charleston or Newport, OR. For info and to make reservations, visit the webpage at [www.oregonpelagictours.com/p/schedule.html](http://www.oregonpelagictours.com/p/schedule.html).

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

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

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

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

Sept. 28-30 – First WINGS OVER WILLAPA FESTIVAL, hosted by Willapa NWR, Ilwaco, WA. For information, check the website at [friendsofwillaparefuge.org/wings-over-willapa](http://friendsofwillaparefuge.org/wings-over-willapa), or contact Rebecca Lexa at [wingsoverwillapa@gmail.com](mailto:wingsoverwillapa@gmail.com).

Oct. 5-7 – 19th ANNUAL RIDGEFIELD BIRDS AND BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL, Ridgefield, WA (near Vancouver, WA). For information, check the festival webpage at [ridgefieldfriends.org/events/birdfest-bluegrass](http://ridgefieldfriends.org/events/birdfest-bluegrass), or contact the Friends of Ridgefield NWR by phone at 360-609-0658, by email at [ridgefield-](mailto:ridgefield-)



*Rufous Hummingbird in the sprinkler  
by Nora McMuldach.*



[friends@gmail.com](mailto:friends@gmail.com), or by snail mail at PO Box 1022, Ridgefield, WA 98642.

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

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

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

## 2019 EVENTS

Feb. 14-17 – WINTER WINGS BIRDING FESTIVAL, Klamath Falls, OR. For information and to register, please check the festival website at [winterwingsfest.org](http://winterwingsfest.org).

Feb. 25-28 – ANNUAL MEETINGS, SOCIETY FOR NW VERTEBRATE BIOLOGY and THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY, WASHINGTON CHAPTER at the Great Wolf Lodge, Grand Mound, WA (near Olympia). For details, check the SNWVB website at [thesnvb.org/annual-meeting](http://thesnvb.org/annual-meeting); registration info should be posted by November or December.

Feb. 27- Mar. 2 – PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP, 46th ANNUAL MEETING, Kauai, Hawaii, USA. For information and to register, visit the conference website at [pacificseabirdgroup.org/annual-meeting](http://pacificseabirdgroup.org/annual-meeting).

Mar. 15-17 – 17th ANNUAL WINGS OVER WATER NORTHWEST BIRDING FESTIVAL, Blaine, WA. For information, please check the website at [www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com](http://www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com) or contact Debbie Harger (phone, (360) 332-8311; email, [dharger@cityofblaine.com](mailto:dharger@cityofblaine.com) ).

Mar. 22-24 – 21st ANNUAL OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL, Othello, WA. For information, check the festival website at [www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org](http://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org), or contact the Grant County Conservation District at 1107 South Juniper Way, Moses Lake, WA 98837 (phone 509-765-9618).

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*John Gordon photographed the Cassin's Vireo below during the Skagit Valley Bird Blitz, May 4-6, 2018. The annual event is organized by the Hope Mountain Centre for Outdoor Learning. Around thirty participants of all ages camped out at the Skagit Valley Provincial Park's Ross Lake Group Campground. Over ninety species were counted including Western Meadowlark, Dusky Flycatcher and Cassin's Vireo.*





## IOCongress Photo Presentation

Ken Otter of UNBC produced a fine bird-montage presentation for the Canada Evening at the IOCongress in Vancouver. 178 photographs in all were used, featuring photographs provided by Jeff Dyck, Greg Drozda, Myrna Pearman, Roy V Rea, Bob Steventon, David W Greenberg, Katelyn Luff, Clive Keen, Christian Artuso, David Bradley, Scott M. Ramsay, and Danika Kroeker. Here are just a few of them. Attendees will have been wowed.



*Top to bottom:*

Red-throated Loon by Katelyn Luff  
 Eared Grebes by Myrna Pearman  
 Canada Jay by Jeff Dyck  
 Tufted Puffins by David Bradley



# Avian Encounters

## Swamped

*Clive Keen*

During an early June trip to Ontario I heard what I suspected to be a Swamp Sparrow – a bird I never see in my home patch. To check my memory of the song, I played it on my cell phone, finding that the bird as well as I heard the recording. It flew nearby, and then started a most unexpected behaviour. I've seen plenty of photographs of Buff-breasted Sandpipers doing the *hello sailor* arm-wave, but I'd never heard of it from a Sparrow.

At first I wondered if the wind had lifted the wing, but that wasn't the case, and the bird repeated the trick at least half a dozen times, usually with its right wing, but occasionally with the left. Given the enthusiasm of its singing, I assumed that this was a regular part of its courtship behaviour. I don't know this species though – if any readers know about this behaviour, please write in ([clive\\_keen@hotmail.com](mailto:clive_keen@hotmail.com)).



*Waving Swamp Sparrow, photographed in early June by Clive Keen.*



## Upland Surprise

*Kathryn Clouston*

A group of birders from the Comox Valley went to SE Alberta and SW Saskatchewan this spring. We were happy when we saw a couple of Upland Sandpipers, and a spare, at a marsh near Wild Horse as this bird had eluded us the previous summer on the extension after the AGM. We were delighted, despite the limited view through the long grass, when one of the pair started to shake its booty for the other. I was happily getting marginal photos of the pair through the long grass when the spare hopped up on a fence post right in front of us! It was so close I was afraid to move in case I spooked it but then I couldn't resist and it paid no attention while I got my shots.

Grasslands turned out to be a great spot as we heard a Sprague's Pipit as we entered the park and stopped by the interpretive sign beside the entrance. We kept looking around trying to locate it, and it seemed to be calling all around us, and yet we couldn't spot the bird. Then Art suggested we look

*Upland Sandpiper by Kathryn Clouston*



up and, sure enough, there it was, a couple thousand feet straight up! We also managed to get a look at a Burrowing Owl while scanning a prairie dog town and then, later, spotted a badger doing the same from the other side of the town.

Then we stopped to check out a pond and someone spotted a Sharp-tailed Grouse. We were delighted with this sighting as it was our first for the trip – then we spotted another, and then there was a male displaying, and more females, and another male.... The two males “duelled” before what turned out to be five ladies, and one even leapt into the air. The grass obscured the view, even for the ladies, as one of them jumped up on a pole to get a better look at the action.

After looking our fill at the Sharp-tail lek we had a look around to see

what else was in the area and spotted a Bobolink, which is not common for that area. We even had a juvenile Golden Eagle fly by while we were stopped for lunch.



*Sharp-tailed Grouse by  
Kathryn Coulston*

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*The white Raven below would be a shoo-in for a role in a remake of Gormenghast. The leucistic bird was spotted by Melissa Hafting in Coombs in early July.*



*© Melissa Hafting*



# Harold The Hirundine Hero

## ...And Other Reasons To Head North

Charles Helm

There are compelling reasons for anyone from BC to head north in summer:

1. the “true north strong and free” is a powerful magnet
2. living for a while in 24-hour daylight is weirdly wonderful
3. the need to swim in all three of Canada’s oceans is primal and profound
4. the Dempster Highway (the only road in Canada to cross the Arctic Circle) provides the ultimate road trip, and
5. such a journey may become a personal rebuttal to the rigours of winter.

For a BC birder there are two additional motivators. One is that every spring many birds grace our gardens, forests, shores and sewage works with their presence. They fill our lives with joy and anticipation as we soak up this exuberant wave of migration. And then, as quickly as they have arrived, they are gone. One way to repay the favour is to learn more about what they are up to, what entices them north, and where they are headed; to see them on their own Arctic breeding turf in their finest plumage. Another is that as of 2018 it is possible to drive all the way to the Arctic Ocean, turning around only once the pingoes and wood-covered coastline of Tuktoyaktuk have been reached and the icy immersion ritual between shore and ice has been fulfilled.

The 735 km Dempster Highway, which ends at Inuvik in the Northwest Territories, passes through the uplands of Tombstone Territorial Park, the Ogilvie Ranges and the Richardson Mountains. These splendid surroundings give hints of what is to come. Gray-cheeked Thrush and Long-tailed Jaeger are on the Tumbler Ridge checklist due to some competent sightings by expert birders, but are difficult to find. In these far-northern climes they shout out their presence, and roadside cliffs allow for nesting Peregrine Falcon and Gyrfalcon to be viewed with ease. However, in

between the mountain ranges there is much boreal forest to be traversed, where, it must be admitted, the birds are similar to those of BC, just fewer in number.

That all changes along the 140 km of new roadway between Inuvik and “Tuk,” where the last stunted trees (many of them festooned with singing White-crowned Sparrows) and brush (harbouring secretive American Tree Sparrows) are finally left behind, and a surreal, gentle landscape of tundra and lakes is traversed. The birding becomes super-simple, and the lakes and tundra deliver one easy-to-spot species after the next in glorious avian profusion. There is fulfilment and satisfaction to be had in seeing pairs of Pacific Loon, Tundra Swan, Greater White-fronted Goose, Long-tailed Duck, Short-eared Owl, Rock Ptarmigan, or the ubiquitous Red-necked Phalarope, all in their chosen territory that they have travelled so far to reach.

For me, however, one birding experience trumped all others, and, surprisingly, it had nothing to do with the traditional target boreal species or the usual reasons birders may choose to head north. It happened on the MV Louis Cardinal, the ferry that conveys vehicles and their passengers across the Mackenzie River about two hours’ drive south of Inuvik. For sixteen hours a day from early June to late October

this doughty vessel plies a three-kilometre triangular course, visiting not just the west and east banks of the Mackenzie but also making a stop at Tsiigehtchic, the community which proudly sits on a spur above the confluence of the Mackenzie and the Arctic Red rivers. The longest arm of the triangle measures 1.25 kilometres, and completion of the loop takes close to an hour. Needless to say, this is an area of commotion and bustle, with a regular and noisy coming-and-going of muddy vehicles and their occupants.

Enter into this boreal drama the main players: a feisty flock of a few dozen Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*). They have chosen the underside of the superstructure of the MV Louis Cardinal to build their nests and rear their young. This is acknowledged in Wildlife of the Arctic<sup>1</sup> and is clearly not a new phenomenon. Maybe it occurs elsewhere in the world and I am not aware of it. Yet I wonder if its profound significance has been fully appreciated.

Let me explain what I mean by this. From my explorations in the Tumbler Ridge area, which include discoveries of fossil bird footprints, I know that birds have been around since Jurassic times, for well over 140 million years. During this interval every single representative of Class Aves that successfully procreated made a nest at a natural

*Cliff Swallows nesting on the MV Louis Cardinal. Photo by Charles Helm.*



site of its choice somewhere on our planet's surface. Cliff Swallows, as their name suggests, typically chose overhanging cliffs under which to build their distinctive mud nests in colonies.

Then, for the last few centuries or millennia (~ 0.001% of that time period), they made a dramatic switch: a new species (*Homo sapiens*) had arrived on earth, that built bridges and other structures. These offered superior nesting sites that trumped any natural cliffs. Consequently, finding a "natural" nest colony is nowadays regarded as rather curious, and is largely limited to occasional remote areas where the imprint and engineering marvels of *H. sapiens* are absent. In so doing *P. pyrrhonota* demonstrated great versatility and adaptability.

Then, at some point since the construction of the MV Louis Cardinal, a small population of *P. pyrrhonota*, pre-

sumably inspired by Harold, the clever Cliff Swallow (that most dangerous of all animals) took a giant leap of faith into the unknown. All previous nests of the species had been made on structures, whether natural or man-made, that did not move relative to the surface of our planet. However, unlike all other birds which had ever lived, they rejected the stable premise of that strategy, throwing in their lot with a mobile site. Presumably weighing up the engineering advantages of the vessel with the hassles of continually having to calculate where to return to after feeding forays, they abandoned terra firma and came out in favour of a nest untethered to Earth's surface. To find and feed their chicks they would simply have to follow the ferry.

I see this as an avian quantum leap, a paradigm shift, an example of lateral thinking so profound that we, the other

players in this act, can take note and be inspired as we grapple with major problems that beset our own species and our future on Earth. These trend-setters are the Aristarchus, the Eratosthenes, the Copernicus, the Kepler, the Newton and the Einstein of the bird world. I salute them as hirundine heroes, just as I salute the giants of our own species on whose shoulders we stand.

Heading north in Canada is a wonderful birding adventure. But in this case, perhaps the most transcendently significant sighting is the one that is impossible to miss, by simply gazing upward when briefly aboard the MV Louis Cardinal.

1. Richard Sale & Per Michelsen, 2018. *Wildlife of the Arctic*. Princeton University Press, 304 pages; page 190.

## YB Workshop Report

*Sasha Fairbairn, a young birder from Surrey, was successful in gaining a place on this summer's Beaverhill Bird Observatory Young Ornithologists' Workshop. This is a fully paid internship, and Sasha follows Cole Gaerber, who succeeded in gaining a place last year and loved the experience. This is her report.*

*Sasha Fairbairn*

Deciding to go camping for a week with strangers was the scariest decision I have ever made, but I have no regrets whatsoever in attending. I flew in to Edmonton from Abbotsford on the first day, and was given a ride to Beaverhill Bird Observatory (BBO). I had already been in contact online with both drivers (one of which was Helen Trefry, the organizer of the Young Ornithologists' Workshop) before the journey, and both were friendly and easy to talk to, so it was a surprisingly comfortable car ride despite lasting an hour and having the nervous thoughts of myself and another young ornithologist filling the atmosphere.

It was mid-afternoon by the time that everybody arrived on the first day,

so there was only time to set up tents before the staff gave an introductory presentation and organized dinner. In that time, I got to know that the four staff were all super friendly, the other young ornithologists were equally shy and willing to make friends, and BBO itself was a beautiful place to be.

The main location was a grass clearing in the trees, where tents could be set up anywhere nearby. There were picnic tables with a tarp overhead, that were used for the meals as well as any free time. There was also a small building that had a kitchen, seating area, and specific banding room. Everything else was located outdoors, including a dishwashing station, handwashing station, and long-drop toilet (aka "the throne"). There was a private shelter to take a shower using a solar-heated water bag, but most of us chose to instead wait and use the bathroom at Helen's house midweek. It was possible to get one bar of signal to text people from the middle of the clearing, but the most reliable place to make calls was a two-minute walk from camp to volunteer parking.

The rest of the days had more of a routine. Each morning, we woke up at 4:45AM, made ourselves breakfast in the cozy kitchen, and banded birds from 5:30 to 11:30 AM. Previously, I had never tried banding and did not even know what a mist net looked like, so I



learnt more than I could ever imagine during those six hours each morning, and even on the second day my opinion was valued as I measured wing lengths and judged age and molt, along with a long list of other things.

Once banding was over, lunch was served before a presenter came to speak to us and we had a field trip. The presentations were on butterflies, hummingbird banding, ducks, and falconry. There was always a relevant field trip that followed, including one to Helen's house, where she was raising falcons



and the cutest-ever Northern Saw-whet Owl, and another to Elk Island National Park and Geoff Holroyd's house (another workshop organizer who the workshop was named after). It was an early night of around 9:00 PM, but there were always a couple of kids that stayed up, unable to sleep because of hot or uncomfortable tents. On the first and last nights, all the young ornithologists organized a walk together. The other nights included talking for long hours, playing a bird-identification game that one of the kids brought, and going on shorter walks with a partner.

It honestly did all feel like fun and games, although there were basic camping chores that needed doing. On the first night, the young ornithologists were split into two groups. Each day, a different group would take on the washing up and preparing meals. There were also two banding programs that needed doing at the start of the week, so the groups would also take turns between Migration Monitoring, and Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS). I found that this helped me get to know the people in my group much better, and I was able to take more turns handling the birds during banding. I also have no complaints about preparing meals, as I learnt camping skills, as well as basic life skills, from doing so. Each day, a volunteer or staff member would bring food from their house or garden, so the young ornithologists rarely had much to do aside from laying the table and cleaning the dishes afterwards. There were three vegetarians, including me, and we always had plenty of healthy food to eat. Nobody had the chance to go hungry as there were leftovers and snacks available throughout the day for anybody feeling peckish.

My least favourite part about the week was the bugs. The mosquitoes were considered better than last year, but were still landing on any bare skin throughout the day, especially around sunrise and sunset. I found it the most comfortable to wear a bug jacket during banding in the mornings, and then a short-sleeved shirt but long loose trousers for the majority of the day. I was very pleased to have brought long hiking socks, as ankles were a favourite for the sneaky mosquitoes. There was nothing to be done about the wasp problem, aside from forget any previous fears of wasps because there was no avoiding

them near water and food at the camp site. Three people were stung during the week, but nobody was allergic so it did not ruin any of our weeks.

Aside from the mosquitoes and wasps, the wildlife at BBO was incredible. Exciting birds were caught in the mist nets most days, and Friday was the Big Birding Day, where we went around Beaverhill Lake and Tofield, trying to spot as many birds as possible. A few of the many lifers I saw during the trip included Sora, American White Pelican, Black-and-White Warbler, and Canada Warbler. I also learnt heaps about butterflies during the presentation on Monday, had a spontaneous lesson

on snakes while holding a garter snake on Thursday, and saw my first-ever porcupine during the evening walk on Friday.

This camp was designed to benefit general nature lovers as well as the full-on bird enthusiasts. I enjoyed every aspect of it, and found that there was no time to be bored, yet too much adrenaline to be tired. The staff were overly generous with providing food, offering help, and entertaining everyone. After being together for a week, I got to know the other young ornithologists well, and we have all been keeping in touch since. I hope to return to BBO and volunteer one day, because I had such an



# *Funded* *Project Report*

## **eBird IBA Protocol Survey in White Lake IBA**

*Jason Bieber*

The BCFO provided support funding to the Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas (IBA) Program of BC Nature to coordinate a bird count using the eBird IBA protocol. The count was the second of its kind in BC, taking place in the White Lake IBA on June 14, 2018 during the peak breeding season.

The drive down to the White Lake IBA on the day of the count started off with dark clouds and rain. By 5:00 AM, all fifteen volunteers arrived on site. During the planning stages, ten participants had been estimated, so the high attendance reflected the enthusiasm of the local birders. While the clouds remained, the rain stayed to the north and only a few light drizzles were felt. Local IBA Caretakers, experienced birders, and researchers, split into eight teams to cover the diversity of habitats that White Lake has to offer, and spent the next six hours surveying all birds encountered by sight or sound.

The White Lake basin is located in the South Okanagan Valley of the Southern Interior of BC. The area consists of sagebrush grassland and open ponderosa pine forest with riparian creek corridors, wetlands, cliffs and a typically small alkaline lake. The South Okanagan has been experiencing wet conditions from extra precipitation during the past winter and spring with resulting snow melt. The lakes and wetlands were larger in area and more numerous, hosting a high diversity of wildlife and vegetation throughout the White Lake IBA. The diverse habitats are home to a variety of amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals including some of Canada's rarest and most endangered species. The basin is used as range land for cattle and an astrophysical observatory is located in the northeast corner of the IBA.

The Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC and the Nature Trust of BC are working together near White

Lake to reintroduce Burrowing Owls to the area starting in 2018.

White Lake supports a nationally significant number of endangered Sage Thrashers with one to ten birds counted annually. Some of the bird species at risk occurring in the basin include the endangered Western Screech Owl, Yellow-breasted Chat, and threatened Common Nighthawk, Lewis's Woodpecker, Barn Swallows, and special-concern Olive-sided Flycatcher – there are also rare sightings of the endangered White-headed Woodpecker. Other birds of interest occurring are Grasshopper Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, and Lark Sparrow. The alkaline White Lake is also an important stopover for thousands of Sandhill Cranes, among many other shorebirds, during migration to their northern breeding grounds.

The six-hour count was meant to provide a thorough inventory of birds in a one-day snapshot, similar to a Christmas Bird Count. These counts provide important data on numbers of rare birds in our IBAs like the Sage Thrasher. A checklist of all birds recorded during the breeding season from eBird data gave a potential species list of 174 species. During the count, which covered approximately 70% of the IBA, a total of 2,397 birds were found, consisting of 124 species. Three of the 124 species hadn't been recorded in eBird previously during the breeding season, including Common Goldeneye, Marsh Wren, and Pacific Wren.

Most abundant species were Western Meadowlark (355), Vesper Sparrow (221), Red-winged Blackbird (110), Mallard (102), Brewer's Blackbird (101), and Western Wood-Pewee (90).

Several species at risk were also observed during the count including SARA-listed endangered Western Screech Owl (1), Yellow-breasted Chat (3), Sage Thrasher (2), SARA-listed threatened Bank Swallow (6), Barn Swallow (7), Lewis's Woodpecker (1) and Common Nighthawk (2). Other BC Red-listed species (six in total) observed were Grasshopper Sparrow (6), Prairie Falcon (1), Peregrine Falcon (1), and BC Blue listed species (11 in total) Olive-sided Flycatcher (1), White-throated Swift (25), Great Blue Heron (2), Canyon Wren (1), Lark Sparrow (10), Brewer's Sparrow (9), and Gray Flycatcher (1). Other interesting finds included Hammond's Flycatcher (1), Common Goldeneye (1), Common

Poorwill (1), Clay-coloured Sparrow (4), Rock Wren (1), and 17 Dusky Grouse. Only one area spotted Red-naped Sapsuckers (3) and only one Rufous Hummingbird was seen. All sightings were entered in eBird using the IBA Canada protocol.

This year the wet conditions provided a nice look at species diversity in a particularly moist breeding season. We may not see similar wet conditions like this for many years. The extra water enhancing riparian areas opens up a niche for species that in drier years would have moved elsewhere. In that regard it was a great year to conduct this count. It would be great to do these counts on a more regular basis to explore differences in diversity and numbers of birds based on seasonal conditions. It's also great baseline data, as we see an increase in pressure on our birds and habitats, especially with the fast development rate we are experiencing in the Southern Okanagan. Ten years ago we may not have foreseen some of the population declines that are now being reported. Organized official counts like this are an important tool in conservation planning.

Off-leash dogs are prohibited from the White Lake IBA, however during preliminary scouting two large dogs off leash were witnessed running through the grassland, flushing ground-nesting birds. During the count in this area, several listed species were observed. This demonstrates an issue that is crucial to the protection of the numerous species that nest on the ground or in low shrubs, especially endangered birds such as the Sage Thrasher. The two Sage Thrashers we saw are at extremely high risk of being predated by dogs, or of failing to raise broods due to the increased stress.

A big thank you to the BC Field Ornithologists for the funding to run this bird count, and BC Nature and the IBA program coordinator for applying for the grant, and to the many volunteers that came out to participate. Thanks also to the landowners, ranchers, Nature Trust and the Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory for granting access, and to White Lake IBA Caretaker Doreen Olson's Three Gates Farm for hosting the count-up lunch.



# Birding Ghana

Peter Candido

## West African Endemics and Upper Guinea Specialties

In November 2017 I joined a birding tour of Ghana organized by Rockjumper Worldwide Birding Adventures. Though I had previously birded South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania, Ghana and its neighbours in West Africa are home to many different and exciting species of birds, particularly in the rainforest habitats. An easy flight itinerary took me from Vancouver to Paris, followed by a direct flight to Accra, the capital. Ghana straddles the Greenwich meridian just north of the equator, so it is on the same time zone as London, England.

With a day on my own before the start of the tour, I explored the area around the Erata Hotel, north of the airport. Two hours of birding in steamy heat yielded 18 species including Gray Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Shrike, Heuglin's Masked Weaver, African Hobby and the striking Double-toothed Barbet, with its deep crimson underparts and yellow, notched bill.

The next day the tour kicked off in the Shai Hills, an area of fields and

*Below: Double-toothed Barbet.*

*Right: Slender-billed Weaver.*

*All photos by Peter Candido.*



bushy forest thickets near Accra. The bushy areas yielded a mixture of both West African specialties and more widespread species. Gabar Goshawk, African Green-Pigeon, African Pygmy-Kingfisher, African Gray and African Pied Hornbills, White-crested Helmetshrike, Northern Black-Flycatcher, Pin-tailed Whydah, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Gray Tit-Flycatcher were among the more widely distributed species. West African specialties included Senegal Parrot, Western Plain-tanager, the large and stunning Violet Turaco, Senegal Batis, Senegal Eremomela and Splendid Sunbird. The grassy habitats yielded Red-necked Buzzard, Double-spurred Francolin, Blue-bellied Roller and Yellow-winged Pytilia.

We stopped for lunch on the shore of Lake Volta, the largest man-made lake in the world by area (8,500 square km), formed by the Volta River hydroelectric dam. This lake dominates the eastern half of Ghana. Here we had good looks at the drab Mouse-brown Sunbird. Crossing to the eastern side of the river we found Bar-breasted Firefinch, White-throated Bee-eaters (migrants from the Sahel to the north), Ethiopian Swallow, Broad-billed Roller, Senegal Coucal, Bronze-tailed Glossy-Starling and Purple Glossy-Starling among others.

Continuing east we arrived at Kakum Resource Reserve, about 25 kilometres from the Togo border. After sundown we found African Scops-Owl, Black-shouldered Nightjar and Long-tailed Nightjar. The next morning in the Reserve some notable sightings included African Cuckoo-Hawk, Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, Green Wood-Hoopoe, Black Scimitarbill, Brown-necked Parrot, Fine-spotted Woodpecker, Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Gray Kestrel, Gray-headed Nigrita and Mottled Spinetail. A Thick-billed Cuckoo flew in and circled low, calling all the while.

In the afternoon we retraced our route towards Accra, stopping at Sakumono Lagoon, a wetland which was teeming with eight species of heron including Black Heron, and a variety of migrant shorebirds including Wood Sandpiper, Collared Pratincole, Marsh Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Ringed Plover and Ruff. Also present were Senegal Thick-Knee and Blackcap Babbler, a West African endemic.

The next day we travelled west from Accra along the coast. Our first stop was Winneba Plains, an area of mostly farm bush. Sightings included Lanner Falcon, Black-winged and Red Bishops, Red-winged Prinia, Black-rumped Waxbill, Yellow-shouldered Widowbird, Black-billed Wood-Dove, Black-faced Quailfinch, African Firefinch and Yellow-crowned Gonolek. An overpass in the town of Mankessim gave views of a small colony of Slender-billed and Village Weavers as well as two dark-morph Western Reef-Herons.

We then proceeded westward to Cape Coast Castle where we visited this



sombre site in the mid-day heat. Cape Coast Castle was one of a series of forts built along the coast by European traders and were used to hold African slaves before they were loaded on ships to the Americas.

It is a profoundly sad place in a picturesque natural setting. A wreath laid by President and Michelle Obama during their visit in 2009 was still present in one of the dungeons.

In the afternoon we drove northward to Kakum National Park, which proved to be one of the most interesting and productive sites of the trip. This park is home to the famous Kakum Canopy Walkway, a series of seven rope-style bridges totalling 350 metres in length attached to rainforest trees at a height of about 40 metres. The platforms around the trees provide enough space to set up a scope, allowing views of many bird species that would otherwise be difficult to see.

Outstanding birds recorded here included Palm-nut Vulture, Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, Blue Malkoha, Speckled Tinkerbird, White-crested Hornbill (a large, striking West African endemic), Blue Cuckooshrike, Hairy-breasted Barbet, Spotted Greenbul, Sabine's Puffback, Red-vented and Red-headed

Malimbés (rainforest weavers), Green Hylia, West African Wattle-eye, Yellow-mantled Weaver, Scarlet-tufted and Tiny Sunbirds, Preuss's Swallow, Ussher's Flycatcher, Cassin's Honeybird, Sharpe's Apalis, Honeyguide Greenbul, Gray Longbill, and Black-headed Paradise-Flycatcher.



*Above: White-crested Hornbill.  
Top right: Long-tailed Hawk.  
Bottom right: White-necked Rockfowl.*

For the next day and a half we birded the farm bush and forest habitat around Kakum National Park, turning up a long list of exciting birds, including Blue-headed Coucal, White-spotted Flufftail, Buff-spotted Woodpecker, stunning Rosy and Black Bee-eaters, Buff-throated Sunbird, Western Bluebill (a red-and-black grosbeak-like bird), Chestnut-winged Starling, Fire-bellied Woodpecker, Bristle-nosed, Naked-faced and Vieillot's Barbets, Puvel's Illadopsis (a thrush-like bird), Fanti Saw-wing (like a Barn Swallow but entirely black!), Golden Greenbul, Fire-

crested Alethe (another thrush-like bird), and Rufous-sided Broadbill.

A brief stop at the Pra River yielded White-throated Blue Swallow and two pairs of Rock Pratincoles.

We then moved on to Nsuta Forest, a wooded area west of Kakum, where we birded a forest track on three consecutive days during our two-night stay in the area. Here we had many new species, some of which were seen only once or twice on the tour. Notable was Long-tailed Hawk, an accipiter-like species of West Africa with a long graduated tail; a pair of these birds flew across the trail and one of them perched in a nearby tree for stunning views. Other interesting sightings included Black and Sabine's Spinetails, the huge Great Blue Turaco with its funky crest, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Blue-throated Roller, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Tit-Hylia, Maxwell's Black Weaver, Yellow-billed Turaco, Bronze-naped Pigeon, Red-billed Helmetshrike and Willcocks's Honeyguide.

Continuing westward, we reached Ankasa National Park near the Côte d'Ivoire border, widely considered one of the best rainforest birding areas in Ghana. Here we stayed in a forest camp in large tents under a thatched awning, in steamy tropical heat. A permanent building nearby housed excellent bathroom facilities and showers. Birding in the forest was usually preceded by a bouncy, half-hour drive on a muddy track in Land Rovers to get to key habitats. Birding was also productive on foot around the camp, especially along the entrance road and nearby stream.

New species seen at Ankasa included Hartlaub's Duck, Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, Blue-headed Wood-Dove, African Dwarf and Shining-blue Kingfishers, Yellow-casqued Hornbill, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Brown-eared Woodpecker, Spot-breasted Ibis, Finsch's Flycatcher-Thrush (an Upper Guinea specialty), White-tailed Ant-Thrush, Forest Robin, Cassin's Flycatcher, Yellow-bearded Greenbul, Square-tailed Saw-wing, Red-chested Owlet, Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill, Pale-breasted Illadopsis and Red-vented Malimbe.

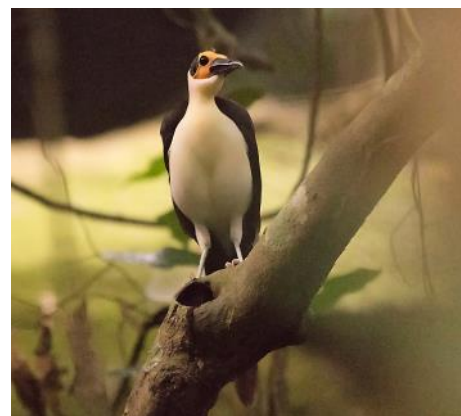
Leaving Ankasa we stopped in



grassland and farm bush habitat where we found Double-spurred Francolin, Marsh Tchagra and the more widespread Brown-crowned and Black-crowned Tchagras, Thick-billed Weaver, Levaillant's Cuckoo and Brown-throated Wattle-eye which showed very well.

Retracing part of our earlier route past Cape Coast we then turned north, passing Kakum and continuing towards Kumasi. Our goal was to search for White-necked Rockfowl at Bonkro Forest. Indeed, for everyone in the group this was a key part of the trip, since this iconic species, one of only two in its family, is found only in the narrow forest belt between Guinea and Ghana. En route we added Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Little Gray Greenbul and Yellow-billed Barbet to the list.

Arriving at a small village in the afternoon, we began a 45-minute climb to the Rockfowl site, a low rock face and overhang. Two benches were strategically placed for awaiting the arrival of the birds; outside the breeding period these birds usually return to their nesting sites to roost after foraging in the





forest. Scanning the rock face, we noted several old nests attached to the walls; these were made of mud and somewhat resembled giant Barn Swallow nests. At about 4:50 PM, a single White-necked Rockfowl came in and perched, showing well, then moved out of sight. Success and much relief all around! A bird reappeared several times, likely the same individual, and provided decent photo opportunities albeit in failing light. These are slim-bodied birds with long tails and a mostly bare head and nape. Despite their strange appearance, the Rockfowl or Picathartes are actually passerines.

After an overnight stay in Kumasi, former capital of the Ashanti Kingdom, we continued north. Our next birding stop was at Opro forest, a logging concession where we found Guinea Turaco, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Gray-headed Bristlebill, Olive-green Camaroptera and others.

On our route north to Mole (pronounced “molay”) National Park, we picked up Grasshopper Buzzard and Piapiac, a black corvid with a long tapered tail. The landscape became progressively drier as we moved northward. Mole National Park lies in the northwest corner of the country and is

*Below: Greater Honeyguide.  
Right: Egyptian Plover.*



Ghana's largest wildlife refuge. It consists of savannah and riparian ecosystems, reminiscent of the East African game reserves. It has populations of African Elephant, Hippopotamus, African Buffalo, Warthog and a variety of antelope species. Large carnivores such as lion, leopard and hyena however are now rare in the park.

We spent three nights at the hotel in the park with Olive Baboons, Warthogs, Bushbuck and even an African Elephant frequenting the grounds outside our rooms. Birding various sites around the park yielded a rich variety of species. Particularly memorable for me were the huge Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill and the Greater Honeyguide. Of the seventeen species of honeyguide, the Greater is the one most famous for leading humans to bees' nests, from which the birds profit by eating the wax combs (!) and grubs. Honeyguides are brood parasites and the young are born with razor-sharp bill hooks which they use to lacerate and thereby kill their nest-mates.

Other notable sightings in Mole included the unusual Oriole Warbler, Stone Partridge, White-shouldered Black Tit, Bruce's Green-Pigeon, White-crowned Robin-Chat, Red-throated Bee-eater, White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike, Bearded Barbet, Red-winged Pytilia, Long-tailed Glossy-Starling, Wilson's Indigobird, Red-headed Lovebird, Togo Paradise-Whydah (males with exceedingly long streamer tails), Pygmy Sunbird, Forbes's Plover, Sun Lark, Abyssinian Roller, Gosling's Bunting and Brown-rumped Bunting.

Night walks here yielded excellent views of Grayish Eagle-Owl, Long-tailed Nightjar and most exciting of all, two Standard-winged Nightjars which allowed close approach. The males of this species have second innermost primaries that are more than twice the length of the body and webbed only at the tips, forming the “standards.”

On one of our days in Mole we made an excursion northeast to the White Volta River to look for Egyptian Plover. This monotypic species was a major target for most people in the group. The usual site for finding this species, further north in the country, had become inaccessible due to repair work on the bridge over the river. Fortunately our local guides knew of an alternate site, and directly upon arrival we found a pair of these lovely shore-

birds on a sand bar: tick off another new bird family!

After experiencing many amazing birds in Mole National Park it was time to head south again on the final phase of the tour. East of Kumasi we birded the Bobiri Forest Reserve and Butterfly Sanctuary on two successive days, walking the forest tracks and finding birds such as Dwarf Black Hornbill, Forest Woodhoopoe, African Piculet, Least Honeyguide, Violet-backed Hyliota (another new bird family for me) and a pair of Gray Parrots. Birding some farm-bush habitat north of Accra we found Compact Weaver, the stunning little Red-cheeked Wattle-eye and a species I had long wanted to see – a pair of Bat Hawks at a nest site.

The last day of the tour featured a 12 kilometre walk (return) up to the top of a forest ridge at 350 metres elevation in Atewa Forest north of Accra. The main target here was Blue-moustached Bee-eater, a highly localized West African endemic. We had great looks at one of these birds, and also added Black-capped Apalis and a much sought-after Congo Serpent-Eagle to the list.

The final tally for me was 395 species, of which 238 were lifers. Ghana is a country with stable government, decent tourist infrastructure and friendly people and provides access to many special West African birds. Logistics for this tour were arranged by a local



company, Ashanti African Tours, which provided a comfortable air-conditioned bus, two very skilled local guides and an excellent driver. Furthermore, we were pleased to discover that Ashanti Tours was actively contributing to its community: a large new school, built with their support, was about to be opened in the village near the Rockfowl habitat that we visited. This is a noteworthy example of how birding tourism can directly benefit local people.

# A Week in the Cariboo

Gareth Pugh

**June 24–30, 2018**

Our annual naturalists' trip this year was to 108 Mile in the Cariboo. Eight of us, Bob Puls, Wim Vesseur, Pauline O'Toole, Anne Gosse, Liz Walker, Alice Steffenson, Gill and myself met at Bob's and left at 8:00 AM. We rendezvoused with Fernando and Paulina Selles in Chilliwack at 8:45 and made good time in light traffic, stopping at the 100 Mile Visitor Centre for lunch and checking out the birds on the lake.

We checked into the Spruce Hill Resort by mid-afternoon and after an early supper set out to explore some of the many trails around the extensive property. Mosquito repellent was essential as the pesky critters had apparently had a bumper breeding season. We followed the sound of a very agitated Pileated Woodpecker and found it harassing an American Marten. A second woodpecker flew away as we approached, almost certainly a juvenile which the adult was protecting. We were able to get some very good photos of the marten which tried to hide in a tree and surprisingly did not run away. For all of us this was one of the highlights of the trip and a first-ever sighting for some.

After heavy rain most of the night we were able to head out early for Sucker Lake in warm sunshine where we walked the trail to the far end of the lake finding a variety of birds including Sandhill Crane and MacGillivray's Warbler. Returning to our vehicles we drove on towards another lake but found the dirt road too wet and slippery so turned back just as the rain started again. We then visited the 108 Mile Heritage site where we could get a cup of coffee and spent some time touring the buildings and heard the tale of the woman who killed some fifty miners returning from the gold fields and amassed a fortune before being found out.

When the rain stopped we took a drive down Tatton Lake and Gustafsen Lake FSR's looking for a possible route

to do a Nightjar Survey. We stopped at several lakes as we went, adding new species to our list at each one. We drove through part of the area where the previous year's Gustafsen Lake fire had destroyed many trees and found two Mountain Bluebird families, a Mule Deer and a Yellow-bellied Marmot. Logging and clearing was in progress in the burned areas which will hopefully be replanted soon.

After supper we drove to a small lake at the Tatton Lake Road turnoff from Hwy 97 which was typical of the many small lakes and wetlands in the area. It was obviously a good breeding site as we saw young Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds, American Coots, Ruddy and Ring-necked Duck, Mallard, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Tree Swallows etc and also a Green Heron. Our last stop of the day was on Watson Lake where we found Eared Grebe, Ring-billed Gull, and a flock of Sandhill Crane in addition to the usual ducks and common species.

We started the next day at the west end of Watson Lake, one of a number of lakes in that area that are managed by Ducks Unlimited, where we found a wide variety of birds including species not normally seen in the Lower Mainland such as Ruddy Duck, Redhead, Eared Grebe, Mountain Bluebirds etc. From there we drove on along Tatton Station Road into the burn area as the roads were drying out at last. We looked for the Bluebirds again but without success so we turned back and down Gustafsen North Road where we did find several Bluebirds plus Hairy Woodpeckers feeding on the burned trees. Grass was growing well in much of the burn and we found a number of songbirds in the area indicating nature's resilience.

From there we headed to Canim Lake Road then onto Archie Meadows Road. At our first stop we found several non-verbal Empids which we could not identify, however a Northern Waterthrush, a lifer for some of us, gave us good views. Further on we met a rancher who told us there was a Great Gray Owl in the neighbourhood which was often seen during the day, so we spent some time looking for it without success. While owl hunting we found a Pacific Slope Flycatcher nest, one of three found on the trip.

After supper we were joined by local birder Patricia Spencer and headed

for Gustafsen Lake Road to try doing a Nightjar Survey. On the way we spent some time at a small lake on Bridge Creek and added Solitary Sandpiper, Red-naped Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush and Golden-crowned Sparrow to our list and also saw two Willow Flycatchers building their nests. We tried doing our Nightjar Survey but after drawing a complete blank at the first seven stations gave up.

Wednesday morning we made an early start on a day trip to Farwell Canyon. We made good time and once we reached the Chilcotin Plateau we stopped at every small lake, finding Green- and Blue-winged Teal, and Vesper and Lincoln's Sparrowes while listening to Western Meadowlarks singing in the grasslands. Eventually we reached the lookout point from where the canyon and the winding road in and out can be seen. The alfalfa was in full bloom and busy with butterflies and bees.

We descended into the canyon and checked out the Chilcotin River bridge before stopping for lunch on the bench above the river then walked down to the old ranch site by the river which is a little oasis with a large grove of cottonwoods. Several White-throated Swifts could be seen around the cliffs above the river while Bullock's Oriole, Magnolia Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, Western Kingbirds and others were seen in the trees. On our return journey we detoured along Mission Road hoping to see Bobolink but instead found a Dusky Flycatcher and a small colony of Clay-colored Sparrows, the only ones found on this trip, in the 31 species counted on this road. To end the day four 'die-hards' visited nearby Sepa Lake and were rewarded with six Common Nighthawks which we had searched in vain for the previous evening.

Thursday morning we met Patricia Spencer who had offered to take us around the Walker Valley. We met at her home and set off through grasslands overlooking Watson Lake. Savannah and Clay-colored Sparrows sang around us as we descended to the lake where the valley starts. Patricia showed us where the fire had come to the edge of the 108 Mile Ranch sub-division, taking one house and narrowly missing hers, a scary situation and hard to imagine. The valley is typical of the Cariboo with groves of Aspen/grass/bushes



along the hillside and a stream that widens into a wetland/lake with islands in it. A pair of Sandhill Cranes could be heard and seen across the valley and the bird life in this mixed habitat was amazing, we even found a Trumpeter Swan that had obviously decided not to migrate further north. The outstanding feature was the 250+ American Wigeon among which we saw most, if not all, of the duck species found in that area including Greater Scaup and Cinnamon Teal. In all we recorded 57 species on our three and a half hour (two mile) walk. We are very grateful to John Woods for putting us in touch with Patricia.

After lunch we headed for Spring Lake Road which follows 111 Mile Creek for several kilometres, much of it through open range land.

Friday morning we returned to Spring Lake Road hoping to get through to Lake of the Trees if a recent washout had been repaired. We walked down a ranch access road as far as the gate and found two Red-necked Sapsucker nests in one tree with very vocal chicks. At the creek crossing where it flowed out of a small lake we found Waterthrush, Tennessee Warblers, and a Belted Kingfisher in addition to the usual birds. Luckily the washout repair was just being completed so we were able to visit Lake of the Trees and have lunch in the sunshine.

From there Bob and Wim decided to drive on and complete the circle through Forest Grove while the rest of us turned back wanting to check out an old forest road that we had seen earlier. The road is an old grass-covered FSR leading past Larsen Lake to Club Lake and is obviously used occasionally. It was easy walking and birds and butterflies were plentiful. We found four more Sapsucker nests by following the sound of the chicks.

At Larsen Lake we found a family of Common Loons while in the trees nearby were two Hairy Woodpeckers. For our last evening some of us returned to Sepa Lake and this time saw only two Common Nighthawks.

Our total species count for this trip which has been submitted to e-Bird was 117. We also saw the following butterflies which will be submitted to e-Butterfly:

- European Skipper
- Anna's Blue Ringlet

## SATIPO TOURS

<http://www.satipotours.com>

### Ethiopia – Mammal Madness & Endemics

March 3 – 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020



Photo: Thomas Plath

**Cost:** TBA (approx. \$6600.00 CAN) from Addis Ababa

Costs include accommodation from Mar 3<sup>rd</sup> to Mar 20<sup>th</sup> (18 nights), all meals, transport, diesel, drivers, bird guides, park permits and fees, bottles of water, extra local guides, and taxes. Lodging based on twin rooms. Single supplement is \$650.

**Leaders:** Thomas Plath, Wildlife Biologist, R.P.Bio; Local Guides

**Summary:** Crazy looking mammals and lots of birds on a comfortable, culturally rich people-friendly tour. In addition to 40+ endemics/near endemics, hordes of Palearctic migrants abound in a place where people do not harm birds! Birds are tame offering excellent photo and viewing opportunities. Expect 450+ species.

**Highlights:** Wattled Ibis, Blue-winged Goose, Harwood's Francolin, Rouget's Rail, Spot-breasted Lapwing, Yellow-fronted Parrot, Prince Ruspoli's Turaco, Banded barbet, Sidamo Lark, White-tailed Swallow, Abyssinian Longclaw and Wheatear, Stresemann's Bushcrow etc..

**Mammals:** Guereza Colobus, Gelada, Giant Root-rat, Ethiopian Wolf, Bat-eared Fox, Serval, Menelik's Bushbuck, Mountain Nyala, Salt's Dik-dik, Gerenuk, Soemmerring's Gazelle

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- Silver-bordered Fritillary
- Acmon Blue
- Alexander's Sulphur
- Arrowhead Blue
- Boisduval's Blue
- Great Basin Wood-nymph
- Grey Hairstreak
- Margined White
- Melissa's Blue
- Mourning Cloak
- Northern Pale Crescent
- Old World Swallowtail
- Pale Crescent
- Persius Duskywing
- Pink-edged Sulphur
- Sara Orange Tip
- Silver-bordered Fritillary
- Sylvan Hairstreak
- Western Tiger Swallowtail
- White Admiral

# Young Birder Trips

Melissa Hafting

## Ptarmigan Hunt at Illal Mountain

On August 19, 2018 we set off on yet another adventure. If you have followed my young birder trips, you would know that White-tailed Ptarmigan is the BC Young Birder Group's nemesis bird. Over the years I have led nine hikes all over the province looking for them with the kids. I have seen them on my own but when I would take the youth, we would constantly dip.

So this time I made a promise to myself that I would get the youth their ptarmigan. They are never easy birds at any location but I was determined to try. I researched for months where was my best chance. Last year we did Whistler, Mount Cheam and Flatiron/Needle Peak, all places where others got ptarmigan especially the latter. However, Needle Peak was a tough hike and it didn't work out for us last time, so I wanted to try something different. Also, it is always cool to show the kids a new peak. I ruled out Mount Cheam and Whistler for the high amount of people traffic on the weekend. I wanted to go to a hard-to-access mountain where hikers regularly see ptarmigan, but a hike that we could all physically do, since I had 13 year-olds and first-time hikers on the trip.

So after extensive research on the Internet and talking to my friend Alan Burger, who hikes this mountain often, I decided to take the kids up to Illal Mountain. This mountain is located past Hope in the Coquihalla Range. The hike is a 16-kilometre round trip if you don't have a four-wheel-drive but we were lucky enough to have one and were able to drive down a very rough spur road to get to the trail head. When we got to the parking lot we were greeted by a Columbian Ground-Squirrel. Bears are in the area, so we carried bear spray, but the only sign of bears we saw that day was their scat.

We hiked up to Illal Meadows but on the way up, in the steeper forested

section, we had an American Three-toed Woodpecker and a Pine Grosbeak as highlights. As we crossed the shale ridge we had a few Pikas making "eeapping" sounds at us. I love their cute sounds. We enjoyed picking delicious wild blueberries the whole way up. Illal Mountain is famous with back-country hikers for its delicious blueberries.

We couldn't smell smoke in the air (we sure could in Hope) but the air was more heavy and it was very hazy so our visibility out towards the other peaks wasn't great. We took many breaks and ascended slowly since your lungs need to work harder in those conditions. As we climbed out of the trees into the meadows, we saw quite a few Clark's Nutcrackers.

The kids were busy chatting away sharing their summer experiences. Bridget had just returned from Long Point's Young Birder Workshop in Ontario and she went with fellow young birder Isaac from Kamloops. It was so great to hear about all the birds she saw, like a Prairie Warbler. Then Sasha just got back from Beaverhill Bird Observatory's Young Birder Workshop in Alberta and she told us about all the cool birds she banded including Canada Warblers. Plus Cole just got back from a VENT young birder camp in Arizona and he was telling us about all the awesome birds he saw like Five-striped Sparrows. Adam had just returned from Japan and Australia and he told us just

how hot it was in Japan and the unique birds and animals he saw in Australia. Katya had just done a family trip to Mount Rainier where she saw her lifer ptarmigan; so she told me she would do her best to spot one for us.

The chatting helped us to pass the time and get through the final grunt before we reached the beautiful meadows. We stopped to admire the landscape. We looked at all the wildflowers like Indian Paintbrush. Since I have done so many alpine hikes with the young birders, one of them – Bridget – kindly bought me an alpine wildflower book, which I constantly reference. Thank you Bridget.

When we reached the alpine meadows we sat down for lunch between two pretty lakes. Here we saw a Baird's Sandpiper. It turned out to be one of two we actually saw. Baird's Sandpipers tend to migrate over alpine lakes, so it isn't as strange as you would think. Two weeks ago Alan had a Western Sandpiper in the same spot (which is rarer) and on nearby Flatiron Mountain, which we could see from Illal Mountain, my friend Ben had an Upland Sandpiper (rarer still) in July.

After lunch there was no time to waste. We were on a mission and we searched all the lower meadows in a long line of eight of us spreading out everywhere. There was just so much (too much) suitable habitat.

We saw American Pipits, Northern Harriers, Savannah, Chipping and

*Adult female White-tailed Ptarmigan. Photo by Melissa Hafting.*





White-crowned Sparrows but no ptarmigan. We did find a threatened Western Toad in the meadows though, which was cool.

We climbed around and went up the ridge of Illal Mountain and we found Hoary Marmots and Chipmunks and more Pikas but no fancy chickens. We searched for hours and people were getting tired; some were probably thinking that we weren't going to see one ... yet again. I felt that this time we would be lucky; it just was a gut feeling and I wasn't going to give up yet.

After what seemed to be forever Katya spotted ptarmigan and screamed it out and we had to rush around collecting kids who were scattered along the ridge of Illal Mountain. We got everyone together and I actually started crying. They were tears of joy but I just couldn't hold it in. After nine bloody hikes we had finally found our golden goose. All the kids gave me so many hugs I fell over, it was just a wonderful moment that I don't think we will ever forget. I had told the kids in the morning that if we found the ptarmigan today I would cry and if we were successful I would get down on my knees and kiss the ground and I kept that promise! The kids tried to turn one into a Rock Ptarmigan but it just couldn't be done. They joked and asked me where my next ptarmigan hike will be with them. I said I'm done I'm too old for this! I

they were no less excited. They were enjoying looking at the bird's unique feathered feet. I was very grateful to Ilya for all the help he gave me for supervising the kids on the mountain and helping me immensely.

As we were lying down watching these White-tailed Ptarmigan they suddenly began to multiply. First Katya had seen two and we were so excited our teary eyes couldn't focus too well I guess, because then Bridget counted four. After about 30 mins when I was looking at them I counted five! It was just more joy added to an already immensely joyful occasion.

The alpine ground we lay on was extremely uncomfortable and we were being bitten by horseflies despite spraying with deet but we didn't dare move because the ptarmigan chicks began clucking and walking right up in front of our faces! I know people say they aren't too smart but they sure are lucky we didn't want to eat them. We could have reached out and touched them. The adult female was clucking and watching over her young and feeding but the young were jumping around and eating and doing dust baths. It was very cute! We watched them for a full hour and then I reluctantly said we had to go.

We had to get down the mountain before dark but it sure was hard for the kids to pull themselves away from these fancy chickens ... but they all got

Cole pointed out a raptor flying over us in the distance and we looked up and photographed it and we saw at once it was a Golden Eagle! It sure was a nice way to end a fantastic day.

We had hiked all the way from the meadows up to the ridge of Illal Mountain and we had all finished our water so we found a nice stream and filled up our bottles with our water-filter pump and added iodine drops for added safety. Water never tasted so good! It was a nice warm day up there – about 30 degrees C as a high – and at the top of the mountain it was a bit windy but still warm, even though there was still some snow on the ground.

We climbed down in 1.5 hours (down is much easier than up) and the last bird we saw was a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Our total hike was 13.5 km with an approximately 800-metre elevation gain.

We got some dinner at Tim Hortons and went home with memories to last a lifetime. We were all very tired but happy after a very long day. We would all be sore tomorrow but that didn't matter anymore now that we had our golden chicken. I'm so grateful I was able to share this special day with this amazing group of people.

Here is a full list of species we saw:

- White-tailed Ptarmigan
- Clark's Nutcracker



joked with them that they will never get me on a mountain again, since I fulfilled my promise.

It was a lifer for almost all of the youth except for Cole and Katya but

amazing pictures and a lifer and incredible experience so they were so happy. I still will never forget their amazing infectious smiles when they first saw the bird. When we were about to leave,

- Northern Harrier
- Baird's Sandpiper
- Pine Grosbeak
- American Three-toed Woodpecker
- Wilson's Warbler

- Orange-crowned Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Chestnut-backed Chickadee
- Pine Siskin
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Steller's Jay
- Savannah Sparrow
- White-crowned Sparrow
- Chipping Sparrow
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Dark-eyed Junco
- American Robin
- Red-breasted Nuthatch
- Red-tailed Hawk

#### Animals seen:

- Columbian Ground-Squirrel
- Western Toad
- Yellow Pine Chipmunk
- Red Squirrel
- Hoary Marmot
- Pica

## Princeton Trip July 14, 2018

We started our young birder tour with five young birders and it was the first trip with 15-year-old Sasha Fairbairn. The first location was the Great Blue Heron Nature Reserve in Chilliwack to see the long-staying Black Phoebe, which was a lifer and BC bird for a few of the youth. Here we also were greeted by the sweet songs of Yellow Warblers, Black-headed Grosbeaks and Red-eyed Vireos. It was also fun to watch the Eastern Kingbirds fluttering around and a lone Vaux's Swift.

Next we were on our way to Princeton. We were hoping to see Williamson's Sapsuckers at August Lake as our main target. As we drove on the dirt road to the lake, Bridget Spencer and Daniel Beeke called out Lewis's Woodpecker, sitting on a stump right beside our van. We pulled over and hopped out and got beautiful views as it flew from tree to tree quite like a crow except for when it would bank and reveal its hidden green-sheened back. Next we drove straight to the lake, which was alive with nesting birds. We found a family of six Pied-billed Grebes and eleven Common Goldeneyes and some American Coots. A Marsh Wren was also present chattering in the reeds. We

also found a very agitated and close-approaching Solitary Sandpiper, which was a highlight. We suspect she had a nest nearby but we didn't want to disturb her too much. It is uncommon for them to be nesting that far south but there are records of them nesting in the area at some high elevation lakes. They also nest sometimes in abandoned Robin nests so it is highly unlikely that we would ever find it.

Other birds present on the lake were male and female Ruddy Ducks in their glorious breeding plumage. Female Barrow's Goldeneyes, Mallards, Lesser Scaup and a lone female Bufflehead were also present. As we began to wander around the lake we saw Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks and watched at least three American Kestrels swoop and dive down hunting their prey. The kids loved watching the Kestrels put on their show.

We walked into the woods and found a couple White-breasted Nuthatches. One was so cute making their unique calls and walking up and down the base of the tree trunk allowing for some great photos. We also saw many Pygmy Nuthatches feeding their fledged young. Their cute voices and funny antics were fun to watch especially since most of the youth, except for Kalin who lives in Kelowna, do not see them often. We also found a few Red-breasted Nuthatches rounding out our three nuthatch species. Many Mountain Chickadees and Western Wood-Pewees were also singing.

As we walked towards a farmer's field we saw two Western Kingbirds hawking for insects and making a racket. As we walked back into the woods we had a male Western Tanager come down and perch on a mossy perch right in front of us. Of course I didn't have my camera ready but some of the youth did thankfully.

We also found a nest cavity with Lewis's Woodpeckers inside. The fledgling was making so much noise it was easy to find. We watched the two adults religiously come and go with a mouth full of berries and bugs. All of the youth rarely get to see these birds and funnily enough Kalin who lives in Kelowna was happy most of all.

Other woodpeckers seen were a family of Northern Flickers, two beautiful Pileated Woodpeckers and a Red-naped Sapsucker that Bridget Spencer found, and least but not last some Downys. We never did see a Williamson's Sapsucker but it wasn't due to lack of trying. We tried hard in the baking heat in several different areas – even different roads like Copper Mountain Road. However, since they nest earlier and the young had fledged and dispersed, they were impossible to find in mid July.

We delighted in watching a few pairs of Evening Grosbeaks that were calling and chasing each other around. They are such stunning birds. We also got to see a single Cassin's Finch which was a target for many of the youth who rarely see them living in Metro Vancou-

*White-breasted Nuthatch by Bridget Spencer.*





ver. Even though it was really hot and now midday the House Wrens were constantly singing. Kalin Ocana found an Olive-sided Flycatcher, a few Pine Siskins flew over, and Ilya spotted a beautiful male Lazuli Bunting singing away giving us good views. Chipping Sparrows with food littered the roadway, Yellow-rumped Warblers filled the trees and we heard a Warbling Vireo. We were amazed at the high number of Common Ravens too; we saw at least 16 and even more later on at the community landfill.

We had a great visit at August Lake and after lunch packed up and headed out to Swan Lake. Since we were at lower elevation we were baking on the way there and stopped at the community landfill where I knew the kids could pick up one of their targets: an American Crow! After nabbing the crow and more Ravens than the eye could see we pulled into Swan Lake.

As soon as we got out of the car we were overwhelmed by the number of Vesper Sparrows. We walked through the pretty wildflowers into the Ponderosa pine forest. Here we saw our only Western Bluebird of the trip; it was a

beautiful male too! We found many Mountain Bluebirds carrying food and saw nesting Tree Swallows and House Wrens. It was a day full of many nesting birds which was great.

As we hiked down to the lake we stopped by a little pond and looked for salamanders under rocks to no avail. However, we did find some baby American Coots and at least ten pretty Yellow-headed Blackbirds making not-so-pretty calls. We also saw an Eastern Kingbird posing on beautiful perches. One of the highlights of the trip was an animal with no feathers: it was a Mule Deer doe with a spotted fawn that could barely walk. He was suckling the mother and came quite close, thrilling the kids. The fawn was truly adorable. Bridget found a Bullock's Oriole as well.

We found an Osprey on a nest and one Osprey also flew over us. At the lake a male Ruddy Duck was doing his bubbling courtship display. His advances were not tolerated at all by the female, who kept racing at him in a very angry fashion. We were surprised to see a male displaying this late in the year. Lesser Scaup and Red-winged Black-

birds were also present. Western Meadowlarks were singing their wonderful songs in the fields and the trees were full of Western Wood-Pewees and some American Robins and Cedar Waxwings. The youth had fun photographing multiple butterflies and dragonflies here and enjoyed reading the park's many interpretive signs.

As we left very happy, we decided to check out the Evergreen Motel for a Calliope Hummingbird, and a nice female came into one of the feeders for us, giving fantastic views. Thanks to Randy Dzenkiw for that tip! We also saw two stunning Mule Deer stags and picked up Brewer's Blackbirds and Rock Pigeons.

On the way home in Princeton we saw some Northern Rough-winged Swallows and some Clark's Nutcrackers but we did not see a Black-billed Magpie, which was my first time dipping on this species in that city.

It was a great day with some great youth. Thanks to Ilya Povalyaev for all the help he gave during this trip.

*Group photo by Melissa Hafting.*





## Featured Species, No 3

Adrian Dorst's *The Birds of Vancouver Island's West Coast*, UBC Press, covers 360 species in its 550 pages. Permission has been given to include examples in this newsmagazine.

### Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*

*Status:* Common to abundant spring and fall migrant. Casual in winter. Breeds.

This bird of the grasslands breeds throughout North America except for the High Arctic islands and southern United States. In British Columbia, it breeds in suitable habitat throughout much of the interior of the province, as well as in the Fraser Valley and south-eastern Vancouver Island. Savannah Sparrows winter through much of the southern United States southward, and on the west coast from Vancouver Island south to Guatemala.

The population that migrates through Vancouver Island's west coast region is the subspecies *P. s. sandwichensis*, which breeds on Unalaska Island at the eastern end of the Aleutian chain, which lies some 2,600 km (1,600 mi) northwest of Vancouver Island. It appears that birds make the flight to and from Vancouver Island by taking a direct route over the Pacific rather than the much longer flight following the shore around the Gulf of Alaska. This would explain the overnight invasion of west coast beaches by hundreds of birds each year in September and October. When this occurs, it is inevitably after a period of clear skies, sometimes accompanied by a brisk wind from the northwest.

One location where large numbers convene in fall is Stubbs Island, near Tofino, where Savannah Sparrows feed on the seeds of several introduced varieties of European dune grass. On 19 September 2004, 300 birds were estimated there, and on 30 September 2013, 350 birds. An estimated 200 birds were recorded along the northern section of Long Beach on 20 September 1980, and about 250 birds at the Long Beach Airport on 11 October 1984.

In spring, such an inundation, or "fallout," is usually the result of a weather front interrupting the migration. Surveys conducted at the Long Beach Golf Course produced counts and estimates of 200 birds on 6 May 1999, 250 on 3 May 2001, 290 on 27 April 2008, and 132 on 11 May 2011. Birds generally begin arriving in late April, with the peak migration period occurring anywhere from late April to mid-May. By the end of the third week of May all birds have usually departed. On Cleland Island, migration counts were made in 1970. Thirty (the maximum number) were noted on 11 May, and the last bird was recorded on 6 June. For a four-year spring period from 1969 through 1972, the earliest arrival date was 19 April and the latest departure date was 30 May.

Extended periods of heavy fog in spring can be devastating for migrating Savannah Sparrows. On 2 and 3 May 1972, 57 passerines of five species were killed flying into the lighthouse at Cape Scott, in the northwest corner of the region. Of these, 30 (53%) were Savannah Sparrows and all were males, suggesting a sex-segregated migration.<sup>311</sup>

Fall migration usually commences during the last week of August or early September. First arrivals at Stubbs Island were seen on 30 August in 2014 and 26 August in 2016. In 2004, 60 birds were counted at the airport as early as 1 September, and in 2014, birds peaked at Stubbs Island on 5 September. Large numbers are usually not seen until mid-September or even into October. By late October, virtually all birds have departed. There is a late date of 20 birds on 31 October in 2010, at Jordan River. A very few individuals may linger to late November, and I have two records for December. On 6 December 1989, a bird was seen in Tofino, and on 1 December 2014, a single bird was observed on the beach at Florencia Bay. These were likely very late migrants. Overwintering birds are extremely rare. There is one record for Vargas Island on 10 January 1969, 299 and one record at the airport on 5 February 2001. As first suggested by Hatler et al., the fall migration generally occurs in two

waves. In 2004, 100 birds were counted at the south end of Long Beach on 15 September; five weeks later, on 19 October, 300 birds were tallied at Stubbs Island. In 2014, the first wave peaked with 265 birds at Stubbs Island on 5 September; three weeks later, on 26 September, a second wave of 150 birds was observed at the same location.

As far back as 1972, birds had been heard singing at the Long Beach Airport during the month of June, raising suspicions that birds were breeding there. Breeding was confirmed on 14 June 2004, when an adult and newly fledged young were seen together. Since then, counts at the airport during the summer months indicate that a small population of Savannah Sparrows breeds there each year. In some years, a good number of young are seen in July and August.

Local birds occasionally overwinter. Resident airport birds appear to be slightly paler than the migrants, with less prominent streaking on the breast, sides, and face, indicating that they belong to the subspecies *P. s. brooksi*, which nests on the southeast side of Vancouver Island. Members of this subspecies are also the first to arrive in spring.

Photo by Adrian Dorst. The book can be ordered online at [ubcpres.ca](http://ubcpres.ca).





## Gone Fishing

Chris Siddle

### Bank Swallow – The Prodigious Digger

The Bank Swallow is our smallest swallow, weighing only 13.5 grams. That's a gram less than a Violet-green Swallow and 6.5 grams less than a comparatively heavy Tree Swallow. And yet, even weighing a little less than a hefty cherry tomato, the Bank Swallow completes a long spring migration from South America to its breeding range across the United States and much of Canada. Unlike the Violet-green or the Tree, the Bank can't pop into a ready-made cavity to nest. Rather, equipped with a bill best suited as an insect trap and tiny claws on comparatively weak legs, the Bank Swallow finds a roadside cutbank or an eroded riverside cliff and digs a burrow up to a metre long through gravel, sand or clay. In human terms a swallow deciding to excavate a long tunnel in gravel seems like a child armed with a saw from a carpentry-play setting out to cut down a large tree.

Yet every spring Bank Swallows accomplish what they set out to do, and they do so in harsh environments. Soil solid enough to support a nesting tunnel wears away at the bird's feathers. The road cut or river bank is by its exposed nature an unstable place. It's exposed to wind and in poor weather water, which these days of changeable weather can mean short sharp rainfall bucketing down on granular near vertical surfaces. Mud flows are common and cutbanks can slump suddenly.

In spite of these risks and hardships, the Bank Swallow carries on. The species has evolved to dig well. Study a burrow to see the grooves its triangular bill made while digging a ceiling or a floor. Compared to other swallows, the Bank Swallow has a smaller, more conical bill and "a proportionately larger cucullaris-lateral rectus muscle complex" (Garrison 1999) which I'm guessing means stronger-than-usual muscles around the face. The bird uses bill, feet and wings to dig with. The material dug out is ejected from the excavation by "vigorous kicks and wriggling body and wing shuffling" (ibid).

Although individual pairs are capable of nesting alone, Bank Swallows prefer to nest in colonies, tunnels often dug in rows within areas of suitable substrate. Some burrows are reused from year to year (the old nest at the far end is thrown out if the tunnel is used again) while many tunnels are freshly dug, perhaps the swallows' attempts to avoid heavy parasite loads. Bank Swallow nests and tunnels can become infested with fleas, blowflies (larvae suck blood), mites, lice and feather lice. Slightly off topic but ghoulishly interesting are the "swallow bugs" that plague Cliff Swallows. Desperate for a drink of hot swallow, these tubular blood suckers crowd the entrances of nests and hitchhike to new nests by gripping the legs of newly-arrived swallows that visit their old digs. Check out the group photo of such a hungry swallow bug horde in Charles Brown's excellent account of his early life as a Cliff Swallow scientist, *Swallow Summer*.

According to the literature the male Bank Swallow digs part of a tunnel (at least 30 cm) and courts a female by "singing and flying in circles around entrance, then [he] perches at or hovers in front of it and displays [his] throat patch: sings, sometimes quivering wings" (Turner). So far so good. The

female enters the tunnel and inspects his work. If they become a pair, he continues digging up to a depth of a metre and creates a nesting cavity at its far end. Digging can take up to eleven days, a prodigious effort for so small a bird. The first egg of the clutch is laid in the unlined cavity. Now the female takes over for the next 1-3 days, with some help from her partner, to construct a nest of roots, plant fibres, grass, and most sought-after and fought-over, feathers that are added during laying and incubation.

#### The Larkin Cross Road Colony

In the late 1980s I discovered a small colony in a cut bank where a country road descends from benchland to the flood plain of Deep Creek between Armstrong and the North Arm of Okanagan Lake. Each spring in latest April or early May I would visit the colony, mainly, I confess, just to "get" my first of the year Bank Swallow. Spring 2018, however, was different. After reading about *Riparia riparia*'s long migration north, I made several visits to the cutbank, especially in June and July.

I missed seeing courtship because I began my regular visits just a little too late in the season and because I didn't know what to look for. What I did see on one occasion were two Bank Swallows, presumably males trying to claim



the same tunnel, grapple in mid-air, tumbling out of flight and landing in a furious tangle of wings near my feet. Fighting about particularly well-built, well-located tunnels is frequent among males and compared to some avian tiffs I have witnessed, appears strenuous and serious. My photos of one aggressive encounter show two swallows locked together, rolling down the cliff. Near the bottom one of them is ejected upside down.

Females other than the male's mate also visit "nicer" burrows, the draw of a well-constructed, well-located home being as strong among Bank Swallows as it is among many humans. The female who co-owns the burrow objects to female visitors by "spreading neck feathers and aggressively displaying. After expelling intruding females, [the] paired female displays bill gaping postures, bristled head feathers, and vibrating wings to [the] paired male until she recognizes him" (Garrison). My guess would be that he has to spend the night on the couch anyway, even though he was blameless in the whole affair, guilty only of a superior sense of location-location-location and fine excavating.

The Bank Swallow breeds across North America, Europe (where it is known as the Sand Martin) and Asia. As a colonial species it has attracted much scientific attention especially in Europe and North America. Studies

have revealed that the higher on the bank the burrow is, the better its location, and the deeper the burrow, the more successful the nest is.

There are problems with colonial nesting beyond the aforementioned destructive effects of weather. For predators all the eggs (and young) are in one large sandy basket, albeit a vertical one. Bank Swallows are not well equipped for extreme family defense, so for an egg- or nestling-hungry predator the only problem is access. Cliff-climbing Gopher Snakes (*Pituophis melanoleucus*) seem to be prime predators in North America. American Kestrels will grab both adults and young. At my colony, a pair of Swainson's Hawk paid close attention to the fledglings as they were first exiting the tunnels. On 24 June I photographed one of the Swainson's Hawk pair perched atop a pole opposite the colony, plucking a swallow, then flying off with it, presumably to feed its mate or chicks. In *The Birds of the Yukon Territory* (Sinclair et al.) I came across mention of perhaps the ultimate predator, a Grizzly digging out an entire colony along a riverbank. Of course, a common cause for nest failure is human disturbance. Sometimes Bank Swallows will unknowingly select a site slated for removal like the mound of marble dust at a Montreal construction site (Champoux and Bombardier). The most bizarre cause of nest failure that I have heard of came from a resident of

Enderby who emailed the local birders to tell them that youths enjoying summer boating and tubing along the Shuswap River were destroying nests by sliding down the steep banks on their asses.

Although I missed seeing details of courtship, I was able to witness behavior I had noticed previously, called by researchers the Mate Pursuit Flight. A common sight in spring near colonies and feeding areas is of three Bank Swallows flying closely together. A male pursues a female in hopes of copulating with her, and her mate flies after the two of them, attempting to guard her from the first male's uninvited attentions. These flights are easy to pick out since the trio appears to fly faster than surrounding swallows. Occasionally more than one outsider pursues the female, who may fly a little slower than usual due to the extra weight of an egg forming within her.

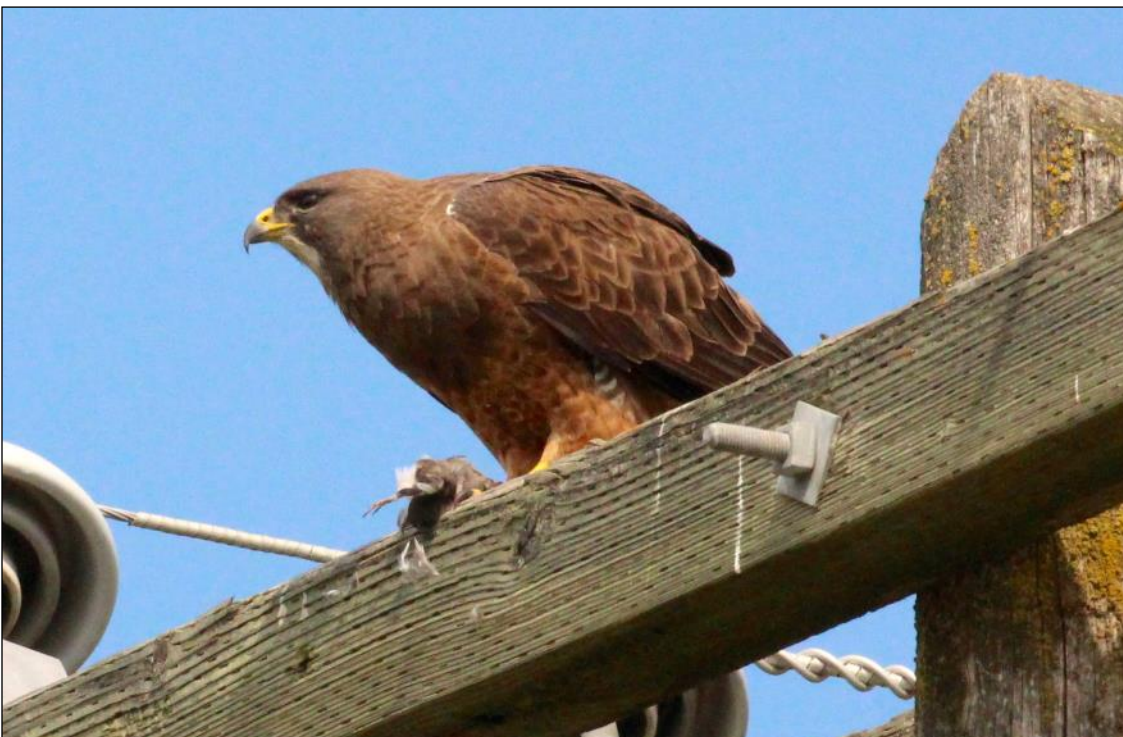
### Eggs and Young

The female lays 4–5 white eggs at the rate of one per day and begins sustained incubation 1–2 days before the clutch is complete. She performs most incubation; her mate incubating when she leaves the nest. The incubation period lasts 13–16 days. The parents remove egg shells from the nest as the young hatch. One of my treasures from this spring's investigations was a fragile half egg shell I found on the ground in front of the colony. I carefully stashed the delicate specimen in a cup holder in my vehicle where it remained as a token of the life cycle of *Riparia riparia*, until my wife placed her coffee cup on it.

Unless you push a mini-cam into the tunnels, the chicks' early development is unseen, and you have to rely upon external clues to guess what's going on in the tunnel. Even determining if adults are

*"On 24 June I photographed one of the Swainson's Hawk pair perched atop a pole opposite the colony, plucking a swallow ...."*

*Photos by Chris Siddle.*





rive with food can be challenging if not at times impossible because their arrival is swift and unannounced, and the food items are often hidden in the birds' tiny bills. However, according to the literature, during the chicks' first days, the parents eat fecal sacs, neat little packages of poop produced by the chicks. Once the chicks are about four days old, the adults begin to carry the fecal sacs from the burrow. This is something to watch for, a guide to determining what's going on in the nests. But again, fecal sac removal can be fairly subtle and easily missed by the observer, not obvious as it is in some species like Brewer's Blackbirds where the gelatinous glistening white sac contrasts with the parents' dark plumage. After nine days, young leave the nest to defecate in the tunnel, but nowhere an observer standing outside can see. By 14 days, chicks run almost to the tunnel entrance and turn around to defecate, but do not eject feces outside the entrance. Parents remove feces less promptly when their young are older but continue removal at irregular intervals until the young depart the tunnel (Roselaar).

Chicks are brooded almost continuously for first few days, brooding declining to about day 7-10, depending on weather. The young are fed by both sexes, with feeding rates varying with weather and with brood size and age. In good weather the observer can expect to record 20-30 visits per hour by parents bringing food to their young.

The literature also records that "by c. 9 days of age nestlings rush to meet parents returning with food, and from c. 15-17 days wait at burrow entrance." (Roselaar) Chicks waiting at the burrow entrance are obvious and enabled me to roughly determine how large my colony really was.

At first the swarm of birds flying outside the colony seemed uncountable. I guessed that about 15 pairs were nesting among the new and old burrows on the cut bank. Later when the parents were coming to the burrows to feed their chicks, I took a photo of the entire colony, printed it on plain 8.5 x 11 paper, and surveyed the colony for burrow use, crossing off the burrows on the paper as birds visited them. I repeated this process three times at twenty minutes a session and arrived at the conclusion that of the 188 burrows, 58 were in use, concentrated in three areas on the cliff, a main colony of 44 active

nests, and two satellite groups of ten and four nests.

At fifteen days of age, chicks wait just inside the tunnel entrances. Two, three, and even four chicks can be seen by the outside observer as they crowd one another. It's not unusual to see Chick 4 crouched atop the backs of Chicks 1-3. At this stage they are feathered and recognizable as Bank Swallows. However, many chicks differ from adults in showing a curious patch of short wavy parallel streaks on the chin, at the base of the lower mandible.

The chicks fledge between 18 and 22 days, returning to their burrows for 4-5 days. Fledglings form creches during the day and roost in burrows, often not their own. They are fed by their parents for up to a week and become independent thereafter. According to *The Handbook of Birds of the Western Palearctic* "fledged young spend much of [the] day loafing, sunning, and dust-bathing; also scratch[ing] at [the] bank and play[ing] with nest material in incipient nest-building behavior. Commonly [they] play with feathers, dropping them in flight and retrieving them. May hover in front of holes, calling and singing."

My visits in July revealed fewer and fewer groups of chicks waiting for food delivery at the mouth of their burrows. Gradually the colony emptied. If the chicks were forming creches, they were doing so somewhere else. On my final visit early in the morning of 16 July, very few Bank Swallows were present. Two chicks peeked out from a burrow near the bottom row of tunnels, individual swallow made brief visits to three other burrows, but whether these were adults still bringing food to unfledged chicks or juveniles just visiting I couldn't tell. There will be Bank Swallows around the Deep Creek valley most of the summer, but they will become harder and harder to find as August becomes September. Gradually they leave to migrate slowly down the coast towards South America and their wintering grounds. They will return next spring and by then I will be ready to accept the challenges of learning more about these amazing birds.

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## AOS Checklist Update

The American Ornithological Society has not just given us back the Canada Jay: eBirders who travel may have found that their life list is now longer. The most likely reason is that the White-collared Seedeater has been split into Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater in western Mexico and Morelet's Seedeater from southern Texas to western Panama. Red-eyed Vireo in North America has also been split from what is now the Chivi Vireo in South America.

In a possible Pyrrhic victory for lumpers, "Mangrove Warbler," with its striking red head, was *not* split from Yellow Warbler. Details can be found at:

[blog.aba.org/2018/06/aos2018.html#comment-3959348701](http://blog.aba.org/2018/06/aos2018.html#comment-3959348701).

