

BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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A young Great Horned Owl photographed by Chris Charlesworth in the Glenrosa neighbourhood of West Kelowna, June 25, 2020.

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) for details, or write to the BCFO address given above under "Publisher."

Annual Membership Dues

General Membership (Canada): \$30

Junior Membership (Canada): \$20

U.S. and International Membership: \$35

Newsmagazine Submissions

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

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

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

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

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Back Page Photo

For those dreaming of post-COVID trips to exotic birding locations, Dave Whiting (Kamloops) has a tip. He writes:

“Photos were taken in the Sarapiquí region of Costa Rica in early March.

“The Tico Rainforest Bed & Breakfast (www.ticorainforest.com) is where I had great views of the Collared Aracari. In my three weeks of bird photography in Costa Rica, the Tico Rainforest B&B provided me the most lifers and the best photography conditions. The bed and breakfast has a second-floor veranda that surrounds the building providing eye level photography of a huge variety of birds. And the host, Victor, is very knowledgeable and helpful with identifications.”

Photo: Perhaps this year's most extraordinary sighting: a Gray-tailed Tattler, spotted in Minette Bay, Kitimat, between June 23 and 26. If confirmed by the Rare Birds Committee, this would be the first record for BC and Canada. Photo by Jeff Dyck. See bcbirdalert.blogspot.com for further information on this and other BC rare sightings.

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President's Message

Marian Porter, Salt Spring Island

The subject of inclusivity has attracted much attention lately in the extraordinary times of the COVID pandemic when many people are feeling isolated and vulnerable. Birdwatching is an activity that can be done independently or in a group, and although I have enjoyed birding around the Gulf Islands the last few months, I find myself eager to join other birders for the camaraderie and shared enjoyment of finding rare birds, or just gathering a good checklist to add to the information of a known or a new area. Birding has changed dramatically in modern times with so much information being shared online with eBird but just imagine not feeling welcome in a group of people in an activity that is very important to you.

So much can be learned from the Internet now, with courses offered, ID apps, vocal recordings, and now entire

conferences available online. When I entered the rather exclusive world of birding, knowledge could primarily be gained by joining an organization and being mentored by experienced individuals and joining organized bird walks. Classes and workshops in British Columbia were relatively uncommon at the time, so I was motivated to travel as a delegate to ornithological conferences where the world of birds really opened up to me. Travelling to different countries as a birdwatcher proved challenging at the time as there were fewer trained guides, and organized tours were not as common as they are today. Finding local birders who would be willing to assist in finding and identifying local birds became an exercise in futility in many cases. One that comes to mind is Cley next the Sea in Norfolk where my B&B hostess could not convince the local birders to accompany me to the nearby Cley marshes. The birders at the RSPB Minsmere reserve in Suffolk were even more unfriendly when a group deliberately blocked my view of a Green Woodpecker in a hide. I could hear the distinctive laughing call but never saw Britain's largest woodpecker.

My birding trip in England finally ended after staying in the lighthouse at the Portland Bird Observatory at Portland Bill as the cyclone known as the Great Storm of 1987 raged throughout the night, blowing in the windows and tangling the mist nets so badly my hopes of helping the wardens to "ring" the local birds were thoroughly dashed.

It seems no matter who you are, someone will try and knock you off your perch. You just have to move on with the perseverance and passion of a dedicated bird watcher. Being told it was completely inappropriate for a young woman to join a nocturnal owl trip never diminished my fascination for these amazing creatures, and I spent several memorable years conducting owl surveys for the provincial government. Insisting I be allowed to enter the La Selva Biological Station when my reservation was lost and ignoring the insulting taunts of "la gringa" by students gave me a fantastic day in the tropical lowland forest of Costa Rica. It

Below: One of some 2,000 Trumpeter Swans congregating at Vanderhoof, Spring 2020. CNK photo.

Welcome New Members

Charlotte Keller - Coquitlam

Ian Burgess - Vancouver

Paula Farrell - Burnaby

Sheila Kee - Port Angeles

Kevin Krebs - Vancouver

Corey Mazurat - Kelowna

Scott Polzen - Vancouver

Paul Preston - Vancouver

Ryan Loveridge - West Vancouver

Jack Carrigan & Carina Helm - Vancouver



was a relief that my only companions were a curious Tayra (similar to a marten) and the wonderful birds around me.

Moving to California was exhilarating with the possibility of new birds and connecting with the birding community through the many chapters of the Audubon Society throughout the state. It was a rewarding experience to join many Christmas Bird Counts, and attend festivals with informative classes and workshops given by some of the foremost experts in North America. However, acceptance was not always automatic and I worked hard to learn the local birds to ensure I was a valued member of the local "flock." A willingness to go to the tougher, more remote locations was helpful as well; as a Canadian I was typically assigned to high-elevation mountain tops, where I was rewarded by finding unusual birds for local Christmas Bird Counts. I was accepted into the prestigious San Francisco Christmas Bird Count by taking the assignment in the town of Colma, founded as a necropolis in 1924 where the landscape is dominated by cemeteries and the dead now outnumber the living by 1,000 to 1. A skeptical area

leader put me through my paces but I had a great time chasing birds through the quiet lawns and surrounding hillsides and I was asked to accept Colma as my own territory at the end of the day. I am still not sure if it was because I found the cemeteries historically interesting rather than intimidating, or if the leader was pleased about my ability to find most of the elusive Varied Thrushes in the conifers, but I unfortunately had to decline his offer since I was moving to southern California. My residence in Malibu made me the only local birder in the Malibu Christmas Bird Count, the easiest acceptance I have ever had for a CBC. I will never forget taking a bow at the San Francisco CBC dinner at the historical Presidio log cabin for finding unusual birds in the bay, a feeling of belonging that just cannot be overestimated.

Birding is learning for the rest of your life. When you feel you know your territory, get out of your comfort zone and travel. Opportunities for expanding the world of birding improve every year. There are several good articles in the recent editions of *Bird Watchers Digest* encouraging birders to

use time now spent at home to improve identification and audio skills. Tom Stephenson gives valuable tips on how to hear better and memorize bird songs. Alvaro Jamarillo gives valuable information on how to use online imagery to learn more effectively and adapt our innate ability to recognize human faces to identify many species of birds. There are many online tools to assist you in becoming a good birder; this will open doors for you around the world. Be generous with your knowledge, and mentor those who are hoping to share your experience and guidance. Almost three billion birds have been lost since 1970, and most of those remaining will not benefit from exclusivity in the birding community.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all of the BCFO members who participated in our first online 2020 Annual General Meeting by navigating Zoom Communications, expertly hosted by Mike McGrenere. I look forward to seeing you in person next year at our Conference and AGM in Smithers.

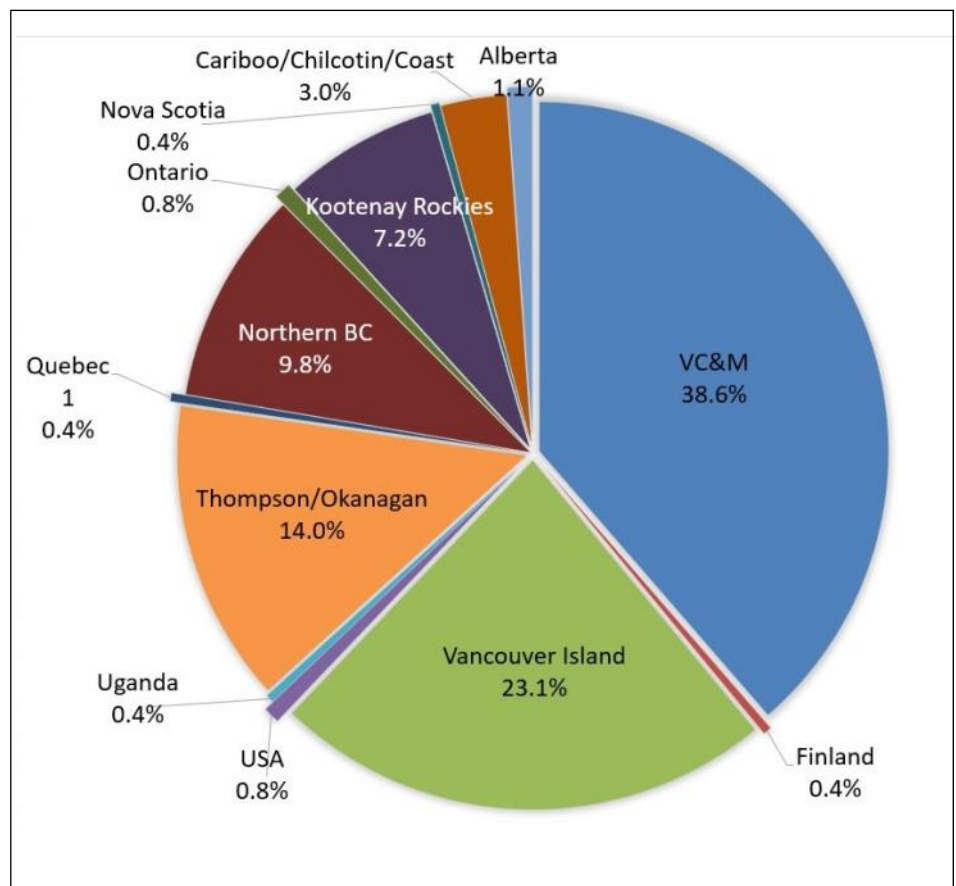
Notes and Notices

Online AGM

Given the COVID situation, the 2020 conference and AGM planned for Smithers has been postponed to 25–27 June, 2021. In lieu, an online and quorate AGM was held on June 25, to cover approval of the financial report and election of directors; under the current circumstances, there were no changes to any of the directors or their positions. A directors' planning meeting will now take place in early September and will be reported in the December edition.

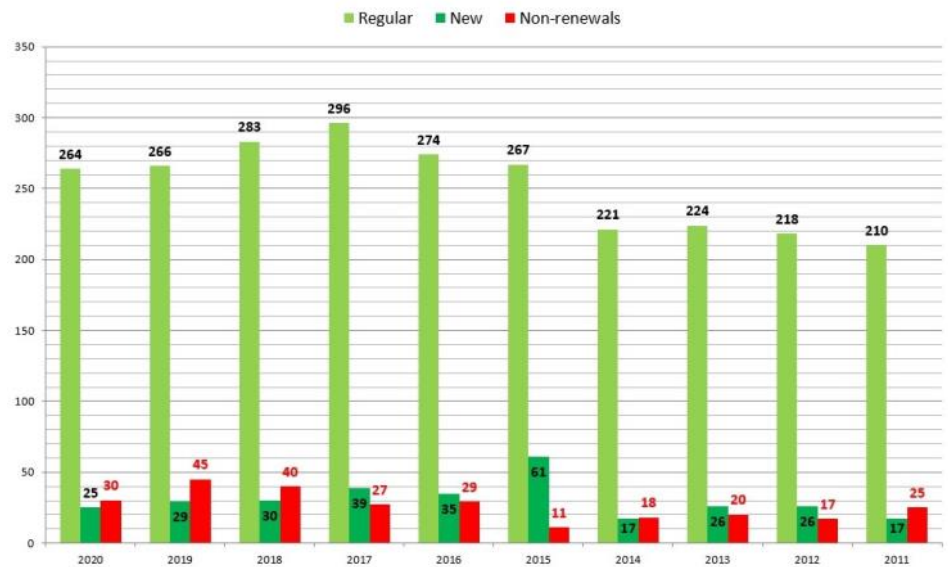
BCFO Membership

Membership Secretary Larry Cowan reports that as of August 13, BCFO membership numbers were as follows with full-year numbers for 2019 in brackets (continued overleaf):



- Regular: 264 (266)
- Honorary: 3 (3)
- Junior Award Winners: 16 (16)
- Institutional: 6 (6)
- Complimentary 3 (4)
- Total: 292 (295)

There are 25 new members so far this year, compared to 29 in the whole of 2019. The regional breakdown and multi-year statistics are given in the accompanying charts.



Below: A Cassin's Finch waiting for its turn at a feeder in the Lower Nicola Valley. Photo by John Gordon.



AOS Checklist Supplement 2020

Lumpers, who for years have cast aspersions at the “Northwestern Crow,” have been vindicated. The American Ornithological Society has declared that not only is it not a separate species, it is not even a subspecies, but merely a geographic trend. Many of us could have told them that.

But splitters, as usual, have even more to crow about. The AOS has followed Clements in splitting the Mexican Duck from Mallard and splitting Japanese White-eye into Warbling White-eye and Swinhoe’s White-eye. Canada didn’t, however, get its first endemic species in the Haida Gwaii Saw-whet Owl – the proposal was not accepted.

For those travelling farther afield, there are more details to be learned and these can be found at:

www.aba.org/2020-aos-supplement.

The Song of the White-throated Sparrow

On July 2 the results of research on the changing song of the White-throated Sparrow were published in *Current Biology*. Ken Otter and his UNBC team of Alexandra McKenna, Stefanie LaZerte and Scott Ramsay would hardly have guessed that within two weeks an incredible 280 news outlets around the world would cover the story. You might think that Ken would have been most proud of getting coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* (London) and other heavyweight newspapers, but in fact he was most delighted and amazed by the fact that it hit the headlines in Botswana. Botswana?!

Members of the Prince George Naturalists Club felt bathed in reflected glory, since Ken and then-PhD candidate Stefanie LaZerte had made presentations on the research, and as the research progressed, members had followed developments closely. For a nicely written piece of popular science from *The Times* of London, see the text to the right. For the *Current Biology* article, see:

Popular birdie song makes sparrows change their tune across Canada

Tom Whipple, Science Editor
Friday July 03 2020, 12.00 AM BST, *The Times*

Sometimes, a song sweeps the nation. One day, everyone is singing the same boring melody, the next it seems like the whole country has changed its tune. Such is the world of sparrows.

Scientists have tracked a new song through the white-throated sparrows of Canada. They have shown how over 20 years it went from being a niche tune, sung only by a few west-coast hipster sparrows, to a mainstream hit. “As far as we know, it’s unprecedented,” Ken Otter, from the University of Northern British Columbia, said.

The work offers insights into how the birds live and think and a window into their “culture”, showing the ways in which they transfer knowledge. The song spread too fast to be learnt by parents passing it on to offspring. It must have been “catchy” — a tune that sparrows heard and wanted to copy.

It is not uncommon for birds to switch tunes as the males compete for a mate. Often this means pockets of regional “dialect” emerge where a variation on a melody gains prominence.

The latest study is the first to document a continent-wide switch, however. It was first spotted near the end of the 1990s when Professor Otter, a biologist, moved to Northern British Columbia and noticed the sparrows had a different song.

“They were singing something atypical from what was the classic white-throated sparrow song across eastern Canada,” he said. “I originally thought they were a peripheral population, a new song with an odd dialect.” However, he went on a drive and found the song spread as far as the Rockies.

He had expected to hear a melody which began “da-da-da” then ended with speedy triplets: “dum-dee-dum, dum-dee-dum”. Instead of triplets though, there were doublets: “dur-dur, dur-dur, dur-dur.”

Over the years, he used online databases of recordings to track the spread of the doublets as they became the dominant song west of the Rockies. In the past decade he also saw them conquer the Atlantic side of Canada. “Originally, we measured the dialect boundaries in 2004 and it stopped about halfway through Alberta,” he said. “By 2014, every bird we recorded in Alberta was singing this western dialect and we started to see it in Ontario, which is 3,000 km from us.”

After tagging the sparrows and tracing their route through the year, he believes that the two separate populations learn it from each other at their migration sites to the south.

Why would one catchy song supplant the previously dominant sparrow call? As with any tune that gets stuck in your head, the secret to this remains enigmatic. In most bird species there is a pressure towards conservatism.

When a male bird sings it is essentially an elaborate call for someone to mate with him. “They use song to say, ‘this is my spot, it’s occupied’. Then it is used by females to say, ‘there’s a male there, I’ll mate with him.’ I equate it to guys screaming ‘get off my lawn’, and females finding that attractive,” Professor Otter said.

Biologists generally assume that the bird that can best imitate the local style is the one most likely to impress females. In these sparrows, Professor Otter suggests, the opposite may be true.

“There must be an underlying bias towards novelty,” he said. There is a corollary of this — it means that today’s fresh ditty is tomorrow’s boring dirge. “About five years ago a new variation appeared. We were like, ‘that’s really interesting’. The next year more birds were singing it. The doublet was the novel song, it spread across Canada. It’s been here 20 years. Maybe it’s passé.”

[www.cell.com/current-biology/
fulltext/S0960-9822\(20\)30771-5](http://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(20)30771-5)

Award for Stephen Partington

Stephen Partington, a member of BCFO's Conservation and Education Committee, was recipient of the 2020 Charles & Kaye Ney Award for Extraordinary Service from Nature Vancouver. The Ney Award is the premier award of the Society for lifetime exemplary service and dedication to the Society.

Among the many reasons for the award were Stephen's involvement as Conservation Committee co-chair in issues ranging from the Squamish River estuary to Chilliwack including Howe Sound, Bowen Island, Whytecliff Park, Lighthouse Park, Cypress Provincial Park, Maplewood Mudflats, Indian Arm, Stanley Park, Crab Park, New Brighton Park, Hastings Park, Jericho Park, Pacific Spirit Regional Park, Fraser River Foreshore, Everett Crowley Park, Burnaby Big Bend, Iona Regional Park, Sturgeon & Roberts Banks, Ladner Marshes, Boundary Bay, Serpentine Fen, Nicomekl River, Mud Bay, Burns Bog, Deas Island, Surrey Bend, Green Timbers, Campbell Valley, Pitt Polder, Widgeon Slough, Burke Mountain, Derby Reach, Elk Mountain, Chilliwack River, Cultus Lake and the Skagit Valley.

Aside from contributions to *Discovery* journal production and the Nature Vancouver Finance Committee, Stephen's community engagement included chairing the Boundary Bay Conservation Committee, appointment to the District of North Vancouver Parks Advisory Committee, representing Nature Vancouver on the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC, sitting as a director on the Friends of Cypress Provincial Park & the Stanley Park Ecological Society, membership in Save Our Parkland Association & the Fraser River Coalition and lending various efforts to Greater Vancouver Regional District Parks, the Fraser River Estuary Management Plan, Parks Plan 90, Land for Nature and the Nature Trust of BC. Stephen is the newly elected president of the BC Naturalists' Foundation.

Stephen is pictured here with Bill Kinkaid, Chair of Awards Nominations Committee.

"I have joined the ranks of my heroes!" Stephen exclaimed.



Thank you Melissa Hafting

On July 16, 2020, BCFO directors Monica Nugent and Larry Cowan, along with George Clulow and Carlo Giovanella, met at Colony Farm to present the plaque photographed below right to Melissa Hafting, Co-ordinator of the BCFO Young Birders Program from 2014 to 2019. We wanted to convey our collective thanks to Mel for her considerable commitment of time and energy to the organization and operation of the program.

On behalf of BCFO, George thanked Mel for her six years of hard work, noting that she not only had a significant impact on the youth in the program, but also on BCFO members. Many members have commented over the years that they are delighted to see a new, diverse generation of birders coming onto the scene, and to read reports of their many field trips. All the bird photographs used in the plaque were taken by Young Birders.

(Melissa was also the subject of an eBird Reviewer Spotlight. See ebird.org/news/ebird-reviewer-spotlight-melissa-hafting.)

Major Bird Protection Victory

“It is not only a sin to kill a mockingbird, it is also a crime. That has been the letter of the law for the past century. But if the Department of the Interior has its way, many mockingbirds and other migratory birds that delight people and support ecosystems throughout the country will be killed without legal consequence.”

This was the opening paragraph of a 31-page ruling by U.S. District Judge Valerie Caproni overturning the Trump administration’s 2017 reinterpretation of the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Her ruling, issued on August 11, negated a Trump policy that had let industry polluters entirely off the hook for killing birds. The Trump interpretation had stated that the Act only applied to intentional killing of birds and not “incidental” killing from industrial activities. That would have meant that industry need take no action to prevent such deaths. More on this can be found at:

www.reuters.com/article/us-environment-birds-trump-idUSKCN2580EK

The text of the certificate reads:

YOUNG BIRDERS PROGRAM OUTSTANDING COMMITMENT AND SERVICE 2014 - 2019

BCFO congratulates and thanks

Melissa Hafting

Her tireless leadership and unstinting work with the province’s
young birders

have left a legacy of memories, passion, and inspiration
in our next generation of birders.



BCFO Short Trips

BCFO short trips are unlikely to take place in 2020, but the following are among those planned for 2021. Readers are encouraged to suggest other trips, either to places you would like to go, or to spots in your area that would be of interest to other members. Pass on ideas to any member of the executive, using addresses given on page 2.

Two Days: Nakusp June 5–6, 2021

Leader: Gary Davidson.

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

Accommodation

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

Itinerary

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

How the Short Trips Work

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

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

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

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

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

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

Browse Loop Road

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

Summit Lake

This is a 1-to-2+ km walk through riparian and marshy habitat, depending on the activity of local beavers and the willingness of participants to get their feet wet. You will be rewarded with a rich variety of warblers, particularly American Redstart, Yellow Warbler and Northern Waterthrush. Veery can be found at this site and although Magnolia Warbler occurs here it cannot always be located.

Ferret Road Loop

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

Below: a Masked Tityra photographed by Dave Whiting during his Costa Rica trip – see also page 3 and the back cover.



Upcoming Meetings & Events

Compiled by Wayne C. Weber, Delta

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

NOTE: Because of the COVID-19 epidemic, most scheduled meetings and events for the next few months have been cancelled, gone virtual, or been postponed until 2021. Events that have not yet been cancelled could still be cancelled at a later date. Please be sure to check event websites before you plan to attend or register for any events. Also, note that you will not be able to attend events in the USA until the international border is reopened.

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

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

2020 Events

Sept. 5: First WESTPORT SEABIRDS pelagic birding trip of the fall from Westport, WA. Westport Seabirds has eight trips scheduled between September 5 and October 3. For information on the trips, schedules, and to reserve a spot, please visit the Westport Seabirds website at westportseabirds.com. Each trip will carry only 12 birders, but there is space on most fall trips.

Sept. 12: First OREGON PELAGIC TOURS bird trip of the fall from Newport, OR. This is the first of four tours scheduled this fall. For further information and to sign up, please visit www.oregonpelagictours.com. Each trip will carry a maximum of 16 birders to help minimize the risk of COVID-19.

Sept. 12–13: PUGET SOUND BIRD FESTIVAL, Edmonds, WA. The festival is online-only this year. For information and to register, check the festival website at 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.

Sept. 24–27: WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION annual meeting, Grass Valley, California. For information and to register, see www.westernbirdbanding.org/meeting_2020_announcement.html.

Sept. 26–29: Third annual WINGS OVER WILLAPA BIRDING FESTIVAL, based in Ilwaco, WA. For information and to register for events, please visit the festival website at wingsoverwillapa.org. (POSTPONED UNTIL 2021)

Sept. 28–Oct. 2: 27TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY. The Wildlife Society's conference has gone virtual this year! For information and to register, please visit the conference website at twconference.org.

Oct. 4–5: BIRDS AND BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL, Ridgefield NWR, Ridgefield, WA (near Vancouver, WA). For information, visit the Friends of Ridgefield website at ridgefieldfriends.org/birdfest-bluegrass. This year's festival will be a virtual one; a full list of activities will be posted at a later date.

Oct. 4–8: RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION annual meeting, Boise, Idaho, USA. For further details, visit the society website at raptorresearchfoundation.org/conferences/upcoming-conferences. (POSTPONED UNTIL 2021)

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

2021 Events

Feb. 11–14: WINTER WINGS BIRDING FESTIVAL, Klamath Falls, OR. For information and to register, please check the festival website at winterwingsfest.org. (Now cancelled)

Feb. 23–27: PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP, 49th ANNUAL MEETING. This will be a virtual conference. For information and to register, visit the conference website at pacificseabirdgroup.org/annual-meeting.

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

Below: A Cedar Waxwing photographed by Joshua Brown at Colony Farm.



Avian Encounters

Flycatching Precision

In the spring John Gordon (Surrey) was surprised to see a new yard bird – a Western Tanager – in his Acacia tree. He intended to take a record shot, but instead photographed a remarkable sequence, as the bird sallied forth towards an insect, closed the distance, and snagged it. John was fascinated by the way the bird tucked in its wings before taking the insect, presumably to give extra precision.

Backyard Fledglings

Kathryn Clouston (Courtenay) was one of many members who had the pleasure this summer of hosting nesting birds and watching their progress. The Pacific-Slope Flycatchers in her backyard were successful, and the youngsters spent most of an afternoon squeaking in a tree until one finally moved out for her to see clearly and photograph (below).



Very Late Nesting

Prince George in June and July saw almost constant rain, so many nesting attempts were postponed. The Barn Swallow below only started building a nest in the Editor's barn in the last week of July. Would it successfully raise a brood before the bugs disappeared? Find out in the December edition.



The Prince George Curlews

The saga of the transmitter-carrying and leg-tagged Curlews continued throughout May, June and July. At first, daily reports on the ncenbird listserv concerned attempts to find where the birds were nesting; Jack Bowling was keeping close tabs on the radio pings, so the location and travels of the birds carrying transmitters was well understood. Martha Griesbach sent in numerous reports on the tagged birds near her farm in the Wright Creek area: agitated birds were giving clear signals when she was in the vicinity of nests or young. Karen Kellett, who farms in the



Egg and hatchling photos by Karen Kellett.

tales of male curlews chasing away anything or anyone that came close to their juvenile charges – and even a tale of a curlew outlying a Peregrine Falcon.

And then, far too soon it seemed, we got to hear that the females were looking to head back south. Jack Bowling reported, “As expected, Shalin is the first tagged female curlew this year to head south. At 11:47 pm on June 23, she started southeast, pinging near Horsefly, BC at 12:38 AM, June 25, 2020. At 3:22 AM, June 25, 2020 she pinged just northwest of Hedley, BC until her last ping was northwest of Brewster, WA at 5:00 AM.” Shalin was quickly followed by Martha, who on 25 June was flying over the Oregon-

California border on her way into California.

The male curlews were mostly still around, though not all the males felt the need to protect the youngsters, and Konrad disappeared south on 27 June.

Following the departures south, most reports were of the youngsters and their remaining male guardians. The juveniles can run and feed themselves almost as soon as they hatch, but it takes four to five weeks for them to gain a full set of feathers, allowing them to fly. Some males stay around to the end, taking their protective duties very seriously. It is not known if they are needed to guide the youngsters on their first migration south. Perhaps another study, with another batch of transmitters, will give the answer.

Non-Avian Encounter

One of the great things about birding is that plenty of other things can be seen while looking for birds. The creature shown below might not be the rare shorebird that the Editor was hoping to find, but he really didn't mind. The Lynx was spotted on the path to the Shelley lagoons (high water levels meant no shorebirds) near Prince George, on June 31. Clive Keen photo.

second location at Stoner, also kept an eye on where the birds were nesting and sent in these egg and hatchling photographs.

At first, all seemed to be going well with the 2020 breeding cycle, but then Prince George suffered through the longest wet spell that many local residents had ever experienced. Reports came in of abandoned nests and eggs. Jack Bowling concluded that the early nests did well, but any eggs laid toward the end of May or early June mostly failed, likely due to weather-induced food failure.

The news was certainly not all bad, though. On 23 June, for instance, Martha Griesbach reported seeing nine chicks together, with some much larger than the others, indicating that some late nests were successful. Cathy Antoniazzi also saw four chicks, one much larger than the others, supervised by an adult male, crossing the road. And there were some great



A Reported Northern Wheatear Sighting in the Tumbler Ridge Mountains

Charles Helm, Tumbler Ridge

The *Breeding Bird Atlas of British Columbia* lists 320 breeding species in our province. Knowing that such lists are unlikely to be the final word on the subject, I ask myself: what might putative future additions look like? Knowing how BC birders are concentrated in the south, and how, even when they venture north, few of them make it up above tree-line, I know that northern BC's alpine realms are significantly under-birded. I would therefore put my money on a species which has not yet been spotted by a human in BC, but which is known to breed in the Arctic, and which might just find the rolling expanses of BC's high-altitude northern tundra to its liking in terms of finding a mate and building a nest. After all, the summer range of the Rock Ptarmigan in the Rockies has recently been shown to extend as far south as Tumbler Ridge, contrary to previous knowledge. I would therefore go for a species like, well, the Northern Wheatear.

If one goes to Kluane National Park or Tombstone Territorial Park and other locations on the Dempster Highway in the Yukon, the Northern Wheatear is listed as a target breeding species for southern birders. Consulting the BC literature is interesting. In Campbell et al's *Birds of British Columbia* it falls within the "Casual, Accidental, Extirpated and Extinct Species" department, where one confirmed sighting is mentioned (Patricia Bay, Vancouver Island, 1970), along with three unpublished sightings, two of them from the Haines Highway in the far northwest. Plus, there was a published 1975 July record from the Spatsizi Plateau, but this was considered to be "without adequate documentation."

There is also a goldmine of information from 2015 by Rick Toochin and Don Cecile, at ibis.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/efauna/documents/Northern_Wheatear-RT-DC.pdf. This states that "there are only a handful of Northern Wheatear records" from BC. Five records are listed, all from the fall migration period: four from the West

Coast, and one from the Haines Pass region. Regarding the latter, the authors conclude that: "The Haines Pass record comes from a very poorly covered region in the Province and yet it has appropriate breeding habitat in abundance.... This species breeds very close to this area in the Yukon at Kluane National Park.... Future expeditions by keen observers are encouraged especially to look for evidence of breeding as this would furnish a new breeding species for British Columbia."

However, this is a story not just about an interesting bird species, but about an interesting birder. Dr Nigel Mathews has spent most of his adult life interspersing his medical career



Northern Wheatear. CCO photo.

with forays into diverse corners of our planet in search of birds. Southern African birding books contain that remarkable bird, the Shoebill, as a result of a Mathews' sighting in the Okavango Swamps, published in *Ostrich* in 1979. His lifelong ambition is to see all 64 heron species, and a long sojourn in the Amazon rainforest enabled him to research the elusive and intriguingly named Zigzag Heron. Pursuit of interesting birds and following a medical career naturally found an area of overlap with multiple stints as a ship's doctor on voyages to Antarctica. A photograph from Namibia of a Cape Eagle Owl established beyond doubt that more than one race of the species in-

habited that dry land. And the list could go on. But the connection to the Northern Wheatear is that Nigel grew up in Kenya, where he became familiar with migrating wheatears in abundance. (In those days, the species was known rather Eurocentrically simply as "The" Wheatear.)

Over the past 27 years Nigel has worked in Tumbler Ridge as a locum tenens physician on a fairly regular basis, usually timing these periods to coincide with the best birding seasons. And so he became familiar with Mount Spieker, the flat-topped massif that dominates the view to the west from town. In fact, the other-worldly summit plateau of Spieker became arguably his favourite place on Earth. In particular he gravitated to a feature known to locals as "The Playpen," where a small meadow is surrounded on all sides by vertical rock surfaces a metre or two high, and where it is therefore claimed that toddlers can be deposited without any chance of them escaping. In fact, it is rumoured that Mt Spieker was the main factor that inspired Nigel's recent decision to accept a one-year medical post in Tumbler Ridge.

Other than birds, and his wife, Shelley, Nigel's main love in life is reading the *Guardian Weekly*. It came as no surprise a few weeks ago that when I presented him with four back issues of this newspaper, he hiked up Mt Spieker one sunny afternoon, climbed into The Playpen, and lay down to read all four in succession. No surprise either that when an old Cape Town medical school colleague came to town for a visit, Nigel insisted that he and Shelley take their guest to see The Playpen and the mountain. But what was indeed surprising was that upon reaching the Playpen on August 2nd, 2020, Nigel out of the blue was seen to startle, and to loudly exclaim: "Wheatear!"

Toochin and Cecile also provide a helpful comment: "In the context of British Columbia, there are no other similar looking species that should cause any problems in identification." When I take a look in Sibley, I have to agree that this handsome bird is at the

other end of the spectrum compared with empids, immature gulls and fall warblers. This would be especially true if the bird were a male in breeding plumage, and that is what Nigel says he saw on the krummholz right in front of him, before it descended to the tundra floor: characteristic tail pattern, wing pattern, facial mask, colour on the breast, erect posture... all of it.

Unfortunately, subsequent visits armed with cameras failed to relocate the bird. Nigel has promised that he will send in his observations to the BC Bird Records Committee. This generally esteemed (but sometimes vilified) body has the unenviable task of assessing putative records that have been submitted to it, their goal never being to satisfy the whim or ego of the observer, but rather to meticulously follow criteria that have been established, for the greater good of birding and science in the province. I know that the gold

standard is a photograph of reasonable quality, and clearly that will be lacking in this case. Whatever the committee's decision, it will be accepted with grace and understanding.

Then again, what else could it possibly have been? Come to think of it, if I were a Northern Wheatear, and I had to choose a suitable patch of tundra turf in which to spend my northern summer, I wouldn't choose a mountain with steep sides, where my preferred terrain would be tightly controlled by altitude. No, I would choose a large, flat-topped mountain just above tree-line, where if I ignored the distant views it would seem that I was in the Arctic. After all, we don't find Baird's Sandpipers in fall migration on high mountain slopes; we find them on flat expanses of alpine in places just like... Mt Spieker.

For the past few decades I have maintained the Checklist of Tumbler Ridge Birds. Unencumbered by the

kind of rigorous criteria that the Bird Records Committee is bound by, I and my colleagues enjoy more latitude in decision-making. That is why the Whooping Crane is on the list, based on a sighting at the local golf course in the late 80s by a highly competent birder, despite the absence of a photo. Not to have accepted it would essentially have meant not trusting his word. Thus far, 243 species have made it onto this august list, of which 105 have a little asterisk beside their names to indicate the presence of a breeding record. And that is why, when we get around to publishing a sixth edition, the Checklist will include the Northern Wheatear, with an "a" for "accidental" code. And I can dream of the day, when maybe, just maybe, there are many more alpine birders in the northern parts of our province, NOWH gets a coveted asterisk beside it, and the number of breeding birds in BC rises to 321.

Below: A Dusky Grouse shot taken by Sandy Corsi of Tumbler Ridge while hiking in mid-June. It was forwarded by Charles Helm, who noted that the shot is special as it does not just capture Dusky Grouse courtship, but speaks of the habitat and altitude (snow is in the background) of this not-often-seen but spectacular species.



Exploring the Creston Valley

Gaelen Schnare, Nelson

Looking for a unique birding experience in BC? Look no further than the Creston Valley with its reed-filled marshlands, diverse forests, winding rivers, open grasslands, and hidden lakes. Nestled between the Selkirk and Purcell mountain ranges, with over 240 bird species recorded, this valley is a hidden birding jewel of southern interior BC. Some of my most memorable birding experiences have taken place in this pristine natural area.

While I currently reside in Nelson, BC, the Creston area has been like a second hometown to me during my early birding years. On one of my first trips to the Valley at age ten I stopped at Duck Lake and was astounded to see thousands upon thousands of migrating waterfowl, mostly wigeons and pintails, but with many Green-winged Teal, Northern Shovelers, and Mallards among them. Apparently, this is actually quite a common spectacle for the Creston Valley, where large numbers of waterfowl can be reliably seen from early April to the beginning of May.

Somewhat more recently, in May 2019, while I was leading a tour for the Creston Valley Bird Festival, my group found a Great Horned Owl nest containing a fledgling in a coniferous tree near



the road. After observing the fledgling for about ten minutes, we spotted the mother owl sitting in a nearby cottonwood. Both of these birds gave us beautiful, clear views and an experience I would never forget. On that same tour we located a Golden Eagle flying across an agricultural field and a Swainson's Hawk, rare for the area, circling lazily above our heads.

Shortly after the tour finished, I was alerted to the presence of some shorebirds at Duck Lake and my Dad and I immediately drove out to see them. There were far more species than I expected for that time of year, including Black-necked Stilts, Least and Semipal-



lated Sandpipers, and Semipalmated Plovers, all of which, especially the Stilts, are fairly unusual during the spring in interior BC.

The Creston Valley is home to some species found almost nowhere else in BC and many non-resident rarities have been sighted in this area as well. The diverse habitats of this valley offer territory for many unique and endangered species. At Leach Lake there are breeding populations of Black Terns and potential breeding populations of American White Pelicans, both of which have few other nesting sites in BC. Perhaps the most special breeding bird in the Creston Valley is the Forster's Tern. This bird breeds at both Duck and Leach Lakes, but nowhere else in BC. Similarly, Duck and Leach Lakes host one of only two colonies of Western Grebe in British Columbia. Other spe-



Above: Yellow-headed Blackbird. Centre: Black-necked Stilt. Left: Great Horned Owl. All photos on this page and next by Gaelen Schnare.

cialty species that breed in the Creston Valley include Long-billed Curlew, American Bittern, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Sandhill Crane, and possibly, Ovenbird.

Because the Creston area is on a major north-south flyway, the Valley has attracted many provincial rarities including Ferruginous Hawk along Kootenay River Road, Loggerhead Shrike and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Duck Lake, Black-throated Blue Warbler at the Wildlife Centre, Black-billed Cuckoo near Reclamation Road, and Blue Grosbeak, White-headed Woodpecker, Pinyon Jay, Brown Thrasher, and multiple records of White-faced Ibis at other locations throughout the Valley. Many other local rarities include White-rumped Sandpiper, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Winter Wren, and Pomarine Jaeger.

The Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (CVWMA), which includes Duck Lake, Leach Lake, and the Creston Valley Wildlife Center, was formed in 1968 after many attempts to buy the land as a conservation area. After the CVWMA was formed, efforts were focused on creating better habitat for waterfowl. Dikes previously intended for draining the wetlands were used to control water levels and create nesting habitat for waterfowl.

If I have convinced you that a birding trip to the Creston Valley is worthwhile, here are my top five favourite

places.

Number five on my list is Reclamation Road. This road, ending near the US border, winds through miles of farmland interlaced with irrigation ditches and patches of forest. This habitat is home to many grassland birds such as Long-billed Curlew, Western Meadowlark, and Bobolink.

Kootenay River Road is fourth on my list. Located a short distance west of the town of Creston, this is a reliable destination to find raptors, including Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, and the odd rarity such as Ferruginous Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Northern Goshawk, or Short-eared Owl. A bonus is the presence of many shore- and wading-bird species that have been documented on agricultural ponds along the road as well.

Number three must surely be the Creston Valley Wildlife Centre, which is a section of the CVWMA. This area is known for its vast marshlands that are home to many birds including ducks, waders, rails, blackbirds, and flycatchers.

Number two is Leach Lake and Summit Creek which are also part of the CVWMA. This trail is most easily birded by bike, as it winds through several kilometres of coniferous and deciduous forests, marshland, and open water. The large variety of habitats make it excellent territory for multiple species of birds.

Number one, and a larger part of the CVWMA, must be Duck Lake. This remarkably productive lake, with no less than 226 species recorded, is one of my favourite places to bird in all of BC. In the spring and fall, thousands of migrating waterfowl blanket the lake from shore to shore while numerous shorebirds feed on the mudflats.

My most recent experience in the Creston Valley took place this past spring while visiting to look for a reported rare Brewer's Sparrow. While we unfortunately did not see our target bird, we ended up seeing a whole array of other rarities and special species. It was just our luck that on that particular morning, a whole host of migrating birds chose to arrive, especially at Duck Lake. Just as we reached the lake, 16

White-faced Ibis appeared! We were especially shocked to see these birds as they are rarely reported in the province of BC. In addition, we were blessed to see 23 American Avocets, a Forster's Tern, two Franklin's Gulls, and many other special species. It was truly a unique birding experience!

And that is precisely my point: birding trips to the Creston Valley almost always end just like that, with a unique and memorable experience. While a trip to this spectacular valley at any time during the year is very productive, and even extraordinary at times, you cannot go wrong with a trip at any point in May. The Creston Valley Bird Festival takes place over the Mother's Day weekend each year. Offering a wide variety of interesting activities and speakers, this homespun event is like no other nature festival. I hope to see you there!

Top left: Rough-legged Hawk; top right: Swainson's Hawk, bottom left: Red-tailed Hawk; bottom right: Northern Harrier.



The Beach Cleanup Squad

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

On June 29 of this year, while conducting a patrol on Long Beach for early south-bound shorebirds, I spotted a mammal carcass in the distance with a Bald Eagle perched on top and a mob of Common Ravens surrounding it. While such events are not unusual on local beaches, they are not exactly common either and you have to be at the right



The adult Bald Eagle may be king (left), but a raven will still pull the Eagle's tail (above). Bottom: A sea lion's hide is very tough. All photos by Adrian Dorst.



spot at the right time to witness it. Long Beach, if I'm not mistaken, is nine miles in length. That's a lot of area to monitor. With the beach largely devoid of people that morning, and with a bright post-solstice sun rising in the east, I saw this as an opportunity for some photos.

As I approached, the adult flew off, giving the juveniles a chance to eat, for there is a hierarchy at work here that determines who gets to eat first and who gets to eat last. Tracks in the sand showed a wolf had been the first visitor, either during the night or the very early morning. The hide of a sea lion is thick and tough and largely impenetrable by even the eagle's large, hooked bill. Thus, if there are no openings in the hide, the powerful canines of the wolf are essential.

Bald Eagles are next, and the adults feed first. Only when the adults are gone do the younger eagles get a chance at dinner. Common Ravens generally get to eat only when all the eagles have gone. However, being the exceedingly clever birds they are, some individuals will steal from the carcass when the eagle's attention is momentarily diverted. To help in this, a particularly bold raven will pull or attempt to pull the eagle's tail, giving another member of the gang a very brief opportunity at grabbing a morsel. I witnessed tail-pulling several times.

One raven that I recorded on video fed on the carcass at the same time as the eagle, but was extremely attentive

to exactly what the eagle was up to. When the eagle's head was down feeding, the raven's head was down feeding. When the eagle raised its head the raven did so as well. And so forth. But this was the only raven brave enough to do so.

The little Northwestern Crows (yes, I know they have been demoted as a species) will also sometimes join in the feast, but not on this occasion.

With a thin veil of mist softening the features of the background landscape, it was a perfect morning and the scene before me was primordial. It struck me that this was a scenario that must have played out just like this on the West Coast for tens of thousands of years. It also occurred to me that a dead pinniped washing up on a beach provides a very important food source for Bald Eagles during the winter and at other times of low food availability. This would be especially true for juvenile birds. I once witnessed a hungry juvenile eagle take possession of a dead sea lion, and even humans approaching to within ten feet did not cause him to relinquish his prize.

*Top: Juveniles have to wait their turn.
Right: Getting a turn at last.*



Briefing 1

*Summary and comment by M. Church,
Vancouver*

Merry Parrots

Various animals are known to engage in play behaviour. In primates and canids it often has an ulterior purpose (such as cohort bonding or mate testing). Keas (*Nestor notabilis*), however, appear to engage in play simply because they enjoy it! Playful behaviour is induced by a particular vocalization by which one parrot encourages others to play.

Researchers tested the spontaneity of Kea play by recording their play call – described as a “warble” – and playing it back to the unsuspecting birds. They also recorded and tested two other Kea calls (a screech and a whistle) and the call of a passerine bird that occupies the same range as Keas and

an artificial tone. In trials, the researchers observed an individual Kea or a group of Keas for five minutes, then played one or other of the recorded calls for five minutes. They then continued to observe for five minutes after stopping the call. In some cases play behaviour was present before the call and continued after, but typically for only a minute or less. In contrast, play by 60% of the observed birds continued for an average of 4.4 minutes during the play call. The passerine and screech calls elicited minor play response, comparable to play observed in the prior- and post-call periods.

“Play” included mock fighting, flight acrobatics and posturing. Individual Keas tended not to crash a group of birds already playing together but to initiate play with another non-player or to engage in solitary play, such as flight acrobatics or tossing a stick. Juveniles and adults alike engaged in the play in all manner of mixed groups, including mature male/

female pairs. Nonetheless, the observers considered that the play remained innocent of mating intentions. Considering the range of observed play groups and “games,” the observers concluded that Keas play for the sheer fun of it. It is an instance of the behaviour, familiar to humans, that psychologists call “contagious merriment.”

The authors assert that this is the first instance of play purely for pleasure in other than a mammal. But after extensive observations over many years of Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*), your reporter is inclined to doubt that claim.

Reference

Schwing, R., Nelson, X.J., Wein, A. and Parsons, S. 2017. “Positive emotional contagion in a New Zealand parrot,” *Current Biology* 27: R213–R214.

Vaseux Lake eBird IBA Protocol Survey

Matthias 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 developed by Bird Studies Canada (now Birds Canada).

In the early morning hours of June 13, a keen group of birders set out to count breeding birds across the Vaseux Lake Area in the South Okanagan. That morning was unusually wet and gloomy; just one of a series of uncharacteristically wet days this June. While conditions were less than ideal, the rain held off for most of the morning and the count participants would not be deterred.

The goal of an IBA eBird Count is to inventory bird populations during the breeding season within a particular IBA in one morning, essentially providing a snapshot of the birds breeding in that IBA on any given day. The idea is to cover the IBA reasonably well, by dividing birders into small teams and assigning each a designated area for them

to count in. In this way, the protocol is similar to that of a Christmas Bird Count. These counts also provide important data on numbers of rare birds in our Important Bird Areas, like the Yellow-breasted Chat and Lewis's Woodpecker.

The third of its kind in the South Okanagan in as many years, this count was again funded by the BC Field Ornithologists and administered by the IBA Program of BC Nature. There were particular challenges this year with the pandemic, resulting in extra coordination time and communications required. It had also been a goal to involve young birders, including some from the Lower Mainland, with the aid of Birds Canada, but given the situation they were unable to participate.

IBAs are locations designated for the essential habitat they provide for birds and other life, part of a science-based program and global initiative led by BirdLife International. Canada's IBA program has been running since the 1990s and involves a network of caretakers who engage in activities

ranging from habitat restoration, stewardship and monitoring, to outreach/education.

Vaseux Lake Area IBA is the largest of five in the South Okanagan with an area of 29.2 km². It encompasses Vaseux Lake and the marshes to the north as well as the surrounding uplands including McIntyre Bluff, Vaseux Cliffs, Eagle Bluff, the OK Falls benchlands, Shuttleworth Creek Road up to about 1,250 metres in elevation, and the antelope brush flats to the south. With such a range of landscape included in the IBA, the variety of habitats encompassed is very diverse and includes cattail-bulrush marshes, oxbow ponds with riparian water birch woodlands, arid grasslands, ponderosa pine woodlands, rugged cliffs, and Douglas-fir/western larch forests at higher elevations.

The IBA is known to support nationally significant populations of breeding Threatened Lewis's Wood-

Below: Tally-up time. Photo by Krista Kaptein.



pecker and Endangered Western Yellow-breasted Chat, as well as Threatened Western Screech Owls during the winter and Threatened Williamson's Sapsuckers. Other avian species of conservation interest include breeding Flammulated Owls, Peregrine Falcons, Barn Swallows, Common Nighthawks, and occasional overwintering Barn Owls. The area is also home to several important non-avian wildlife species, including Bighorn Sheep, Spotted and Pallid Bats, Great Basin Pocket Mouse, Western Rattlesnake, Western Yellowbellied Racer, the rare Night Snake, and Behr's Hairstreak.

Vaseux Lake is nestled in the heart of the South Okanagan, a region that is seeing increasing development and a hub for tourism, and as such, many conservation issues threaten this important bird habitat. Threats to birds in Vaseux Lake Area IBA include ongoing habitat loss and degradation in the form of logging, fire suppression, agricultural land conversion and residential development. Pesticide use in agricultural areas, increased human activity on and around Vaseux Lake, road collisions, and invasive species including noxious weeds (burdock, yellow-flag iris, purple loosestrife etc), fish (introduced carp and bass), and birds (European Starling) are other factors threatening bird populations in the area.

Fourteen skilled birders divided and conquered the IBA in eight separate areas and logged a combined 47 observation hours and 113 km, predominantly on foot or kayak. We estimate that close to 50% of the total IBA was cov-

ered during the count, and a sizeable portion of the area is inaccessible due to rugged terrain. An impressive 128 species were documented and 4,020 individual birds! This high species total is a testament of the diverse range of habitats contained within the IBA.

Highlights include eleven species at risk, of which six are listed federally, and five others are considered at risk in BC. Federally listed species at risk included four Lewis's Woodpecker (Threatened – SARA and COSEWIC) and twelve Yellow-breasted Chat (Endangered – SARA and COSEWIC), as well as 18 Bank Swallow and 25 Barn Swallow (both Threatened – SARA and COSEWIC), four Common Nighthawk (Special Concern – SARA and COSEWIC), and two Olive-sided Flycatcher (Threatened – SARA, Special Concern – COSEWIC). Provincially listed species detected during the count include sixteen Canyon Wren, two Gray Flycatcher, twelve Great Blue Heron, two Lark Sparrow and thirty White-throated Swift (all Blue-listed in BC). Additional species of interest include Golden Eagle (1), Bewick's Wren (3), Clay-colored Sparrow (1), and Peregrine Falcon (2).

The most abundant species counted were Red-winged Blackbird (298), Cedar Waxwing (252), Canada Goose (241), Violet-green Swallow (210), and Spotted Towhee (169). Other species reported with encouraging numbers include Western Wood-Pewee, American Goldfinch, Willow Flycatcher, Bullock's Oriole, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Not every species known to regularly occur within the IBA dur-

ing the breeding season was detected, as to be expected. Some missed species include American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Chukar, Black-chinned Hummingbird, and Cliff Swallow.

Continuing to conduct bird counts like these is vital as they provide valuable baseline data which is particularly important for ecosystems that are under pressure from increasing urban and agricultural development, such as in the Vaseux Lake Area IBA. Increased presence of birders in more remote areas can also identify and bring attention to less apparent issues like habitat degradation from unsanctioned trail development, ATV use, and off-leash dogs.

Thank you to the BC Field Ornithologists for funding this count which covered fuel and lunch for the participants as well as compensation for time spent on count organization, and to Krista Kaptein, the BC IBA Coordinator submitting the grant application. Thanks also to the participants for their efforts and making this a successful endeavour, Eva Durance, the caretaker for this IBA, and to the landowners and the Nature Trust of BC for granting land access for the count.

*Frank Hovenden birding during the eBird Survey at the Northwest Marshes within the Vaseux Lake Area IBA.
Photo by Krista Kaptein.*



Capturing the Avian Soul of a Community

Virginia Rasch, Kimberley

Never doubt that one bird photographer can make a difference! Here's the story of how one small newspaper in the Southern Interior of British Columbia came to run a full page of colour bird photographs on a regular basis. And the avid readers and generous photographers are all part of the story.

Before he retired four years ago, Stewart Wilson was an elementary school teacher who frequently brought his students to Elizabeth Lake in Confederation Park, a local natural area. He would often take photos of birds and other species—such as turtles, dragonflies and snakes—to use in the classroom. And when he saw a great shot of a group of students enjoying the park, he'd snap that too. But most of his photos were of birds.

Wilson is an active member of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club and a natural teacher at heart. He regularly sent his photos to *The Cranbrook Townsman*, our local newspaper, as well as to *The Weather Network*.

Wilson was not one of those bird photographers with a lens as big as his arm. He had a Panasonic Lumix DMC ZS60, which fit comfortably in his pocket and weighed a mere 310 grams. Nonetheless, he took great photos that were often published.

After he retired, Wilson had more time to aim and shoot so he sent in more photos. That's when the magic happened. Barry Coulter, editor of *The Cranbrook Townsman*, said he then had enough photos to fill an entire colour page. So he moved the photos from the local paper to the regional paper, *Kootenay News Advertiser* (of which he is also the editor).

The Urban Wildlife feature was born—mostly full of bird photos and a few other species like reptiles and mammals.

"The reaction was profound," Coulter said. "Our readers love it. Everyone gets great joy from this feature."

"Photographers came out of the woodwork," said Wilson.

"It became a nicely regarded feature in *Kootenay News Advertiser* with its regional audience," Coulter said.

The Popularity and the Benefits

As Coulter explained, our avian neighbours in the Cranbrook region are diverse, beautiful, colourful and cherished. Fans of the photos have even written to the newspaper's Hugs & Slugs column:

"Hugs: To Stewart Wilson for the lovely photo of the Mountain Bluebird sitting on her egg, featured on the front page of our local newspaper *Kootenay News Advertiser*. Hugs also for all the photographers who continue to bring us beautiful pictures of wildlife ... Thank you!"

Readers can learn to identify local species through the photos. Wilson heard that some people even cut out the photos and stick them on their walls or fridge. And the photo captions often have other natural history facts about the species as well as the locale. Wilson

said the location identifications show readers what our area has to offer and encourages people to get out and enjoy our natural areas.

Our local photographers have an outlet for their photos, including getting some recognition. And their knowledge, talent and acumen are greatly appreciated.

Coulter loves how organic the photo feature is, coming directly from his local readership.

"Rates of submission [of photos] have increased," Coulter said. "There are a lot of birders here."

"The feature shows the great interest the community has in its local community and its birds," he said. "We love our birds in the East Kootenay."

Below: One of many examples.

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IT HAPPENED IN 1913: PAGE A12

A female mountain bluebird sits on her eggs in a nest along Pighin Road, one of many bird boxes in the local area which are maintained and monitored by Rocky Mountain Naturalists. She has laid one a day until the entire clutch, typically consisting of five or six eggs, is complete. Then incubation begins lasting 12 to 14 days. After they have hatched the chicks remain in the nest for about 17 to 21 days. Western bluebirds and tree swallows also make use of bird boxes in the area. See more of our feathered friends on Page A15. Stewart Wilson photo

The West Kootenay Bird Study, 1968–1975

Bill Merilees, Nanaimo

Wedge between the Monashee Mountains on the west and the Selkirk Mountains to the east, the West Kootenay has never been considered a birding hot spot. In fact it was regarded as *terra incognita* – the space you pass through, between the superb birding offered by the Okanagan Valley and the Creston Marshes. It was into this void that the author arrived in Castlegar, in 1968 hired as an instructor at British Columbia's first Regional College, Selkirk. Influenced by our Provincial Museum's Occasional Publication series (i.e. Stanwell-Fletcher's *Natural History of the Driftwood Valley*, Jim Munro's *Birds of the Creston Valley* and Walter Johnstone's *Birds of The East Kootenay*), a community-based citizen science project was proposed. Although this term was unknown then, this proposal was eagerly supported by the college.

The West Kootenay Bird Study (WKBS) began with an information release by the College to the community newspapers of Trail, Nelson and Castlegar. The initial number of responses was small but participation grew steadily. In 1969 the first Christmas Bird Count was held and participation in the BC Nest Record Scheme began. In 1972, the West Kootenay Naturalists Association became formally established with many of its members participating in the bird survey.

The WKBS had two components. The first being the citizen science portion where participants, via questionnaires, were asked to record seasonal data on bird species, migration (arrival and departure dates), winter residents and feeder frequenting species.

When species new to the study area were reported these were carefully evaluated and whenever possible confirmed by a secondary observer, a photograph or a speci-

men. Often the latter was via a species misadventure, such as window strikes or collision with a motor vehicle. The latter casualties were most often owls. Up to 1975 this study added thirty-three new species to the West Kootenay bird fauna. Unattributed records are primarily by the author.

New Species Added

Cinnamon Teal

Many transient records April 21 through May. Breeding not recorded though observations of lone males up to June 18 indicate this possibility.

Eurasian Wigeon

Two records, October 26 & 27, 1971, at Nelson.

White-tailed Ptarmigan

Five high-country records: Kokanee Glacier Park & Mulvey Meadows, within Valhalla Provincial Park, where two females with young, $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ grown, were encountered August 9, 1972.

Wild Turkey

The first "wild" Wild Turkeys observed in the West Kootenay occurred in 1967, reported by Peter Berukoff. These observations originated from releases made by the Washington State Department of Game, ten miles south of Kettle Falls, in 1962. Since this time Wild Turkeys have become established in the West Kootenay and have continued their spread northward, at least to Nakusp. In 2019 Castlegar had a designated turkey crossing on its main north south thoroughfare and one of the turkey's favoured roosting areas was on the author's former residential property on Chickadee Lane!

Band-tailed Pigeon

One record: July 10, 1972. Nelson.

White-throated Swift

First seen April 18, 1969 over Castlegar and on May 4, birds were seen inspecting the Rock cliffs above Robson. Seen annually, but sporadically in small numbers thereafter. Breeding suspected.

Anna's Hummingbird

The first and only record for this species was a photograph published in the *Nelson Daily News*, January 11, 1975.



This bird was at a feeder operated by Marjorie Benson and photographed by H.M. Buchna.

Semipalmated Plover

First observed by David Stirling at Kokanee Creek Provincial Park, September, 13, 1968. Two additional records at this location, August 16 & 19, 1973.

Upland Sandpiper

One record: Castlegar, Sept. 15, 1971.

Long-billed Curlew

Two records: April 21, 1972 and April 21, 1975.

Ruddy Turnstone

One record: September 3, 1973, Kokanee Creek Park.

Western Sandpiper

Six records, all at Kokanee Creek Provincial Park, between July 7 and August 29.

Glaucous-winged Gull

One record: February 9, 1972, Nelson waterfront.

Black Tern

One Record: Champion Creek Marsh, by Mel Deanna June 9, 1975.

Double-crested Cormorant

One record, by Conservation Officer Ted Rutherglen at Long Beach, near Balfour, mid-1960s.

American White Pelican

One record: September 14, 1975, by Mel DeAnna on Lower Arrow Lake.

Rough-legged Hawk

Four records: April 12, 1969, April 26, 1970, July 31, 1971 and October 13, 1968.

Western Screech Owl

One record: summer 1971, two birds seen at Six Mile, east of Nelson by Margaret Barwis. Note: there is a specimen in the Royal BC Museum, taken at Nelson, November 3, 1911.

Barred Owl

One found dead on the Salmo Road, July 25, 1971.

Great Gray Owl

Between January and March 30, 1974, a single Great Gray Owl was seen along the West Arm of Kootenay Lake by Conservation Officer Ted Rutherglen, and Margaret and Terry Rourke.

Boreal Owl

One found dead on road, at Kootenay Bay, March 23, 1973.

Peregrine Falcon

One record: an immature bird at Castlegar, September 5, 1969.

Blue Jay

Many records. This species primarily passes north through the West Kootenay in March and early April, and south from late September through October. It wintered in three of the seven years of this study, always in association with bird feeders.

Pygmy Nuthatch

One record: Salmo, November 24, 1969, by George Hartman.

Canyon Wren

Twelve records, the first, an immature individual, by Dosie Crawford, September 18–26, 1968, Kinnaird Canyon. It was recorded thereafter along the north side of the Columbia & Kootenay River Valleys from Deer Park to Pulpit Rock, near Nelson. It may have overwintered in the vicinity of Deer Park, the latest observation being October 19, 1969, by John Walton and the earliest February 19, 1971, by Walter Jacobson.

Northern Mockingbird

Seven records by a number of individuals: four in summer, June 3–12, (one singing at night, June 12, 1969); three winter records, November 24 to December 31.

Brewer's Sparrow

One record: May 21, 1973, at Kaslo by Nancy and John Anderson.

White-throated Sparrow

South Slokan, winter of 1974–75, at the bird feeder of Jim and Hazel Street.

Harris's Sparrow

Thirteen records: nine between January 21 and February 12, and four records between May 2 and 16.

Golden-crowned Sparrow

One record: September 2, 1968, Kokanee Glacier Park.

House Finch

The first record of this species for the West Kootenay appears to be that of Doug Turnbull of Trail "in the summer of 1961." Also, for an unknown period of time previous to 1968, a small resident flock of House Finches had been attending the feeder of Dosie Crawford in Kinnaird. This information predates observation by Maurice Ellison.

Magnolia Warbler

One record: April 29, 1971, at Robson, by Ian and Roberta Hamilton.

Indigo Bunting

A hypothetical record existed at Trail, by Sam Hopkins, in 1966. A second record for this species, that of a singing male, at South Slokan between June 30 to July 26, 1972, was documented by Laurie Street.

Historical Species

The second component was the author's research to uncover historical information back to the time of David Thompson's explorations in 1801. This work uncovered a rich trove of ornithological material, substantiating the presence of 218 species for the West Kootenay Bird Study Area previous to 1968. These findings have been published in our journals.

Historic Contributions to the West Kootenay Bird List:

- John Macoun and Party (1890): 76 species (Lower Arrow Lake to Nelson)
- William Spreadborough (1902) 21 species (Trail – Rossland)
- Dr John E. H. Kelso (1913–1932): 89 species (Edgewood)
- Walter Johnstone & Allan Brooks (1919): 1 species (Edgewood – Gold Range)
- Maurice Ellison (1939 – 1997): 19 species (Trail)
- Herbert H. Currie (1940–1945): 11 species (Nelson)
- Earl Godfrey (1956): 1 species (Balfour)

Historic total: 218 species

West Kootenay Bird Study additions: (1964–1975): 33 species

Grand total: 251 species

Conclusion

When the more recent species additions of the birdwatching community are added, the West Kootenay area of British Columbia should no longer be considered *terra incognita* as far as its bird fauna is concerned. While it may not have vast numbers of individuals, it certainly has a considerable diversity of interesting species.

Regional District Listing – What's Your ARDAT List?

Wayne C. Weber, Delta

Keeping a bird list or lists is something that most of us do, although with varying degrees of enthusiasm and diligence. Some of us only keep a life list; others keep provincial and state life lists, year lists for various areas, and even county lists. For those of us that use eBird, listing has become much easier, because eBird keeps track of all your regional lists and year lists for you. The catch here is that, of course, you need to have entered ALL your bird sightings into eBird if the eBird totals are to be the same as your real totals.

Publication of listing totals was really started by the American Birding Association in 1969 in their publication *Birding*, but was limited to states and provinces or larger areas. A few years later in 1981, Gerry Bennett, a well-known Canadian birder from Ontario, started a newsletter called *Birdfinding in Canada*, which allowed publication of listing totals for local areas as well as Canadian provinces. This newsletter was later continued by Eric Tull and Burke Korol as the *Canadian Listers' Corner*, which morphed into an online E-zine in 2011 operated by Larry Neily, and which still continues today. County listing, which appealed especially to those who did not have the resources to travel the globe, became popular in several US states. However, county listing became much easier after 2009, when eBird introduced the "My eBird" section of their website, which automatically tallied area lists and year lists for you.

One interesting statistic which you could send in to the ABA (and still can, for those of you who are ABA members) is the "Total Tickies" or "TT" list, which is the sum of all your Canadian provincial lists and US state lists. You need to be well-travelled to rate high in this category. In Canada, Gerry Bennett began a similar category – the "ATPAT" list (All Territories and Provinces Added Together).

For BC birders, I would like to introduce a parallel concept: the ARDAT list (All Regional Districts Added Together). Being British Columbia, we have to do things differently, so we

have regional districts instead of counties. However, regional districts have many of the same functions as counties in the US and in some Canadian provinces, serving as the local government for areas outside incorporated municipalities, except that most regional district officials are appointed, not elected. BC has 29 regional districts, a number somewhat similar to the number of counties in states such as Washington and Oregon. (However, eBird uses a somewhat outdated map which recognizes only 28 RDs, and does not recognize the recent split (2008) of the Comox-Strathcona Regional District into the Comox Valley and Strathcona RDs.)

For purposes of this article, I thought it would be interesting to tabulate the ARDAT lists of those birders who use eBird, and who also have an eBird "profile" that is public. A public profile allows other birders to see a set of maps that show how many bird species you have reported in each country of the world, in each state of the US or province of Canada, and in each county (or for BC, each regional district). All of this is public information. However, I hasten to add that many long-time birders, including many of our members, are not included, either because they do not use eBird, or because their eBird profile is not public.

So, for what it's worth, here are the ARDAT lists of some of the top birders in BC. The tabulations I did were on about June 15 of this year, so they are already a bit out of date. I believe I have included everyone whose ARDAT list was over 2,000, but I apologize if I have omitted one or a few people. Also, I recognize that some of these totals are incomplete, because the birders involved have not had time yet to include all their data in eBird. At any rate, it's interesting to compare the totals of various birders, many of whom are BCFO members, and to see where they have and have not birded in BC.

Russell Cannings	4078
Dick Cannings	3827
Wayne Weber	3763
Michael Shepard	3658

Guy Monty	3398
Chris Siddle	3257
Dan Tyson	3226
Chris Charlesworth	3070
Ken Wright	2803
Keith Riding	2774
Ilya Povalyaev	2752
Brian Self	2737
Neil Simpson	2630
John Reynolds	2625
Liron Gertsman	2598
Daniele Mitchell	2478
Ian Cruickshank	2462
Dave Fraser	2414
Max Gotz	2339
Logan Lalonde	2333
Blair Dudek	2325
Christopher Di Corrado	2322
Nathan Hentze	2197
Joachim Bertrands	2127
Syd Cannings	2120
Michael Klotz	2106
Peter Candido	2010

Looking at these totals, it is apparent that most of the birders with high ARDAT scores have two things in common: they have been birding for many years, and they have travelled around the province a lot. However, there are at least two or three birders who have been birding in BC for five years or less, so it is possible to accumulate a significant ARDAT total in only a few years, if you make it one of your objectives.

There must be quite a few birders with ARDAT totals over 2,000 who aren't included above, either because they don't use eBird, or don't have a public profile. If any of these birders would like to be included, I would be quite happy to produce a revised version of the list, if they would send their ARDAT totals to me at con-topus@telus.net. If you do send your ARDAT total to me, please also send your list total for each regional district, so that I can include you in the spreadsheet I prepared prior to writing this article.

Happy regional district listing to all of you – and if you can't be bothered with keeping all these detailed stats, good birding to you anyway!

Birding at Portugal's Tagus Estuary

Larry Joseph, Hazelton

During 2018, I visited Portugal in July and December. My professional obligations were to chair an international working group of experts for the Forest Stewardship Council International (FSC). During both trips, I visited Tagus Estuary at Lisbon to see its birds. It's the largest and most important wetland in Portugal and western Europe. I will introduce biodiversity conservation in it, give an impression of birding in this estuary, disclose my birding costs, and share some highlights of my visits.

Biodiversity Conservation

The Tagus estuary consists of marine and fresh waters, intertidal mudflats, a large flood plain called Lezíria do Tejo, creeks, marshes, salt flats, and agricultural land. Portugal provides legal protection for 14,192 hectares of the estuary which is mainly privately owned land. It's called the Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve, and extends from Alcochete to Vila Franca de Xira on its west bank. Agriculture is an important activity in the reserve with large rice fields. Herds of horses and bulls are raised on the flood plain for bullfights! Yet, a small herd of horses came to me as I stood at a fence. I whispered to them and they loved it!

The Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve

protects many kinds of birds during their migrations between Europe and Africa. Amazingly, Greater Flamingos are a big attraction here. Another well-known species, the Black-tailed Godwit, the national bird of the Netherlands, with Near Threatened conservation status, utilizes the reserve. Sadly, Dutch numbers for it reveal a decline of 75% in recent years so it has gained international attention.

The European Environment Agency (EEA), an agency of the European Union (EU), has established a Natura 2000 ecological network for Europe. It's the largest coordinated network of protected areas on earth. The EEA has written policy instruments that have been translated into national legislation in the EU. Consequently, its Birds Directive establishes Special Protection Areas (SPAs) with suitable territories for birds. As a result, its SPA covers 44,006 ha for the Tagus Estuary.

First Visit to the Tagus Estuary

Through social media, I met Lisbon birders before my trips. On July 1, two expert birders from Lisbon very kindly gave me a free tour through the Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve (Portuguese: Reserva Natural (RN) do Estuário do Tejo). Canada Day 2018 thus became an amazing day for me!

My hosts had a special pass to enter the reserve before the public opening at

7:00 AM. A complete tour requires 80 km of travel. Our visit only covered 42 km. We observed 45 bird species during 5 hours and 20 minutes.

Second Visit to the Tagus Estuary

The combined cost for hotel accommodation, breakfast, and a rental car was only CAD\$131. So, I went birding at my own expense on December 2 and 3.

Immediately after my arrival at the Lisbon International Airport, I drove an expressway to the Lezíria Parque Hotel at Vila Franca de Xira. Then I left the hotel right after check-in to go birding at 3:00 PM. The sun sets early at the start of the Christmas season. Yes, I'll admit it, I'm crazy about birds now!

The Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve was five minutes by car from the hotel. That's why I chose the hotel in the first place.

My plan was to traverse the reserve from its northern boundary to its southern edge. As I drove southwards, I stopped often to observe birds in flight, in the fields, and waterways. I got out of the vehicle and walked to immerse myself in the soundscape. I observed thousands of birds.

Near the seashore, a bird observatory called EVOA was a special attraction to me. It took 20 km of travel to reach EVOA (70 ha.) at the south side of the reserve. I was able to identify 20 species of birds and two other taxa (see the

RN Estuário do Tejo--Sítio das Hortas, Alcochete County, Setúbal, PT, on Mon Dec 3, 2018: The mudflats bird hotspot at Alcochete. Photo by Larry Joseph.



details at eBird: [eBird: ebird.org/checklist/S50374063](https://eBird.org/checklist/S50374063)).

A vehicle stopped near me. The young driver was interested in the birds around me. I called out to him, "When will the gates be locked?" "5 PM," he said, "I have a permit so I will stay later!" I tried to strike up a conversation but he would not talk to me.

The sun would set at 6:15 PM. I thought briefly about the risks of being trapped in the reserve. Then I quickly made a simple plan for one more hour of birding. I would wait at the gate for another vehicle to leave the reserve. So, I decided to take a risk!

The sun was setting. Three vehicles departed the EVOA Bird Observatory. They dashed across the Lezíria, the Portuguese name for flood plains. They appeared to be bumper to bumper! A small dust cloud rose slowly behind the vehicles. They were making a run for the reserve gate before it was locked!

Dust from the Sahara Desert created a soft gold ambiance over the lazzeria. The exotic scene warmed my heart and filled me with wonder as I gazed in silence across the estuary.

Large flocks of White Storks had gathered at pools in rice fields to roost for the night. There were too many to count. Glossy Ibis filled the air and the fields. Like magic, mist appeared and hung low over the Lezíria.

I began to search for Greenland Goose. They were a rarity that had been seen near EVOA just before my visit. Unfortunately, I could not find them. Instead, I had an unexpected, magical experience!

Murmuration

A flock of thousands of Glossy Ibis, large birds between the size of a crow and a goose, flew over a flooded rice

field near me. I pulled the Mitsubishi SUV to the roadside. I scrambled out of the vehicle for a better look. The profiles of the Ibis in flight revealed sickle-shaped bills and the long legs of a wading bird.

Suddenly, a second flock appeared nearby. The downward-facing crescent shape of their bills told me they were Ibis too. Large raptors flew parallel and close to the flocks. In response to this threat, the two flocks joined together for a murmuration! I stood alone in awe! It was my first experience of this mysterious biophysical phenomena that confuses predators and consequently protects birds.

Third Visit with an Ornithologist

During my third visit to the reserve on December 3, Pedro, a consultant and an ornithologist from Lisbon, would be my guide (150 euros for the day).

My birding highlights were: Greenland Goose, Glossy Ibis, shorebirds at the intertidal mudflats, and the EVOA centre. A caretaker opened it for us since I was a visitor from Canada. And he even made us a complimentary cappuccino!

Pedro had done special studies about the impacts of new Lisbon airport proposals on birds in the Tejo Estuary. His experience and research information about the bird life and threats in the estuary were fascinating! We spent so much time talking that our progress was slow. And our checklist was not as big as might be expected but that was fine with me. For me the journey is more important. And birding is not merely a private, extractive, and personal pleasure!

There have been decades of debate about airport proposals for Lisbon and its threat to birds. In January 2020, the

Government of Portugal gave permission to its airport authority to utilize the existing Montijo military airbase to be the new airport for Lisbon.

A huge political and legal controversy has erupted about it. Citizens, NGOs, and the Portuguese Society for the Study of Birds are in high alarm about it. In Portuguese law, if local councils oppose a development, it is not permitted. TAP Air Portugal, Portugal's national airline, has firmly stated it would not move to the new airport. What is more, although the Black-tailed Godwits are hunted in France, citizens in the Netherlands oppose the airports in the Tejo Estuary crying, "Don't kill our national bird!"

Concluding Thoughts

Year-round (all years), 260 species of birds have been observed at the Tagus Estuary Reserve according to eBird. During my visits I observed 82 species of birds. Salmon Arm Bay at Shuswap Lake, BC, has 277 species of birds that have been observed year-round (all years). Both hotspots at Salmon Arm and the Tejo Estuary, therefore, possess about the same bird species richness.

Alcochete, the former hometown (1997–2000) of the Portuguese national hero and footballer Cristiano Ronaldo, is a birding hotspot in the estuary. High tide forces wading birds from the mudflats near Alcochete to rice fields in the Reserve. Flamingoes congregate near the southern shore at high tide. Then more accurate counts can be done. Therefore, birding is best during high tide. My only regret was not going on a boat tour (80 euros for three hours) to see the birds in the estuary too.

Briefing 2

*Summary & Discussion by M. Church,
Vancouver*

To Move or Not to Move – That's a Flexible Choice

It is widely supposed that, as global climates become warmer, fauna and, eventually, flora must shift their ranges in order to maintain population viability. The association between climate

and the geographic range of most species provides first-order evidence to expect this. Direct evidence has been found in altitudinal range shifts of tropical montane birds (see "Escalator to Extinction," March, 2019). But there is also the possibility that birds and animals might instead – at least in the seasonally varying climates outside the tropics – choose to vary the seasonal timing of their activities in order to avail themselves of weather that facilitates the activity.

An obvious example is the nesting

time of temperate-to-polar species, which typically occurs in springtime when weather – in particular, temperature – changes relatively rapidly as the season advances. As the climate becomes warmer, animals might simply shift the breeding cycle to earlier in the season in order to maintain what might, for breeding success, be a critical range of temperatures. Two very important reasons why this might occur are that the availability of critical sources of food might also be thermally constrained, and that ambient temperatures

may significantly affect energy levels of the breeding animals, hence their success in attending to breeding and rearing activities. (Evidence is mounting that animals' tolerance of a range of thermal conditions is narrowest at times of extreme energetic activity, of which breeding is most extreme for both parent and embryo/newborn.)

Examples from California and the American breeding bird survey illustrate the issues. Between 1911 and 1940 breeding bird surveys (known as the "Grinnell Survey") were conducted in the Sierra Nevada (160 species) and the California Coast Range (150 species). The surveys were re-established in 2003–2010 (as the "Grinnell Resurvey Project"). It was established that, in the modern period, birds are, as an average across all studied species, nesting 8–12 days earlier than in the early 20th century. They are thereby gaining a temperature reduction of about 1°C in comparison with what they would experience if they had not shifted their nesting activities. Remarkably, +1°C is the magnitude of the change in thermal climate in these mountains at this time of year over the period between the two surveys.

In the countrywide breeding bird survey, records were examined for 110 species that laid eggs between 15 May and 15 June, 1997–2015 (47,000 nest records). It was found that nests on the cold side of the birds' traditional range had better-than-average breeding success while those on the warm side had less-than-average success. One may infer that a warming climate underlies these results.

How an individual species responds to climate change is increasingly seen to be a complex issue. Birds can successfully move with the climate only if food sources and field conditions that promote security adjust in tandem (see A Knotty Climate, September 2016, for a counterexample). And only if they are genetically predisposed to wander. On the other hand, they can move their activities temporally in place provided the supportive elements of the environment continue to be present. For most birds this amounts to food and protective cover. Most birds feed on materials associated with vegetation (fruit; seeds; nectar; insects), which is also the principal source of cover. And likely to be the most conservative element of the landscape under climate change. So

there is apparent advantage to be gained from temporal adaptation, but probably not forever. Eventually the plant world must respond to climate change too (to the moisture regime as well as to temperature). Then, the propensity of individual species to move to find a viable environment will become critical (see How Vulnerable are Birds to Climate Change, March 2018).

Reference

Socolara, J.B., Epanchin, P.N., Beissinger, C.D. and Tingley, M.W. 2017. "Phenological shifts conserve thermal niches in North American birds and reshape expectations for climate-driven

range shifts." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* (U.S.A.) 114: 12 976-12 981.

Best for Green Herons

Below: A Green Heron making a catch at Brydon Lagoon, Langley City. A former sewage pond, the lagoon is now one of the best places to see Green Herons in the Lower Mainland. During the mid-eighties the lagoon was saved from becoming a subdivision through the hard work and diligence of the Langley Field Naturalists who lobbied council to make the area a nature park. Photo by John Gordon.



Featured Species No. 11

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

Laysan Albatross (*Phoebastria immutabilis*)

Status: Rare visitor in late winter, spring, and fall. No records in April, July, and November.

This distinctive albatross with its white body and dark mantle derives its name from the place where it was first discovered, a small island located some 1,750 km northwest of the big island of Hawaii. The vast majority of the population breeds here in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands, but there is also a small colony off Mexico and another off Japan. Its population is currently estimated at 1.18 million birds, with 457,451 breeding pairs on the three islands of the Midway Atoll in 2016. As with many other seabirds, Laysan Albatrosses disperse across the northern Pacific Ocean after breeding.

This species was not recorded in Canadian waters until September 1968, when one was reported at La Perouse Bank off Vancouver Island's west coast. A second bird was reported on 17 August 1970, 40 km off Ucluelet. However, without a specimen or a photograph, neither of these records would likely have been accepted. The first proven Canadian record occurred on 24 February 1971, when a bird was photographed by R. Wayne Campbell 40 km west of Estevan Point (BC Photo 149). Birds of Pacific Rim National Park (1978) listed only this one record for our waters, and considered it a "very rare winter visitor." Volume 1 of *The Birds of British Columbia* (1990) considered it a "very rare vagrant," and listed 11 records up to the end of 1986 for our west coast region, two of them as specimens. One of these was brought ashore in March 1986 after being caught on a halibut longline 16 km west of Hotsprings Cove. The person in possession of this bird, the late Norma Baillie, donated it to the Royal BC Museum upon learning of its significance.

Since 1986, sightings of the Laysan Albatross have increased. At this writing, there have been at least 50 sightings in offshore waters within the 100

km limit, recorded in all months of the year except for April, July, and November. Out of 65 marine bird and mammal surveys conducted by Strawberry Island Research out of Tofino to a distance of 35 NM offshore, this species was encountered seven times. However, more than one bird was recorded on three of those occasions. On 5 March 1998, two birds were seen, and on 19 October 1999, an astonishing total of nine birds were recorded on a single trip, with eight of the birds congregating near a dragger. Just four months later, on 12 February 2000, five birds were recorded. There is one nearshore occurrence for the west coast. Gale-force winds on 29 October 1973 may have forced a bird into Brooks Bay, north of Brooks Peninsula, the following day.

Not surprisingly, many sightings go unreported. But ask an offshore fisherman if he has seen a white albatross with dark wings, and chances are he will answer in the affirmative. Ucluelet fisherman Mike Tyne reported seeing a Laysan Albatross 25 mi southwest of Ucluelet on 15 August 2008, while he was skipper on the fishing vessel FV Royal Mariner. Likewise, former commercial fisherman Ralph Crombie remembers seeing this bird occasionally during his years of fishing.

There have also been sightings on organized pelagic birding trips. Most sightings involved single birds, but two birds were seen off Tofino on both 11 and 14 September 2013, three birds were seen off Tofino on 16 September 2016, and four birds on 8 May 2017. One of the two birds recorded in September 2013 was a banded bird that was tracked back to the banding location through the band number. It turned out that this bird had been hatched earlier that year on Guadalupe Island, off the coast of Mexico, and banded four months later, on 10 May. Perhaps birds of Mexican origin account for the increase in sightings off our shores. The Guadalupe Island colony became established only in 1986 and now has 400 or more birds.

The following is a breakdown of 33 occurrences in our west coast waters by month: January – 1, February – 2, March – 3, April – 0, May – 2, June – 5, July – 0, August – 4, September – 10, October – 5, November – 0, December – 1. Keep in mind that observers tend to be on the water from May to October, and that few venture out during the

winter months. In contrast to these figures, Kenyon et al. reported that further offshore this species was seen most often during the month of February. Closer to shore, results were somewhat different. Within the 100 km limit, Kenyon listed 29 records in total, with 9 of those in winter, 19 in spring, and 1 in summer.

Threats to this species are many. Laysan Albatrosses were killed in large numbers for their eggs and feathers in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although they have gradually rebounded, they have not reached historical levels of abundance. Between 1978 and 1992, thousands died due to driftnet fishing, until it was banned in 1993. In 1990 alone, 17,500 are believed to have perished due to this practice. Longlining also took its toll, with an estimated 5,000 to 18,000 birds killed annually. That number has since decreased due to preventive measures.

In 2011, the Japanese tsunami also took its toll, killing an estimated 110,000 Laysan Albatross chicks and 2,000 adults on Midway Atoll. Other threats remain. The most serious may be ocean warming and acidification, followed by the ingestion of plastic by chicks. Many young currently die because of this. It also remains to be seen what effect the radioactive water leaking into the Pacific Ocean from the Fukushima meltdowns will have on marine life.

On the positive side, these birds are closely monitored and protected on their Hawaiian breeding grounds, and improved fishing methods have reduced the death toll. Some progress has been made. One of this bird's great strengths is its remarkable longevity. One Laysan Albatross female nesting on Midway is known to be at least 62* years old, and was still producing chicks in February 2013.

Note

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

*This Albatross, named Wisdom, has now reached at least the age of 69. See www.thegardenisland.com/2019/11/28/hawaii-news/wisdom-returns-to-midway/

Bird Photographers' Corner

Make It Sharp!

Clive Keen

Bird photographers have an insatiable thirst for sharpness. A portrait of your granny will forgive, indeed welcome, a bit of softness in the focus, but such softness will destroy what would otherwise be a great bird shot. And yet everything conspires against tack-sharpness in bird photography. Long lenses require higher shutter speeds, but lenses at full aperture aren't always as sharp as we'd like, and high ISOs don't help, nor do camera shake and shallow depth of field. Birds often enough don't even have the decency to keep still. On top of all that, our photos tend to be heavily cropped. We need help.

The various photo-processing programs do, of course, have sharpening functions. Photoshop Elements, for instance, has for years offered us a choice of Unsharp Mask and Adjust Sharpness. These do about the same job, but go about it in different ways, and they add a bit of additional crispness to a shot that is basically OK to start with. But if it is not OK to start with, because of the various factors listed above, such sharpening tools won't really help much. In the past, such photos were simply junked.

But it is now 2020. Camera shake functions have been appearing in the main editing programs, and there are now some dedicated focus-recovery programs which can be assumed to do a

better job still. Following is commentary on one such system.

Topaz Sharpen AI

This currently seems to be the leader in the dedicated sharpening field, and it is affordable, at US\$79.99. It offers three sharpening modes: Sharpen, Stabilize and Focus.

Sharpen Mode

The Sharpen mode does a fairly similar job to the sharpening functions that are included in regular photo-processing programs, adding a little bit of crispness to photographs that are sound to start with. If the image is important or to be enlarged significantly, it can be worth the extra time and effort to use this mode rather than the tools more readily available, as it does a better job of dealing with generated noise. For everyday minor sharpening, though, it is not a game-changer.

Stabilize Mode

The Stabilize mode is a very different matter. It deals with photographs with compromised sharpness due to camera shake or the motion of the subject – very common problems when photographing birds in low light. A few years back I was impressed by the Camera Shake function in Photoshop Elements: sometimes it would rescue badly fuzzed photographs, though at a cost. The photograph would be made sort-of-OK at a glance, but closer inspection showed it to look manipulated and unnatural, sometimes with artifacts appearing all

over the place. Topaz's Stabilize mode does a far better job. Below is a shot of a Galapagos Storm Petrel, heavily cropped. The original (left) was badly fuzzed. The correction using Elements' Camera Shake function (centre) appears sharp, but look closely and you will see it is blotchy and mangled. The Topaz version (right) is all that could be hoped for from a heavily cropped image. View this page at 400% and you'll see what I mean. The fact that the computer takes a long time to process the Stabilize mode image – around four minutes – is reassuring rather than annoying. Topaz would be worth its price for this function alone.

Focus Mode

I've found the Focus mode even more valuable, as I have more photographs suffering from weak focus than from camera shake – vibration reduction is a marvel, even at 600 mm. On a holiday to South Texas I took hundreds of bird photographs that should have been excellent, but for lens softness: I gave away the lens out of disgust after the trip and left most of the photographs to moulder. Processing them through Topaz's Focus mode, though, rescues them, giving them a level of sharpness I consider acceptable.

The focus mode is also very useful when dealing with over-cropped images. On the following page is a shot of a Western Wood-Pewee, taken solely for ID purposes with no expectation of it being worth keeping. It needed so much cropping that sharpness was far beyond



the power of Elements, but Topaz brought the level of sharpness almost to normal. To a large extent this function has transformed my bird photography. If a photograph is taken in sub-optimal conditions, and I've had to heavily crop the image, I'd almost always have had to junk the photograph, as it simply wouldn't be sharp enough to pass muster. The Focus mode, though, will as often as not rescue the shot, making it both printable and publishable. It's a game-changer.

Overview

Topaz Sharpen AI is generally intuitive and easy to use, either as a separate program or as a plug-in. I had some minor gripes, but these were fixed in the July 2020 update. Some useful new features were also added, including a masking function that automatically recognizes birds, allowing just the bird, and not the background, to be sharpened.

All in all, the program is marvelous. If you are serious about bird photography, getting it is a no-brainer.



Above: A very heavily cropped shot of a Western Wood-Pewee after tweaking through Photoshop Elements and sharpening using Topaz' Focus mode.

Briefing 3

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Shrinking Birds

It seems that birds are getting smaller. The most comprehensive evidence comes from measurements of 30,716 birds that crashed into buildings in Chicago during migration (which means that nearly all of them were summer residents from Canada). Other investigations since about the year 2000 in both North America and Europe have identified the same trend in size over nearly all species examined.

The Chicago study is the outcome of systematic collection of fatal crash victims over 39 years (1978–2016) by staff of Chicago's Field Museum. The collection includes 52 species of mostly passerines, mainly sparrows, thrushes and warblers. Similar trends in size were found for nearly all species. Body mass has declined by 2.6%, on average, and tarsal (i.e., leg) length by 2.4%. In contrast, wing length has increased by 1.3%. These seem to be small effects but, as averages over thousands of individuals, the results are highly significant.

What is going on? Many ornithologists agree that the phenomenon is an indication of Bergmann's Rule, which says that birds in warmer climates are generally smaller than similar ones in colder climates. An obvious reason for this is that smaller individuals have a higher surface-area-to-mass ratio, which facilitates cooling. The, at first glance anomalous, increase in wing length, which reduces in-flight wing loading and permits faster flight, is explained as a response to the need to cover distances faster in individual stages of migration flight because the smaller bird can accumulate lesser reserves of energy.

But other environmental pressures complicate the picture. Researchers at Simon Fraser University have found that, while wing length of Western Sandpipers has increased, that of the closely related Semipalmated Sandpiper has decreased over a 40-year period. These changes are evidently unrelated to any change in body size. The researchers suggest that the reasons for the observed effects are related to the increasing numbers of the sandpipers' principal predator, the Peregrine Falcon, after the banning of DDT in 1973. The coastal Western Sandpipers encounter the Peregrines most frequently

during migratory flights, and are adapting to avoid them by improving their ability for long-distance, energy-efficient flight over the sea. In contrast, the more continental Semipalmated Sandpipers may encounter Peregrines during the breeding season and are developing wings that enhance acceleration and flight manoeuvrability as escape strategies.

Other pressures with long-term effects on growth and size might include changing habitat quality, driven by land use, and changing food supply, driven by the decline of certain insects and changing vegetation, including changes resulting from cropping practices. For all the reasons given, changes in bird size and morphology are apt to continue.

Reference

Weeks, B.C. + 6 others. 2020. "Shared morphological consequences of global warming in North American migratory birds." *Ecology Letters* 23: 316-325. doi: 10.1111/ele.13434.

The SFU research is reported in the *Vancouver Sun* for 7 December, 2018, p.A15 (T. Crawford reporting), along with a summary of the Chicago study.

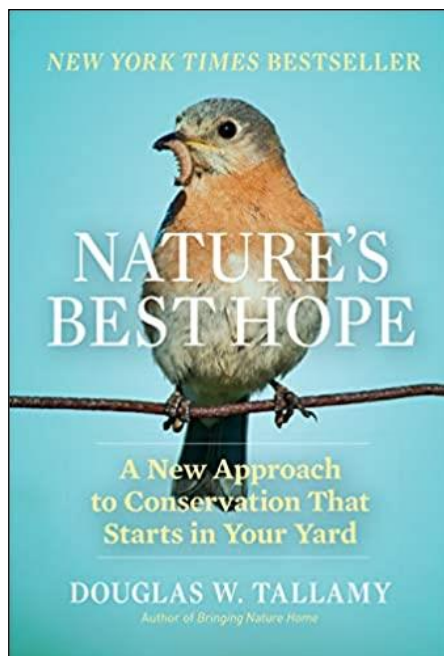
Book Review

Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard by Douglas W. Tallamy, published by Timber Press, Portland, Oregon. \$45 US.

Review by June Ryder

The overarching theme of this book is how we, as individuals, can contribute to creating and improving natural habitats for birds and other native creatures by looking after (i.e. maintaining) ecosystems in our own (and our neighbours') backyards.

The author is a professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, and has, with his graduate students, tested and evaluated many aspects of conservation that are outlined in this book. These include the best explanation I have seen of the reasons why non



-native plants are inferior with regard to providing food for our wild birds. But this is not an "academic" book, nor a textbook: it is easy to read, there are

numerous first-hand accounts of the author's personal travels and learning experiences, and many colour illustrations.

Chapters and topics include shrinking the lawn (and replacing it with bird habitat); why we cannot rely on national parks (at least in the US) to preserve biodiversity (they are too small); why connectivity is important; rebuilding carrying capacity; are alien plants bad? "insects, the little things that run the world;" and "what each of us can do." There are twelve pages of references.

This book should be recommended reading for all of us who are concerned about the status of our native birds (and other wildlife). But it has one drawback – all examples of species (primarily native plants and birds) mentioned in the text refer to the fauna and flora of eastern North America. For this reason, you may prefer to obtain the book from your local library before deciding whether or not to purchase a copy.

Below: A Sooty Grouse hen photographed by Joshua Brown on Cypress Mountain.



Gone Fishing

Chris Siddle, Vernon

Regional Summaries

What appears following this introduction is the first part of a sightings summary I wrote for publication in the North Okanagan Naturalists *Newspack-et*, published five times annually for the club's membership. This sample is from my early spring 2020 round-up. Since 2018 I have been summarizing noteworthy bird sightings in the North Okanagan region as it is defined by eBird. It's a large area, twice the size of the Central Okanagan, and birders are few, but those locals who keep notes and/or use eBird and are willing to share their sightings with me stand a chance of having their more significant sightings mentioned in my "Birds of the North Okanagan" column, though the bulk of the data comes from my almost daily birding. The columns are easily collected since they appear in print and online and can form a permanent record of changes in local birdlife, at least as permanent as things get these days.

The usual stuff gets mentioned in each column:

1. Rare birds
2. Noteworthy aggregations of single species
3. Early arrivals of migrants
4. Late departure of migrants
5. Local increases or declines of species
6. Local range extensions.

As well I usually pick a few species in each column to expand upon, for interest sake.

All of such information is worth keeping. People just don't read bird books anymore, and certainly don't study distribution maps, so any information one can supply them about the birds of their neighbourhood helps, I hope.

If you're a birder with lots of experience, know your birds really well, and like to note down significant records, you might consider writing your own reports for a local birding or nature club.

BIRDS OF THE NORTH OKANAGAN 7 29 FEB – 22 APRIL 2020 BY CHRIS SIDDLE

All sightings, unless otherwise noted, were made by the author. Sightings of unusual or rare birds require documentation in the form of carefully written physical descriptions of the birds or (preferably) photographs. Send your sightings to chris.siddle@gmail.com or enter them in the online program eBird.

The first six days of March were comparatively warm in the lowlands with the deep snow cover gradually melting. Snow fell on the mornings of 7th and 8th March. A minor cold snap 13–16 March re-froze thawing pond edges. The remainder of March and the first three weeks of April were largely without snowfall in the valley bottom, resulting in a dry early spring. Snow melt from the surrounding hills caused flooding of farm fields along Otter Lake Road between Armstrong and Okeefe Ranch. Swan Lake was ice-free on 1 April. Ponds were generally ice-free by 7 April with the exception of Tompson Pond. Generally the early spring was warm and quite dry.

Many thanks to all the North Okanagan Naturalists and friends who contributed their sightings to me personally or through their use of the eBird program. A special thanks goes out to the dedicated volunteers who patrol, maintain, and record results of NONC's bluebird nest boxes.

Ducks, Geese and Swans

A single adult Greater White-fronted Goose was resting with gulls on the sand bars at Okanagan Landing 11 March. Three migrant Greater White-fronts showed at Otter Lake, their usual temporary stopping site, 17 March (Claire Christensen). Canada Geese were noted migrating through or at least into the North Okanagan the week of 7–14 March. Harold Sellers got the earliest high Trumpeter Swan count with 130 at the marsh at the n. end of Otter Lake at 7 March. This count fits well with the 128 I counted there 13 March. These numbers increased when it was discovered that hordes of swans, Canada Geese, Northern Pintails, and American Wigeon were feeding in fields along Grandview Flats Road about a km west of Otter Lake. There on 29 March an estimated 210 Trumpeters and a few Tundras fed and rested, their only dis-

turbance a Golden Eagle that plummeted into the flock but missed its intended prey, a Canada Goose.

The first Wood Duck of the spring was on Deep Creek at O'Keefe's Ranch 18 March (Jack VanDyk).

The earliest Eurasian Wigeon was on Vernon Bay 1 March. After the first few wigeons trickled into the N. Ok. American Wigeons arrived in numbers during the week of 7–13 March. The field n. of Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park where up to 300 American Wigeons grazed was a good site for spotting Eurasians. The highest count was of five drake Eurasian Wigeons 5 April. Single Eurasian drakes were detected through the period, including one at Dure Meadows Road 23 April (Scott Thompson). Northern Pintails followed an earlier pattern of arrival than did the American Wigeons. Sixty-eight at Otter Lake 29 February were their earliest appreciable concentration. On 10 March an estimated 1,100 pintails were crowding the seepage pond at Swan Lake NR Park (John Woods), and on 30 March at least 2,000 were along Grandview Flats Road just west of Otter Lake.

American Green-winged Teals were numerous in the Deep Creek flooded fields north of Otter Lake Cross Road. On 27 March a survey involving counts from photos revealed an estimated 465 American Green-wings in less than one kilometer. A Eurasian Green-winged Teal (considered a subspecies of Green-winged Teal by the American Ornithological Society but considered a separate species called Common Teal by the British authorities and most everyone else) was photographed at Otter Lake 3 April, first for the N. Okanagan.

The first Canvasback of the spring was a lone male on 3 Mar. at the marsh, n. end of Otter Lake. This bird was replaced by a lone female-type on 7 March in the company of 3 drake Ring-necked Ducks. The largest concentration this spring was of a paltry 24 on the Westside km 0.5 Pond 3 April. That count, in turn, pales compared to the 128 counted on the same pond back on 19 March 2015.

A drake Red-breasted Merganser was among Common Mergansers on Swan Lake 5 April. Red-breasts are among a set of rare to uncommon waterfowl visitors to the N. Okanagan that appear annually, mostly during the often huge assemblies of Common Mergansers on Swan Lake in autumn.

Pheasants, Grouse and Allies

Scott Thompson's dog, Chester, flushed four Gray Partridge near Wye Lake high on the Goose Lake Range where Scott had band member permission to hike on 11 April. On 4 April Scott had heard a bird calling in the morning near the south end of Goose Lake. Clearly a remnant population of this introduced game bird hangs on in the North Okanagan.

A Dusky Grouse was seen eating grit on Cathedral Drive at Silver Star Village 13 April, providing one of very few spring records for the North Okanagan.

Grebes

Margaret MacKenzie reports that 30 Western Grebes were back on Head of the Lake Arm of Okanagan Lake when she returned to the lakehouse 11 April.

Hummingbirds

The earliest Calliope Hummingbird report was of a male at Jack VanDyk's home on Pottery Road 16 April. Rufous Hummingbirds became evident generally in the N. Okanagan very soon thereafter.

Rails and Coots

The first American Coots to leave Okanagan Lake and appear at the Otter Lake marsh were three on 7 March. By mid-April between 50–100 could be found at the same site, likely awaiting a decrease in high water levels before breeding. With increased flooding on 23 April, they will have a while to wait.

Cranes

Tom Seifert's sighting of a single Sandhill Crane north of Otter Lake Cross Road 4 April was the first spring record. On 12 April Ted Hillary saw 21 flying west of Enderby.

Plovers

The season's first Killdeer was seen at the East Vernon Rd. horse ranch fields-marsh 2 March (R. Tammi). This was followed by two at the same place next day as well as one along L and A Cross Road. Thereafter the species was uncommon but widespread.

Sandpipers and Allies

A Long-billed Curlew was heard at Otter Lake 7 April. One was seen in a wet field s. of Enderby 12 Apr. (Ted Hillary). Greater Yellowlegs were on schedule, arriving in the first week of April. Single Lesser Yellowlegs began to be reported shortly after mid-April.

Gulls and Terns

First flocks of migrating Ring-billed Gulls noted about 7 March (Larkin Cross Rd.) Two adult Mew Gulls were spotted this spring with one at Okanagan Landing and the other along Larkin Cross Road 21 March. The first of the spring Bonaparte's Gulls (2), passage migrants, appeared on Swan Lake 21 April.

Cormorants

The only Double-crested Cormorant reported made a brief appearance at Otter Lake 10 April (Jacob Hubner).

Hérons, Egrets and Bitterns

After a mostly heronless winter, Great Blue Herons were slow to return to the North Okanagan. The first eBird record was of a single over Swan Lake N.R.P. 22 Feb. A flurry of four adults appeared unexpectedly (for the site) at frozen Cools Pond 3 March representing the first arriving spring birds for the region. 1-4 herons were detected at that site for most of the rest of March. At this time a reliable count of adults at the 24th St. colony is not available.

New World Vultures

The earliest Turkey Vultures were three sharing a snag at Otter Lake 27 March.

Hawks, Eagles and Kites

The spring's first Swainson's Hawk was an intermediate/dark morph bird (as are most Swainson's adults in the N. Okanagan) along Otter Lake Road 10 April.

This bird was slightly earlier than usual. By the third week of April Swainson's Hawks were evident at Silver Star-L and A Road junction; Old Kamloops Road, Baker-Hogg Road, Otter Lake Cross Road, and a few other locations.

Owls

Of note was a Western Screech Owl at an undisclosed location, Lavington-Lumby, sheltering in a shed 26 March (Scott Thompson). Claire Rioux filmed a Great Horned Owl parent with three medium sized downies on their nest on Vernon Hill 22 April.

Swallows

A very early Cliff Swallow appeared with numerous Violet-green Swallows over the beach at Paddlewheel Park 4 April.

Kinglets

A silent Ruby-crowned Kinglet and a Pacific Wren at Polson Park 5 March were probably overwintering birds as this wooded park seems to attract half-hardy winterers perhaps because of a slightly warmer micro-climate. A Pacific Wren was heard in song in the woods upstream from the BX Dog Park 12 March.

The original report continues, but enough has been shown by now to explain how the sighting summaries work.

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Ornithology

Rules

No 5: Fisher's Principle

In all bird species, there are about the same number of males as females. This is true even for species where half the males would seem evolutionarily redundant, such as cowbirds. So why the gender parity? Fisher's Principle explains why gender equity can be expected for sexually reproducing species:

One female to one male will be the norm, as this is the most stable ratio.

The argument goes something like this: if male births are less common, then each male will be in greater demand for reproduction and have greater reproductive success; as a result, parents genetically disposed to produce males will tend to have more-than-average numbers of grandchildren, so the proportion of male births would increase. But when the gender ratio reached 1:1, the reproductive advantage of males would disappear. The same is true if we substitute "female" in the above for "male." 1:1 is thus the natural equilibrium, all things being equal.

A variation on this argument was formulated by British geneticist Robert Fisher in 1930, and it became highly influential, called "the most celebrated argument in evolutionary biology." Charles Darwin had in fact put forward the principle in the first edition of *The Descent of Man*, but it was deleted from the second edition and hadn't gained momentum.

No. 5A: The Rule without a Name

Since we are on the subject of sex equality, it is worth pointing out an ornithological rule that is crying out for a name:

The flashier the male, the less likely he is to look after the kids.

Examples of this rule in the world of birds are legion. Where the male is less flashy than the female, you can be sure he takes parenting very seriously. The most obvious example is the Wilson's Phalarope, where dad does all the par-

enting, and slightly less obvious is the Long-billed Curlew, where males, with their less-flashy bill, stay around to take care of the youngsters while mum speeds her way back south. If the male of a species is no more flashy than the female, on the other hand, the odds are heavy that he is a modern parent, sharing duties equally. This is far from the case if he dresses to dazzle. Male birds of paradise don't even rise to the abysmal level of dead-beat dads.

Why is this very obvious rule, which is more solidly based in fact than, say, Allen's Rule or Gloger's Rule, not given a name? Ken Otter points out that rules in biology tend to come from the population/community ecology side of things, where there is a mathematical principle involved. But perhaps an enterprising graduate student will find a mathematical angle, and become immortalized, like Lack, Foster, Rensch, Schmalhausen, Jarman, and Bell, whose rules will appear in future editions of this magazine.



Briefing 4

Summary by M. Church, Vancouver

Successful Soaring

Some birds are very successful at it. Consider eagles, vultures and buteos, gulls and albatrosses, cranes and storks (see December, 2018, for an account of the latter). How do they manage it?

Experiments with an autonomous glider provide insight. The glider was a model aircraft with a two-metre wingspan and an onboard flight controller that adjusted the ailerons and elevator so that the pitch (longitudinal angle of attack; also called flight attitude) and banking angle (cross-body angle of the craft) could be sensitively controlled. Onboard sensors detected the rate of vertical acceleration (lift provided by the wind) and the changes in vertical wind velocity across the wings (wind shear) that serve to tip the craft. The latter also informs the flight controller in which direction the craft must move to find stronger lift. Values for lift and vertical wind shear were recorded and analyzed in an artificial intelligence program to determine the optimum re-

sponse of the craft to the ambient wind conditions. In this way, the aircraft's performance was incrementally modified so that it improved its rate and total gain of height, hence the distance it could fly in given wind conditions.

The objective is essentially the same for soaring birds. A hunting raptor presumably wants to preserve a rate of passive (i.e., without wing flapping) height gain so that it can remain aloft to spy potential prey with minimum energy expenditure. A bird that migrates by soaring needs to maximize height gain because that also maximizes its gliding distance with minimum energy expenditure. The objective, then, is to lean toward the stronger cross-wing upward directed air current (even though the differential lift will tend to tilt the bird away from that current), while also finding the strongest overall vertical current. For birds, it is likely that the latter is determined by social learning: in a flock each bird observes who is ascending most quickly and moves toward that bird's position. Of course, all this happens in a turbulent and rapidly fluctuating wind field. Banking angle is the most difficult to optimize since the bird is attempting to gauge the momentary difference between two turbulent airstreams that are only a wingspan apart (which may be a reason why soaring birds are relatively large birds). Watching the rapid lateral tilt adjustments of a soaring bird in a high wind is a demonstration of this problem.

The interesting finding from experience with the glider is that gliding performance can be optimized on the basis of experienced interpretation of two signals of the wind field, a task that will be accessible to any soaring bird. The bird also has the advantage of visual clues from observing its companions and, possibly – at low level – from wind effects on vegetation. And even non-soaring birds may need to make similar judgments when flying and landing in the wind.

Reference

Reddy, G., Wong, J., Celani, A., Sejnowski, T.J. and Vergassola, M. 2018. "Glider soaring via reinforcement learning in the field." *Nature* 562: 236-239.



Collared Aracari photographed by Dave Whiting during a pre-COVID Costa Rica trip. See page 3.