BC BIRDING

Newsmagazine of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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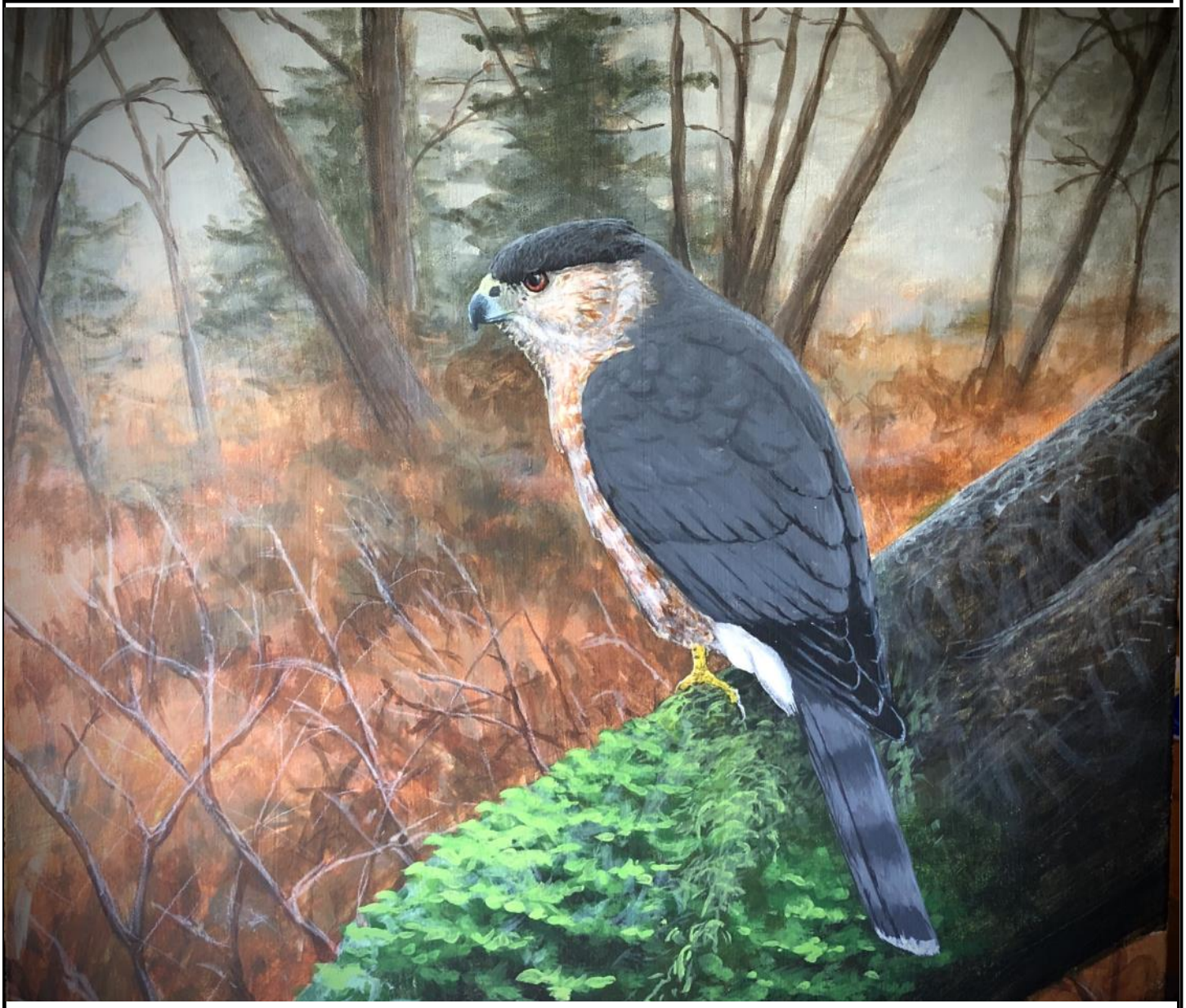

Cooper's Hawk painting by Viktor Vandereyk. See page 18.

Publisher
BC Birding is published four times a year by the British Columbia Field Ornithologists, PO Box 96135, 4590 Fraser St, Vancouver, BC V5V 4G0. A subscription to this quarterly (online version) is a benefit of membership in the society. A hard-copy full-colour version will be posted to members for a $12 annual premium.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Two-day Trips: Paul Foth
Website: Krista Kaptein, Verena Shaw
Zoom Presentation Coordinator: Larry Cowan
Christmas Bird Count Compiler: Verena Shaw
Young Birders Program: TBA

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Conservation and Education Committee: Nathan Hentze, Stephen Partington, Art Martell, Charles Helm, Marian Porter.

Young Birder Awards Committee: Nathan Hentze, Rachel Darvill.

Above: Mountain Bluebird on Beaver Lake Road, Lake Country, (July 2023) by Ted Goshulak (Langley).

Back Cover

A Red-naped Sapsucker preparing the nest. See page 27. Photo by William Murdoch.

Contents

President's Message

Nathan Hentze, Victoria

The torch has been passed. Following a successful Vernon conference, Gary Davidson's term as President came to an end. Gary joined the Board of Directors in 2017, ultimately serving three years as Vice-President and two as President before reaching his six-year term limit. His service and hard-work on behalf of BCFO was monumental, and as testament to his dedication Gary continues to take on roles in the organization. On behalf of BCFO I extend a big thanks and congratulations to Gary on a job well done!

I am honoured to have been elected as President following the Vernon AGM and am committed to serving BCFO and birders in this province to the best of my ability. But it was not just the role of President which changed. Four new directors were elected to the board: Annette Bailey (Secretary), Ian Burgess (Treasurer), Rachel Darvill and Kaitie York (Membership). They replace outgoing board members Larry Cowan, Gary Davidson, Paul Foth and Josh Inman. A huge thank-you to all outgoing directors for their years of service, and to new members for their willingness to participate. I am also very grateful to continuing directors Charles Helm (Vice-President), Krista Kaptein (Website), Clive Keen (*BC Birding* editor), and Mark Phinney for their guidance and knowledge of the BCFO.

Despite having a large slate of new directors, the Board has hit the ground running and is working on the continuation of popular programs such as Zoom presentations and two-day field trips as well as a couple new initiatives. There will be opportunities for member involvement, so check back on the website, Facebook page, and newsmagazine regularly for updates. This is in addition to organizing the 2024 conference in Creston next June.

As I type this message, a Common Nighthawk is swerving around in pursuit of insects, backlit against a smoky, orange-pink sky in Penticton. At 8:30 PM the thermometer is still reading 36° C. There is a heat warning and a smoke warning, and in the distance I can see a large pyrocumulus cloud rising above the hills. These observations dovetail a busy day which started by counting birds in the yard of a prominent BC birder, followed by a lengthy meeting discussing nuances of assessing bird Species at Risk, and ending with listening to Indigenous voices share their stories of resilience and restoration and the lessons we can learn from Yellow-breasted Chats. This day finely illustrated that we find ourselves in a changing and sometimes destructive world, but also that the values of collective, collaboration and adaptation are just as important now as ever. I believe that the BCFO can offer that collective and collaboration for all birders in the province. And we are adapting too. The Zoom presentations and new Facebook page are examples of that, but there is much more to do.

I wanted to end this message by thanking you, dear reader, for being members of this organization and contributing to our collective. For entering field observations, sharing trip reports, submitting rare bird records, reveling in your list totals, helping strangers get on the bird, politely letting the public know that yes, you have seen the eagles, and just generally for your appreciation of birds in whatever way works for you. I am looking forward to the year ahead, and wish you all good birding.

BCFO Business

BCFO Address Change

Note that the BCFO mailing address has changed to

BC Field Ornithologists
PO Box 96135,
4590 Fraser St,
Vancouver, BC
V5V 4G0

Windfall for BCFO Research

In early March, then-president Gary Davidson received an unexpected letter from the Treasurer of the Upland Bird Society – "A society to conserve and improve upland bird populations and habitat in British Columbia." The letter explained that the Society had ceased to be active, and with no ongoing projects, "The decision had been made to wind up the Society and distribute its assets to another organization in a related field. The Society has chosen the British Columbia Field Ornithologists to be the recipient of this donation. The amount is in the region of $10,000."

This seemed at first just a little like those email messages we all get from Nigerian princes, but it was clear that it was entirely genuine. Ensuing conversations with the Society's Treasurer established that the Society had been set up in the late 1990s because of the founders' concern about the declining population of upland birds, and particularly the Blue Grouse population in central BC. They had funded a multi-year research program in the Fraser Valley near Big Bar, and another program in Haida Gwaii, but these have concluded.

Needless to say, the Board was more than happy to accept a cheque – the final amount was $8,700 – to be added to the funds earmarked for research and conservation. In accordance with the Society's request, a statement encouraging research proposals in the field of BC Upland Birds is printed at the bottom of the page.

New BCFO Directors & Officers

The following new directors were elected at the Vernon AGM:

- Annette Bailey, Port Alberni
- Ian Burgess, Vancouver
- Rachel Darvill, Golden
- Kaitlyn York, Maple Ridge

One of the five continuing Directors (Nathan Hentze, Charles Helm, Clive Keen, Mark Phinney, Krista Kaptein) noted that we now have both the newest and youngest BCFO Board for a very long time.

At two meetings immediately following the AGM, the following Officers were appointed:

- *President:* Nathan Hentze
- *Vice-President:* Charles Helm
- *Secretary:* Annette Bailey
- *Treasurer:* Ian Burgess

Upland Birds: Research Proposals Sought

In accordance with the request of the Upland Bird Society, research proposals in the field of BC Upland Birds are particularly encouraged by BCFO. See page 26 for details of the application process.

BCFO Responsibilities

Following the changes of the Board of Directors, responsibilities have changed as follows:

Membership: Annette Bailey will now be responsible for membership communications (emails to members etc), while Kaitlyn York will be membership coordinator (updating membership lists etc).

AGM Planning: Krista Kaptein will be taking a lead role.

Bird Records Committee: the Chair is confirmed as Joachim Bertrands.

Just a Minute

The following are among the notable points from recent Directors meetings:

2024 Conference and AGM
Arrangements are going ahead for the next AGM to be held at Creston on June 7–9 2024, based at the Ramada Inn.

BCFO One-day Birding Trips?
It was agreed to look into expanding BCFO birding trip offerings to include one-day trips, in addition to the two- and three-day trips already being offered. Liability issues and the perspective of local naturalist groups needed to be considered, but it was agreed that members' views should be sought. (See page 21.)

Young Birders Award
In order to allow naturalist clubs etc to recommend young birders for the award, it was a agreed that the current criterion beginning "Be sponsored and nominated by a BCFO member who has direct knowledge of the candidate" should be loosened by deleting the words "sponsored and" and "direct."

Social Media
A Facebook account has been set up, and a YouTube account would be set up to allow Zoom presentations etc to be made easily available to members.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)
BCFO currently has no public stance on EDI, but as a charitable society, it should make its commitment to EDI clear. The President will draft an EDI statement and statement of territorial acknowledgement for consideration at future Director meetings. The possibility of forming an EDI Committee would be discussed at future meetings.

BCFO Directors 1991–2023
The complete list of BCFO Directors since the organization's inception is now available on the BCFO Members' Only page at bcfo.ca/bcfo-members.

BCFO Website

Members will have noted substantial changes to the BCFO website (bcfo.ca). After twelve years running the site, George Clulow passed on responsibility to Krista Kaptein and Verena Shaw. The site now sports an updated and more lively look-and-feel, as well as a number of new and updated features. Additional developments will be coming soon, and it is expected that the site will utilize wordpress.org rather that wordpress.com, as it gives considerably more flexibility.

Notes

Another Major Award for Liron Gertsman

Liron Gerstman (Vancouver) has won the Audubon Society's Photography Awards Grand Prize for his photograph of preening Rock Pigeons. He also picked up an honourable mention in the professional category for his image of a Northern Hawk Owl. You can see them at:

www.audubon.org/news/2023-audubon-photography-awards-winners-and-honorable-mentions

CBC's *As it Happens* on June 21 interviewed Liron. Some extracts:

> *Liron Gertsman usually doesn't bother taking pictures of pigeons. But when he spotted a pair of them preening each other affectionately in White Rock, BC – their iridescent green and purple feathers shimmering in the sunlight – he was moved to take out his camera.*
>
> *"I definitely overlooked pigeons for a while. But that changed when I captured this picture because I just saw them shining in a new light …. When you take a moment to appreciate a bird like that closely, there is so much subtle beauty to be enjoyed."*

Liron is certainly no stranger to the Audubon Awards, having won the professional category in 2022 with his photograph of a White-tailed Ptarmigan; he also gained the 2022 Video award for his Sharp-tailed Grouse submission.

Since gaining his BCFO Young Birder Award in 2018, Liron has received ornithological training from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada, and a biology degree from the University of British Columbia. Among his many other activities he now acts as a guide for Eagle-Eye Tours, and has just returned from leading their Canadian Geographic trip to Newfoundland.

You can find more about him from the Eagle-eye webpage at:

www.eagle-eye.com/guide/liron-gertsman/

AOS Checklist Supplement 2023

The biggest news from this year's AOS checklist supplement was the relumping of Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatchers, resurrecting the Western Flycatcher. The split never did make any sense to many of us – it seemed to be much more a matter of regional variation – so it's good to have that sorted out.

The only other real change affecting the ABA area was the renaming of the Northern Goshawk as American Goshawk, following its split from what is now called the Eurasian Goshawk. This is apparently not another regional variation issue – it turns out that the Eurasian Goshawk is more closely related to a number of other Eurasian species than to the American Goshawk.

The other checklist changes essentially concern birds found in Central and South America. Birders travelling in the neotropics are advised to update their field guides by checking eBird listings.

BC Bird Alerts

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

- BLACK PHOEBE, Pitt Meadows, August 11–15
- BLACK PHOEBE, Colwood, August 11
- BLACK PHOEBE, Delta, August 8–11
- BLACK PHOEBE, Metchosin, Aug 1
- NORTHERN PARULA, Metchosin, July 24
- RED-NECKED STINT Delta, July 13–17
- NAZCA BOOBY, Queen Charlotte Sound, July 10–11
- Two DICKCISSELS, Kispiox, June 29–July 11
- SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS, Tofino, July 3
- INDIGO BUNTING, Coquitlam, June 28–July 13
- SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS, Tofino, July 3
- CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, Cranbrook, June 21–22
- CAVE SWALLOW, Port Alberni, June 9
- SNOWY PLOVER, Delta, June 4

- WHITE-EYED VIREO, Ucluelet, June 3–13
- INDIGO BUNTING, Gang Ranch, June 1
- BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER, Nelson, June 1
- ORCHARD ORIOLE, Edgewood, May 29–30
- BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW, Haida Gwaii, May 28
- FIELD SPARROW, Fairmont Hot Springs, May 27
- INDIGO BUNTING, Gibsons, May 27 –June 6
- RED-FACED CORMORANT, Hecate Strait, May 24
- BLACK-THROATED SPARROW, Kaslo, May 19
- INDIGO BUNTING, Saanich, May 20
- SNOWY PLOVER, Tofino, May 17

See bcbirdalert.blogspot.com

Birdwatching Magazine

Birdwatching magazine will soon cease to be available in printed form. An email from the publisher lauds "transitioning to the very exciting video magazine format on The BeBop Channel Television Network." It doesn't quite say that the print edition will cease, but it is clear enough that that is what is meant. *BC Birding* does not intend to follow suit, though the online version might be technologically enhanced in the near future.

Briefing

Birds Encounter Machine Learning

Michael Church, Vancouver

"Machine learning" is all the rage. Quietly under development for more than 40 years as an adjunct to the development of computers, which established the capacity to tackle problems entailing very large numbers of calculations, it has recently exploded into popular view in terms of "artificial intelligence" and robotics. Artificial intelligence is the capacity for a machine to draw reasonable conclusions about complex questions, usually involving qualitative knowledge. The AI programs are "trained" on very large data sets (often downloaded from the Internet) that carry within them analogues for almost any problem that might be presented to them.

Those who wonder what the birds are up to have noticed. Along with animal behaviour experts studying a wide range of animals, ornithologists have begun to use AI to correlate specific vocalizations of a bird with consistent actions, or reactions on the part of one or more others. This is not new. There are important antecedents, mostly compiled with great labour by observing animal sounds and manually recording the behavioural response of a conspecific or different animal. Classic cases include observations of whale communications and study of widely understood alarm calls uttered by specific species.

It is certain, however, that manual recording and analysis of animal calls – indeed, of birds alone – will not reveal the full complexity of animal language, which regularly is found to be more complex and sophisticated than previously recognized. Some birds are already known to possess sensitivity to signal composition and call order. Southern Pied Babblers, a Robin-sized bird of southern African savannahs, live in cooperative groups headed by a dominant breeding pair. They use a relatively complex set of calls to teach their young the rules of group living and to organize territorial defence and other tasks. Fully penetrating their language will require AI to separate subtle variations of meaning. In Canada, we are, for example, familiar with the varied vocalizations of the Common Raven, an intelligent bird whose calls undoubtedly represent a relatively complex language.

There are difficulties associated with developing an understanding of bird language. While recording their calls is now easy, simultaneously recording their actions is not. This will hamper the capacity of AI to construct correct associations between vocalization and behaviour. One way to simplify this problem is to play back recorded vocalizations to free or captive birds and to concentrate on their response. But there are ethical issues associated with such a practice concerning the extent to which the birds' normal behaviour is inhibited, or changed by persistent broadcast of a misunderstood or inappropriate signal, leading to confusion of the birds' vocabulary and inappropriate responsive behaviour.

There can be no doubt, however, that ML/AI are still in a relatively early stage of their development and advancing rapidly. Already, recording the birds' reactions is perhaps the more difficult problem entailed in deciphering the meaning of bird "language." We may, one day quite soon, be able to conduct a conversation with our favourite bird! More significantly, we may some day be able to eavesdrop on the activities of threatened and endangered species with sufficient understanding of their concerns to be able to construct strategies to increase their chances of survival.

BCFO Conference & AGM 2023 – Vernon

The Okanagan Experience

Gary Davidson, Nakusp

The Okanagan Valley contains some of the most diverse habitat types of any region of our province: from ponderosa pine forest and grasslands at lower elevations up to subalpine meadows at the higher elevations. 133 species of birds were observed in the Vernon area during the conference.

The Field Trips

The most productive trip was just south of Vernon and covered parts of Kalamalka Lakeview Road, High Ridge Road and the Vernon Commonage. This mix of grassland, ponderosa pine, lakes, ponds and riparian shrubbery yielded 88 species. This was the only route to produce three hummingbird species: Rufous, Black-chinned and Calliope. It also yielded five raptor species and seven sparrows.

Closely behind, with 85 species, was the Beaver Lake Road route. This trip had the advantage of traversing a range of elevations. It started in the grasslands and moved up through ponderosa pine forests, mixed woodlands, upper elevation coniferous forests and plateau lakes. Species seen included American Three-toed Woodpecker, Canada Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, White-winged Crossbill and eight members of the flycatcher family.

A trip to the north and west of Vernon visited Swan Lake, O'Keefe's Pond and the Otter Lake area. This route included grasslands, lakes, ponds, and varied woodland habitats. A wide variety of water birds were recorded on this route, including ducks, geese, grebes, loons, herons, and shorebirds. This was the only route to yield all six BC species of swallow.

The Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park route required more walking than the others. Participants were warned that the tour would include at least 4km of walking on park trails. Much of the habitat here is ponderosa pine/grassland. This was the only route to

Participants in the Beaver Lake Road field trip. Photo by Pam Laing.

produce all three vireos and all three nuthatches.

The final trip was to an upper elevation destination on Silver Star Mountain, including the Sovereign Lakes cross-country ski area. A couple of the target species, Spruce Grouse and Boreal Chickadee, were not cooperative on the day, but some other high elevations species were. Hermit Thrush, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Fox Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow were all observed.

Trip Leaders

None of these trips would have been successful without the knowledge of the local leaders. A huge thank-you goes out to Don Cecile, Susan Ghattas, Pam Laing, Gail Loughbridge, Pat McAllister, Margaret MacKenzie, and Marnie Williamson. We could not have done it without you!

The Technical Sessions

Jocie Brooks started us off with a tremendous look back at the life and art of Allan Brooks. Allan was a renowned wildlife artist; his works are featured in several major publications of the time. This includes *Birds of Western Canada*, *Birds of Canada*, *Birds of Washington*, and *Birds of California*. His work has also been featured in *National Geographic*. Allan spent a significant part of his life living in the Vernon area. The Allan Brooks Nature Centre just south of the city was named in his honour. Jocie is Allan's grand-daughter. Her presentation included many personal anecdotes and several extracts from Allan's personal journals. It was presented in an entertaining manner and we all came away feeling like we actually knew Allan Brooks!

Our second presenter was Les Gyug. He has been an integral part of the Okanagan Mountain Provincial Park annual bird blitz. This yearly visit to document the park's wildlife has been carried out since the early 1990s. In 2003, a devastating wildfire burned virtually all the park. Les's presentation looked in depth at the changes that occurred in the wildlife of the park as a result of the fire. Of the 90 species of birds considered to be common in the park, 51 showed no appreciable change following the fire, 28 species increased in number, while 11 showed a significant decrease. Species which apparently benefitted from the change in habitat included cavity nesters such as woodpeckers, House Wrens and bluebirds. Decreases were noted in forest-nesting species such as Golden-crowned Kinglet and Townsend's Warbler.

Following dinner, our keynote speaker was Richard (Dick) Cannings. Dick was born and raised in the Okanagan. He earned a degree in Biology and worked at UBC for 17 years before returning to his "home" in the Okanagan Valley. One of Dick's main areas of interest is owls. The Okanagan Valley has one of the highest species diversity of owls for any small region of North America. His presentation, with abundant photos and personal anecdotes, went through the various species that inhabit the valley.

Thanks

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the time and effort given by two members of the North Okanagan Naturalist Club, (NONC). Chris Siddle established the field trip routes and wrote most of the trip descriptions. He also assisted with finding suitable guides for each route. Marnie Williamson was our main contact with the NONC from the beginning of the planning stage. She helped with trip planning, trip-leader selection, bird checklists and tourist information brochures. She also led two field trips. The BCFO thanks you both, your help was invaluable!

Vernon Conference Kalamalka Trip

Daryl Calder, Cranbrook

Appreciating those Towhees!

Allow me to paraphrase some of the writings of Alice E Ball in *American Land Birds*, copyright 1923, in order to illustrate one of the fascinating experiences which members of Rocky Mountain Naturalists experienced at the 33rd BCFO Conference:

"Before the trees are in leaf, there appears in our woods a lively, trim, and attractive bird who makes himself known in no uncertain manner. So bustling and energetic is he, so cheerful and self-confident, without unpleasant

Spotted Towhee by Bob Whetham.

aggressiveness, that he always attracts attention."

Seven of us set out from the East Kootenay, anxious to engage with BC birders. Four of us set up camp on the west shore of Swan Lake, which provided significant early birding only a few steps from our site.

It was not easy to choose between the field trips; all five were so attractive. On Saturday, we headed to Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park, led by the very capable and proficient Margaret Mackenzie. The landforms, the trees, the views of sky and lake, and the variations were all classic North Okanagan. In all, 54 species were recorded on our four lists.

Within *American Land Birds*, Professor FEL Beal, 1840–1916, who worked for the Biological Survey in the Department of Agriculture at Washington DC, provided some insights. "The work of the survey has been of incalculable value: the examination of birds' stomachs has given indisputable evidence of the relation the different species bear to insect-life and thus to vegetation." Professor Beal was an American pioneer of Economic Ornithology.

"After snow has disappeared in early spring, an investigation of the rustling so often heard among the leaves near a fence or in a thicket will frequently disclose a towhee at work scratching for his dinner after the manner of a hen; and in these places and along the sunny border of woods, old leaves will be found overturned where the bird has been searching for hibernating beetles and larvae. The good which the towhee does in this way can hardly be overestimated, since the death of a single insect at this time, before it has had an opportunity to deposit its egg, is equivalent to the destruction of a host later in the year."

As our group of attentive birders prowled through the Provincial Park that morning, I couldn't help but to recall the Spotted Towhees who visited our feeders in Cordova Bay, on the outskirts of Victoria when I was a wee lad in 1960. At Kalamalka, while we tallied about 20 of the large sparrows, I recalled our families' first camping trip to the Okanagan, over 60 years ago, in the '49 Ford.

Many thanks to all who worked to provide a delightful Conference.

And, it will be great to see everyone in Creston next spring.

Pre-Conference Extension Trip

Okanagan Valley June 7–9, 2023

Marian Porter, Salt Spring Island

Suddenly confronted with the wide-eyed look of astonishment from a downy gray owlet perched before us, we were spectacularly rewarded for our efforts bushwhacking through the lower subalpine forest of Anarchist Mountain on our first day of the BCFO Okanagan Valley extension trip. Two adult Great Gray Owls, parents of the newly fledged owlet, were perched nearby. Several Williamson's Sapsuckers were also located, as well as other species found in the larch-spruce-fir forest such as Mountain Chickadee, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Steller's Jay, Pygmy Nuthatch, Western Tanager and Hairy Woodpecker. A Red-tailed Hawk calling overhead broke the stillness of the forest.

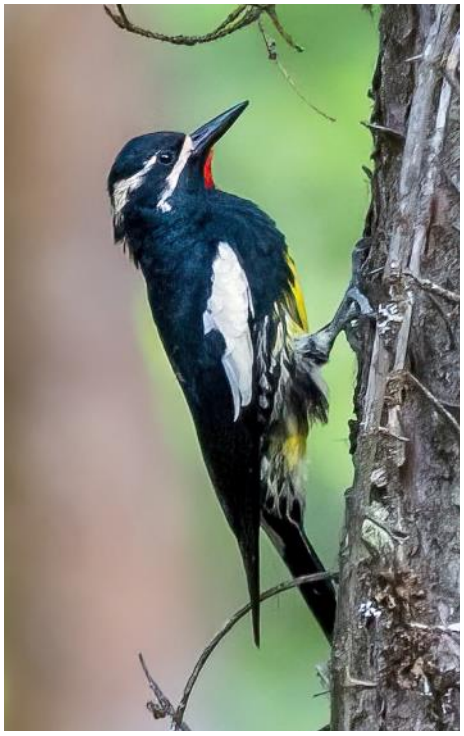
Leaving the adult owls to guard their young, we continued driving through a patchwork of fields and forest yielding four Swainson's Hawks on telephone wires and another perched on an irrigation structure. Vesper Sparrows and several pairs of Mountain Bluebirds were seen on fences, with one male perched near a nest box with a grasshopper in his beak. Say's Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, Lazuli Bunting, Calliope Hummingbird and Red-naped Sapsucker were some of the species easily seen from the road.

The success of the first afternoon of the extension was preceded by the seven participants and their leaders, Gary Davidson and Chris Siddle, leaving Osoyoos to start birding at 6:30 AM at an Osoyoos Lake viewpoint before reaching Spotted Lake about 8 km from town. Named for the rings of magnesium sulphate in the water, only a

Great Gray Owl and owlet by Claude Rioux.

Spotted Sandpiper was near the lake, with all other birds in the surrounding sagebrush hills. Lark Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow and Western Meadowlark were among the birds singing. Taking Highway 3 over Richter Pass we reached the southernmost location of the trip at the Nighthawk–Chopaka border crossing. The surrounding sagebrush flats and farm fields had singing Western Meadowlark, Lark Sparrow and Vesper Sparrow with Black-billed Magpie, Western Kingbird and Northern Rough-winged Swallow among the species seen. The Nighthawk area is one of the few known Canadian locations for the federally endangered Sage Thrasher that eluded us on the trip.

Old Richter Pass Road off Highway 3 connects to Kilpoola Lake Road which ascends into hills with open Douglas Fir -Ponderosa Pine forest habitat containing marshes, ponds and small lakes with aspen copses. Turtle and Reed Ponds were explored, with some waterfowl such as Ruddy Duck, Redhead and American Coot and numerous open forest species. Blue Lake had several broods of Barrow's Goldeneye and a new raptor for the trip, American Kestrel. Kilpoola Lake is a 20 hectare sized alkaline lake surrounded by rolling hills of sagebrush grassland and aspen copses within the 32 square km Chopaka East-Kilpoola Important Bird Area. Waterfowl on the lake included Canada Goose, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Green-winged Teal and Barrow's Goldeneye. Spotted Sandpipers and Killdeer with two young foraged along the shoreline. Chipping, Vesper and Brewer's Sparrows were singing in the nearby sagebrush hills.



Williamson's Sapsucker by Ian Burgess. American Cootlet by Claude Rioux.

Road 22 and the Osoyoos River Oxbows Important Bird Area is a well-known birding destination at the north end of Osoyoos Lake, where dykes provide access to the old oxbows of the river. The road leading to the dykes crosses tall grass pastures where we easily found the target species – Bobolink – along with Savannah Sparrow, Wilson's Snipe, Common Yellowthroat, Willow Flycatcher, Killdeer and American Goldfinch. Three Red-tailed Hawks flew overhead and a pair of Osprey occupied an artificial nest platform. Lush trees and willows along the dyke concealed singing Yellow-breasted Chat, Grey Catbird, Veery and Yellow Warbler. Colourful species such as Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak, Yellow Warbler, Cedar Waxwing and Lazuli Bunting were seen by many. A Sora was briefly glimpsed before melting into the shadows, a male Northern Harrier silently hunted over the marshes and a pair of California Quail appeared from the undergrowth with 15 newly hatched chicks. Two Cliff Swallow colonies occupied the road and foot bridges. This area had the highest bird diversity of the trip at 39 species.

Heading north towards Oliver, Black Sage Road winds through vineyards to Meadowlark Lane and Hayne`s Lease Ecological Reserve with sage shrub and mature Ponderosa Pines with a spectacular rocky cliff backdrop known as "the Throne". At the top sang a Rock Wren silhouetted against the sky.

Our next target was Gray Flycatcher, with the range in Canada restricted to three or four sites in the south Okanagan. Travelling further north along Black Sage Road on Camp McKinney Road our first Gray Flycatcher was found at km 10 about 100 metres into the pine forest, with a unique call and

tail-pumping behaviour. All had good observations as it flycatched repeatedly around its territory. Another Gray Flycatcher was found near the road at km 11.5. Three species of nuthatch, Cassin`s Vireo, Cassin`s Finch, Mountain Chickadee, Chipping Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Townsend`s Solitaire and Red-naped Sapsucker were among the species found in the area.

A wetland area at Road 21 near Oliver known as Deadman`s Lake was visited before heading up Fairview-White Lake Road west of Oliver. Heading north, a small pond on Willowbrook Road produced Barrow`s Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck and Ring-necked Duck. White Lake is located in a valley surrounded by sagebrush grasslands, alkali ponds and rocky outcroppings. A pull-out overlooking high bluffs near White Lake became an extraordinary viewpoint for a male Northern Harrier, a Prairie Falcon flying along the cliff and two Golden Eagles. The first adult eagle flew along the cliffs and landed on a ledge. A second adult eagle flew above the group towards the cliff and landed in a tree at the forest edge before swooping onto a large prey on the ground, possibly a small deer, and then dragging it out of sight into the trees. One of the eagles was later harassed by a White-throated Swift. Mahoney Lake Ecological Reserve was the last stop of an unforgettable day with highlights including nesting Pied-billed Grebes and Killdeer with recently fledged young.

The third day followed the route to Vernon with initial stops in the Vaseux Lake area. McIntyre Road southeast of the Vaseux campground has a large cliff face about 800 metres up the road where White-throated Swifts flew around the ridge tops, with Canyon Wren and Townsend's Solitaire below. American kestrel, Lark Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow and Lazuli Bunting were seen in the grasslands as we gained elevation and reached km 3.5 to farmlands where two Lewis`s Woodpeckers were found near the road. Federally designated by COSEWIC as threatened, much time was spent appreciating their beauty and taking photographs. An Osprey was seen picking up nesting material from one of the fields.

The north end of Vaseux Lake has a boardwalk crossing oxbows with a two-storey observation tower overlooking the lake. Red-eyed Vireo, Veery, Yellow Warbler, Gray Catbird, Eastern Kingbird and Black-headed Grosbeak dominated the soundscape of the boardwalk, with American Redstart and Marsh Wren present as well. A solitary Trumpeter Swan was seen on the lake, with over 200 Canada Geese the most abundant waterfowl.

Hardy Falls Provincial Park in Peachland was a short but very enjoyable trail in riparian habitat along Peachland Creek. Veerys were surprisingly close to the trail and easily seen, as were Black-headed Grosbeaks, Pacific-slope (now Western) Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler and a Red-eyed Vireo with nesting material. Vaux`s Swifts and Northern Rough-winged Swallows were flying above the park. A waterfall rewarded us at the end of the trail with a singing American Dipper on a branch below the falls. A pair of Osprey were on a telephone pole nest platform above the falls and Clark`s Nutcrackers were heard on the hills above the creek.

The last stop before Vernon was Robert Lake Regional Park on the outskirts of Kelowna known to birders for abundant waterfowl. The target species – Avocet and Black-necked Stilt – were detected along with good numbers of Ruddy Duck, Mallard and Eared Grebe. A Wilson's Snipe and Wilson's Phalarope, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal were welcome additions. Everyone enjoyed the brightly coloured American Coot chicks near the parking area.

The extension trip totalled 132 species of birds over three days of intense, wonderful birding with good company and the best possible leaders. Gary and Chris were professional, gifted birders dedicated to giving our group the best possible experience. I hope to see many of you next year in Creston at the next conference and extension!

Below: The Hardy Falls American Dipper.

The Steve Cannings Award 2023

At the Vernon Conference on the evening of June 10, Richard Cannings presented the Steve Cannings Award 2023 to honour Wayne Weber. It was the first time that a posthumous award had been made, but the selection committee agreed that the case for the award was overwhelming. The presentation was made even more appropriate by the fact that Wayne's brother, Robin Weber, was attending the conference and could receive the award in Wayne's name.

The plaque commemorating the award read:

"Presented to Wayne C. Weber In recognition of his contributions to ornithology in British Columbia. For over 50 years Wayne generously volunteered his time in many aspects of bird biology and bird study, including many years as compiler of the Vancouver Christmas Bird Count; chair of the Vancouver Bird Records Committee; regional editor of the northern Pacific Coast region for *American Birds*; Western Canada Christmas Bird Count editor for *American Birds*; major contributor to the BC Breeding Bird Atlas; major contributor to eBird, and eBird regional reviewer for Vancouver. He was a founding member of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists, serving in numerous roles for the Society over a period of three decades."

Below: Robin Weber, Wayne's brother, accepting the plaque from Richard Cannings.

Annual Reports for 2023 AGM

President's Report

Gary Davidson

It's encouraging to see that our membership remains very high. It was unclear how Covid might affect us, but we held on during that period and have increased our numbers since. The addition of monthly Zoom presentations likely helped through the Covid time. Attendance at this conference is also high: 63 paid registrations is 20 more than the previous year. Thanks to the efforts of some, we now have a social media presence which will no doubt create more interest and allow for better connection with members.

Last year the board elected to start printing the newsmagazine in colour. This change has been well received and will continue.

After a pandemic hiatus, two- and three-day field trips are back up and running. Thanks to Paul Foth for stepping up and taking on this task.

We received two unexpected donations in the last few months. Wildlife artist John Waldin donated an original water colour painting to us to be used as a fundraiser. A silent auction at the conference brought in $150 for our organization. We also received a significant cash donation to the Education and Conservation Committee from the Upland Birds Society. The Society was being discontinued and they chose us to receive their residual funds which amounted to almost $9,000.

The Steve Cannings Award has not been presented during the last few years. This was partly due to the ill-health of the previous coordinator, and partly due to the Covid situation. A new committee had now been formed and the award was presented at this year's conference.

I want to extend a huge thank-you to the North Okanagan Naturalist Club for their assistance with the organization of this year's conference. Of particular note are the contributions of Marnie Williamson and Chris Siddle. Between them they organized all the morning field trip routes and all the trip leaders. Marnie also helped with several other tasks needed to make our conference a success.

My term as president ends with this conference. I am completing my six-year term and according to policy must step down from the board. I have greatly enjoyed my time on the board and would certainly consider another term some time in the future.

Financial Report

Josh Inman, Treasurer

The statement of finances to Dec 31 2022 is available online as an Excel spreadsheet :

bcfo.files.wordpress.com/2023/08/2022-to-dec-31.xlsx

Newsmagazine Report

Clive Keen, Editor, BC Birding

1. Following analysis and recommendation from Kaitlyn York, and approval from the Board of Directors, the hard-copy edition of the magazine has been switched to print in full colour.

2. The design of the magazine received a minor update following the switch to full colour. Members with knowledge of layout are urged to forward suggestions for further improvements.

3. Clive Keen continues to edit and desktop-publish the magazine and deal with the web edition. Kaitlyn York arranges printing and distribution of the hard copy. Shawn Mason assists with proof-reading. Additional proof-readers are always welcome and anyone interested is urged to contact the Editor.

Content

As can be seen from the table, this year's magazines have been more substantial than in the previous year, being on average six pages longer and with six additional illustrations. The combined total of 156 pages in fact appears to be highest annual total since the magazine was created in 1991.

Thanks are again due to all contributors, and particularly regular contributors. Additional regular contributors continue to be sought – members interested in areas such as book reviews, equipment reviews, upcoming events, regional reports, specialist birding (e.g. seawatching) etc are asked to consider becoming columnists. One-off contributions are always welcome, however brief.

The flow of photographs continues to increase, as does the quality, driven by steady advances in camera technology and the expansion of bird photography as a hobby. Photographers are nevertheless reminded that good-quality bird and birding photographs are always sought and do not require a related story-line – a brief caption is often all that is needed.

Edition	Pages	Illustrations
September 2022	36	40
December 2022	36	46
March 2023	48	48
June 2023	36	42
Total 2022-23 (2021-22)	*156 (132)*	*176 (152)*

Membership Report for AGM

Larry Cowan, Membership Secretary

The essential details of membership are given in the tables to the right and in the graphic below. Note that all figures for 2023 are as of June 2023, whereas figures for previous years are for the full year. Membership of BCFO 2023 will thus currently be at all-time record levels.

Membership Participation

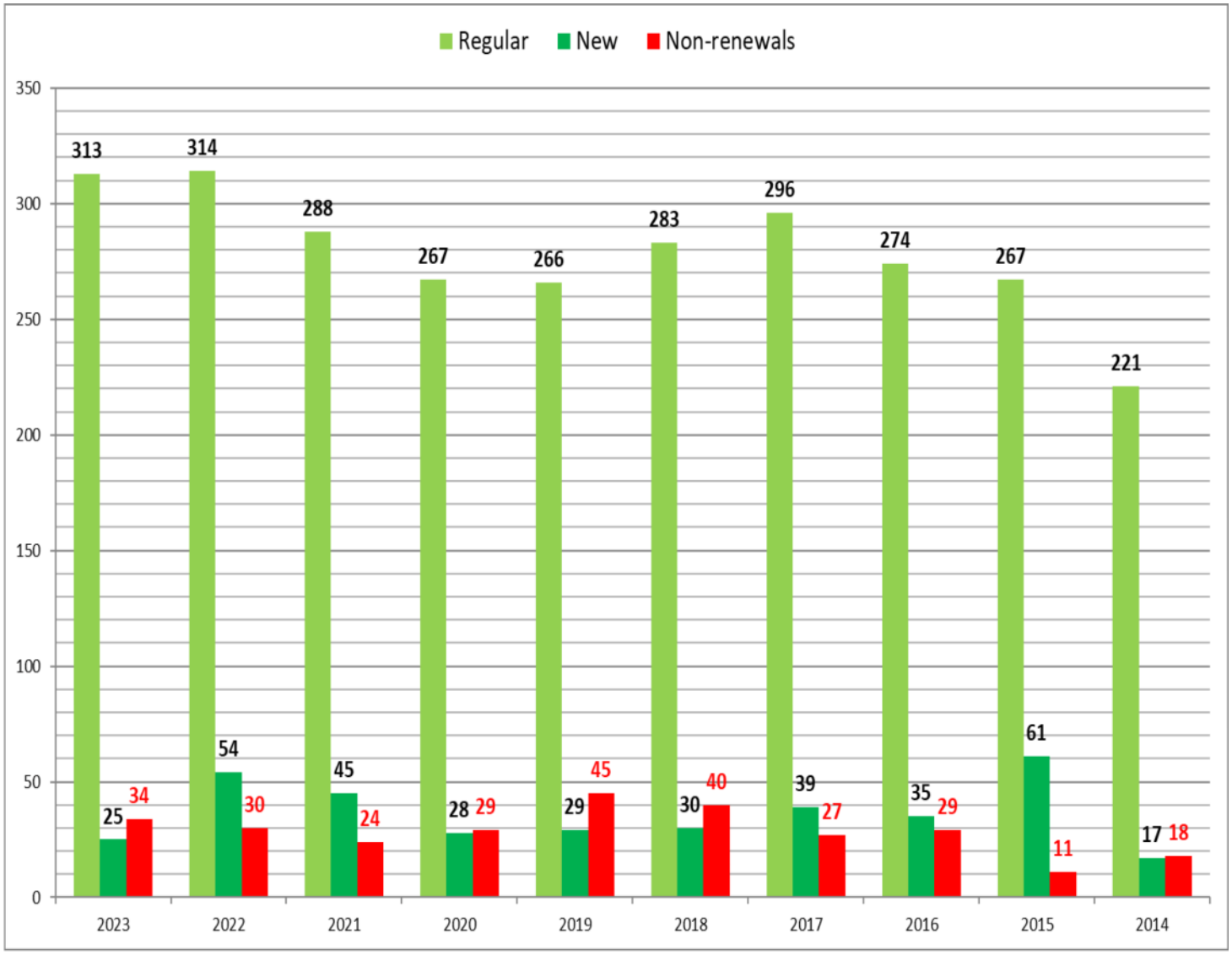
Participation includes contributing to *BC Birding*, Zoom participation, involvement in field trips or the Conference, inclusion in Listers' Corner, etc.

2023 > 51% 2022 > 64%
2021 > 65% 2020 > 30%
2019 > 41% 2018 > 40%
2017 > 43% 2016 > 30%

2023		2022
348	Total	347
313	Regular	314
3	Honourary	3
19	Jr. award winners	15
6	Institutional	6
7	Complimentary	11
25	New	54

105	eTransfer	33.5%
174	PayPal/CC	55.6%
33	Cheque	10.5%

119	Paid *BC Birding*	120
2	No email	2
136	*BC Birds*, website only	125



British Columbia Birds Report

Nathan Hentze, Editor, British Columbia Birds

Volume 33 of the journal was published last fall with three papers plus the BRC annual report. Since that time, manuscripts have continued to be submitted to *BC Birds* at a slow rate and the journal is on track to print Volume 34 later this fall with a similar number of papers. This has been the first year with Daryl Henderson behind the helm as Production Editor, and he has done a great job of navigating the intricacies of formatting and editing. The Editorial Board remains unchanged, and consists of Andy Buhler, Rob Butler, Mark Phinney and Mary Taitt. A huge thank-you to them for their thoughtful reviews and constructive advice.

I am continuing to pursue ways to make the journal more accessible to a wider audience. This includes investigating putting previous articles online at the Searchable Ornithological Research Archive (SORA), and looking into ways of tracking views and downloads of our articles. The latter may require an overhaul of the BCFO website, which is currently under consideration.

I would like to again point out that while the journal is the scientific, peer-reviewed publication of BCFO, you don't have to be an ornithologist to submit papers. Notes on provincial firsts, novel behaviours, advances in our knowledge of distribution, historical summaries and other topics are all relevant and can be contributed by anyone. A final reminder that while past volumes of the journal are freely available to all from the journal website (www.bcbirds.bcfo.ca), only members have access to the most recent volume via the "BCFO Members" tab. This members-only section includes in-press papers, which are accepted and formatted manuscripts appearing on the website ahead of the physically printed volume in which they'll be published.

Education and Conservation Committee Report

Gary Davidson, Chair

In the past 12 months, two grant requests were received.

The University of Victoria Birdwatching Club applied for funds for their ongoing work in the Hesquiat Lake Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. They had previously conducted radar studies to determine Marbled Murrelet numbers and their use of old-growth forests. This 2023 follow-up survey was designed to investigate the herring spawn in the area and how it might influence murrelets and other fish-eating species. The request was approved and a grant of $2,000 was given to the club. The subsequent report was included in the June edition of *BC Birding*.

The second request was from the BC Species at Risk Coordinator with Birds Canada. The purpose of the project was to utilize autonomous recording units to detect Species at Risk during their breeding season in south-central BC. The request was approved and $2,000 was granted for the project. Their subsequent report is given below.

Data Collection Using Autonomous Recording

Lindsay Lalach and Aicha Hezit, Birds Canada

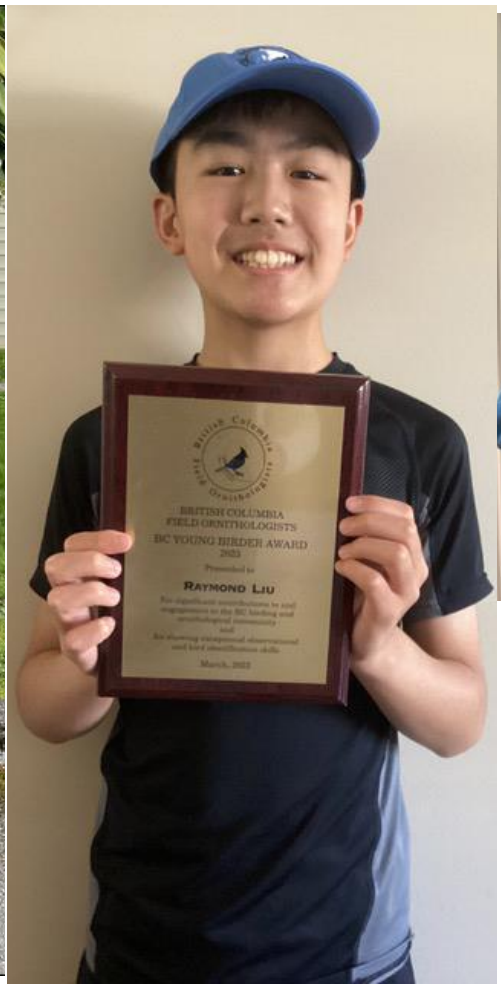
This past June we set out to deploy Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) at various wetland sites around the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of British Columbia. Our goal was to collect data on the presence of Species at Risk and marsh birds at these sites during their breeding period, which will be used to inform conservation planning with our project partners in Central BC. Due to the inconspicuous nature of marsh birds, including their common habitat associations and breeding traits, collecting data through traditional point count survey methods can be difficult. Often, we are more likely to hear them than see them, which makes the use of ARUs for surveying particularly effective.

The Cariboo-Chilcotin region is a beautiful blend of rolling grasslands, pine forests, and countless wetlands and lakes. The variety of habitats here made for a great diversity in bird species we observed, as well as other wildlife. Some highlights included grassland species such as Long-billed Curlew, an abundance of waterfowl and other wetland birds including Cinnamon Teal, Pied-billed Grebe, and Common Loon, and stumbling upon a nesting Sandhill Crane.

We deployed ARUs at nineteen wetland sites throughout the region, from 100 Mile House to Williams Lake, and across the Fraser River to Hanceville. These sites included both conservation properties as well as control (unprotected) sites.

This project is part of a larger research study being conducted in collaboration with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), to study the effectiveness of Canadian Intermountain Joint Venture conservation properties by collecting data from both protected conservation areas and unprotected sites. At each chosen site, two ARUs were deployed in different habitats, to maximize the diversity of species detected. The ARUs were scheduled to take periodic recordings from dusk until the late morning which allowed us to capture both nocturnal and diurnal species. Overall, the ARUs captured approximately 2,750 hours of recordings over three weeks during the breeding season.

Young Birders 2023 Receive Their Plaques



Far Left: David Poon & father. *Left*: Raymon Liu. Above: Harry Sedin. *Below, Left to right*: Clay Zhou-Radies & family; Bentley Colwill & grandmother; Paul Jacques & father; Carlo Giovanella; Josh Yiu & father; George Clulow. For full details see:

bcfo.ca/2023/02/21/bcfo-young-birder-awards-2023/

BCFO Young Birder Now

Krista Kaptein, Courtenay

Featuring Viktor Vandereyk

BCFO has been recognizing and supporting outstanding young birders for ten years through the Young Birders Award. One of the early recipients of the award was Viktor Vandereyk of Langley.

Viktor was nominated for the award in 2017 by Melissa Hafting, after having joined the Young Birder Program in 2016. The Young Birder Program, the field component for youth, was designed and led by Melissa starting in 2014, and adopted as an official program of BCFO in 2016. Melissa was impressed by Viktor's great bird identification skills, noting "Viktor started birding when he was eight years old and is an avid hiker and naturalist. He is never afraid to ask questions about birds and is eager to learn more about them. I was impressed by how fast he spotted birds during our field trips and how well he fit into the group with the others. I have noticed how helpful he is to the younger children in the group and he behaves as a good role model. Viktor enjoys contributing to the British Columbia Birds Forum (birding.bc.ca) and adding his photos to Flickr. He and his brother Marnix, who is also a birder, enjoy watching the birds that come to their backyard, where they have had some uncommon birds show up."

Above: Viktor at the time of his Young Birder Award.
Below: Viktor's painting of a Canada Goose.

Every trip in the Young Birder Program was a highlight for Viktor. "I was an avid patch birder but rarely got outside of my neighbourhood patch, so spending a whole day birding places I had never been to, seeing birds I had never seen, with other kids who were also avid birders was always a treat!" he says. "I also developed my bird identification skills greatly on those trips learning from Melissa and the kids who had much more expertise then I did at the time. It was also my introduction to the birding community which I was previously a stranger to. Two trips that stand out the most in my memory are the Merritt trip (for sheer number of lifers), and the Cleland Island boat trip (for the stunning scenery and cool marine life). Also seeing a Ruff on the Christmas Bird Count for Kids. I very much appreciate BCFO for having the Young Birder Program, and especially a big thank you to Melissa for all her hard work she put into these trips!"

Viktor's day job is currently in Agriculture, mainly cattle-hoof trimming, but in regards to bird-related work he works with the Langley Field Naturalist with trail maintenance and bird counts at two sites that they manage in the Langley area. "The reason I continued with BCFO membership is pretty much for the magazine," he says. "The *BC Birding* magazine is always an interesting read and I like that they started printing colour in the hard copy which I always get."

"I found people in my circles generally responded positively to my being a birder," he says. "They liked knowing someone who could tell them what that bird was that they saw the other day – once they know what it is they continue to recognize it. Then, once it has a name it becomes somewhat special to them." Viktor didn't really encounter any challenges pursuing his birding interests. "Of course, until I got my driver's license my only means of transportation was bike," he says, "unless I could convince one of my non-birder relatives to drive me places – but I had to make it sound like an interesting outing for them as well. That definitely honed my skills in salesmanship! They were very kind though, and did take me many times. My best advice to someone interested in birding: don't be discouraged if you can't identify all the birds you see right away, or if you dip on a rarity. Practice makes perfect, and be sure to have fun and keep things in perspective. The fun of the journey is what it is all about, the goal is a bonus!"

Viktor regularly submits checklists to eBird such as the Forslund-Watson Wildlife Area in Langley and is one of the top birders for that location. He is also is a talented artist and enjoys painting and drawing birds. Some are featured on his Flickr page along with photographs. See:

www.flickr.com/photos/144379173@N02/

The Armstrong Lake Loons: Better News

Gary Davidson, Nakusp

Last year I reported on a pair of Common Loons which attempted to nest on the shore of Armstrong Lake. This is a small lake located on Highway 31 between Galena Bay and the community of Trout Lake. Last year, one egg had been laid when the water level in the lake rose and flooded the nest. This year, the pair tried again and built a nest in the same location. Fortunately, the nest was not flooded and the pair successfully raised two young!

Photos by Gary Davison.

BCFO Short Trips

100 Mile House
June 23–24, 2023

Paul Foth, 100 Mile House

On June 23, seven BCFO members met early to start two days of birding in the 100 Mile House area. We headed east of town to the Forest Grove area to see some distant Black Terns at their reliable colony on Becker Lake. The many singing songbird species there, including Least and Alder Flycatchers, were a hopeful indication of more songbirds to come. The group spent nearly an hour at the lush Hawkins Lake, with sightings of Wood Ducks, many of the regular flycatcher species, three vireo species, Evening Grosbeak, and warblers including MacGillivray's, Northern Waterthrush, and American Redstart.

The group headed north on a forest road for the chance of some eastern warbler species. Magnolia Warblers were plentiful, and a few singing males offered good views. One surprise was a molting adult Broad-winged Hawk flying over the road. These have been recorded in breeding season in the Wells area farther north but are usually only sighted in the South Cariboo during migration.

Above: Spruce Grouse were among the target birds of the trip, and did not disappoint. The hen above gave good views before ushering her chicks into the brush. Photos by Clive Keen.

We continued north in a vain search for Blackpoll Warblers before turning around. But birds including Spruce Grouse, Olive-sided Flycatcher, White-throated Sparrow, Varied Thrush and Magnolia, Townsend's and Wilson's Warblers were a great consolation.

On our return to 100 Mile House, we stopped to explore the mixed forest habitats along Eagle Creek at Canim Lake, which offered the first Veery of the trip. A stop at the farm fields at the southwest end of Canim Lake offered flying Sandhill Cranes, a Northern Harrier, many singing Savannah Sparrows and a myriad of flying swallows. The lake itself presented the only Red-necked Grebe, Common Merganser and Merlin sightings of the trip.

A pair of Mountain Bluebirds with a fledgling appeared along Bates Road in Forest Grove. A stop at a marsh yielded Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, Yel-

Yellow-headed Blackbirds were abundant in the Cariboo, giving many great photo ops.

low-headed Blackbird and Bank Swallow among other species. Our final stop for the day was another marsh on Upper Houseman Road, with broods of Bufflehead and Barrow's Goldeneye, and our first Sora and Eastern Kingbird.

On Saturday the 24th we headed just west of 100 Mile House to spend the morning in the area burned in the 2017 forest fire. We stopped at Scout Lake, where dozens of Ravens from the nearby landfill called incessantly. The small lake offered our first Horned Grebes of the trip, while a Black-backed Woodpecker drummed in the distance, unseen. This was unfortunately the trend for the morning. On nearby forest roads we heard Black-backed Woodpeckers calling and drumming at least three more times, but not one appeared. We were nonetheless graced with the sounds of Hermit Thrush, Common Nighthawk and many singing Clay-colored, Chipping, Vesper, White-crowned, White-throated and Lincoln's Sparrows. We had one sighting of a Townsend's Solitaire and small flocks of Red Crossbills called as they flew over.

Our final birding stops were at Watson and Elliot Lakes, both full of breeding ducks, geese and coots. Watson Lake offered the usual duck species, including Redhead and Canvasback, and many Eared Grebe. We heard Western Meadowlarks, Yellow-headed Blackbirds and one Bullock's Oriole singing and calling. We also heard our only Virginia Rail of the trip. Elliot Lake, a set of small ponds near Highway 97, had more ducks, including our trip first Northern Shovelers.

Despite missing a couple of the target bird species, a total of 119 species were encountered over the two-day trip. More two-day field trips are planned, so join one if you can!

Merritt & Coquihalla Summit Two-day Field Trip

Just as this newsletter was being prepared for uploading to the website, Alan Burger (Logan Lake) and Paul Foth (100 Mile House) were leading a group to locations including Lindley Creek, Midday Valley, Illal Creek, and Flatiron Mountain. Their target birds included White-tailed Ptarmigan, American Pipit, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch and Williamson's Sapsucker.

The Spotted Sandpiper below made his opinions abundantly clear about unwanted human presence – he was protecting two tiny fluffballs.

This trip was organized after the last newsletter was published, and now that the series is getting back on track after the Covid hiatus, notice may often need to be through the BCFO website and email.

One-day Trips?

The Directors are considering expanding bird trip offerings to include 1-day bird trips, in addition to the 2- and 3-day trips already being offered by volunteer members. We would like to assess how many members might be interested in providing 1-day bird trips. If you are keen to lead a day trip to view birds in your local area, please send your name and potential trip location idea to racheldarvill@gmail.com.

How the 2-3 day 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.

If you have ideas for a short trip, Paul Foth would be pleased to hear from you at paulrfoth@gmail.com.

Photo Essay 1

Barn Swallows: Feeding the Kids

Pam Laing, Kelowna

In early July we rented a cabin for a few days at a rustic resort on one of the small lakes east of Kelowna, on the upland plateau. As expected, Barn Swallows were nesting under the eaves of the buildings there. Two nests were on the lake side of our cabin, one empty and one with four small nestlings still being fed. Their beaks looked enormous in comparison to their overall size.

The air was alive with adult and newly fledged birds hawking for insects from dawn till dusk. Late one afternoon I noticed five young birds jostling for space on a horizontal branch hanging low over the lake, so I settled down to watch. It was most entertaining. As the adult birds passed by overhead there was a flurry of "Hey, stop!" activity below, mouths gaping, eyes bright. I watched for some time and took the photographs shown here.

It seemed to me that the adult birds were fairly systematic in their feeding approach, moving from one nestling to another each time they brought a morsel. There was certainly no lack of insect fodder, and we were grateful for their activities. And it certainly brought home to me what raising a family of five means in the Barn Swallow world – non-stop grocery-delivery!

Photo Essay 2

Skitterish Osprey

Claude Rioux, Fairmont Hot Springs

The Fairmont Hot Springs Bluebird nestbox monitoring team has a Bluebird nestbox trail on Lot 48 which is visited weekly. The nestbox trail is along the Spirit Trail on the westside of Columbia Lake, which is a popular trail in the East Kootenay. The monitoring season started in early April and during the following weeks we followed the happenings of a pair of Osprey.

Near the end of April, we spotted a male Osprey displaying a fish near a vacant Osprey nest. We assumed this was in the hopes of attracting a mate. The following week we found that his

ploy worked when a female arrived. Something we noticed about this pair was that both Osprey were rather skitterish whenever someone passed by along the trail near the nest. The female would start to call, jump up and fly around the nest, perching in the surrounding trees. This continued throughout the month of June and into July. It looked like the Osprey pair were not adapting to the presence of passers-by. We found this surprising since most Ospreys totally ignore people, even settling into nests in the middle of towns. We were beginning to worry about the eggs in the nest, whether they would hatch with the number of times that the female left the nest.

On our July 22 outing, the female left the nest with an exceptionally annoyed squawk, flew towards the trees and soon returned with a piece of dead tree in her talons. She flew towards us and dropped the branch near us. We found this behaviour rather strange, but after all the observations of this pair over the past months, not too surprising. On our next visit on July 29th, we found that the Osprey pair had left the area.

After all this, we assumed that the female Osprey might have come from an area where she was not exposed to any human activity and did not know what to make of us.

It would be interesting to see if anyone else has encountered similar behaviour with Osprey.

Late update: after trying again to nest on August 5, by August 12 the Osprey pair had finally decided to quit, and – perhaps due partly to the female's incessant screaming at the male – agreed on divorce.

Photo Essay 3

The Many Faces of the Lapland Longspur

Over the last year Adrian Dorst (Tofino) has been able to document the four different plumages of the Lapland Longspur: adult fall, juvenile fall, transitional in spring, and full breeding. He took each of these photographs in the Tofino/Long Beach area of Vancouver Island.

Photo Essay 4

Eagle Conflict!

Dennis Forsyth, Denman Island

For the past several months I have been monitoring and photographing an active Bald Eagle nest on Denman Island. The location is not ideal as it is quite far from the only place I can set up. However, the early light is excellent and by using a good tripod and a 600 mm prime lens I have had some success in recording the development of a single chick there. On July 10 my patience paid off with the chance to photograph a very exciting encounter at the nest.

The nestling is by this time quite well developed and is nearly ready for first flight. It is still being fed in the nest. The parents have, for the past few weeks, found a reasonably productive food source. Approximately a kilometre away from the nest is a municipal boat launch and right now it is being used by local fishermen taking advantage of some excellent coho fishing in the area. Some of these fishermen make a habit of cleaning their catch at the boat launch when they come in. The eagles take full advantage. On this day, early in the morning the female came to the nest carrying a head and some attached viscera and was apparently sharing the bounty with the juvenile. I was busy photographing with the pre-focused camera. Then came the excitement.

The resident male showed up carrying another Coho head only to be intercepted right beside the nest by a second male who attacked instantly and attempted to take the prize. The aerial combat that ensued was one of the longest and toughest that I have seen. Usually these affairs are intense but brief. This one lasted several long minutes and took place in a very limited area. As is usual in these cases both birds attempted to neutralize the other's prime weapon by locking up the other's talons. Since neither would let go of its grip on the fish-head they each had only one free talon to fight with. The resident Eagle won this tactical struggle and managed to lock onto his adversary's head with his free foot. This must have been seriously painful and I think potentially very dangerous. Eagles have enormous gripping strength and it is far from unknown for one adult to kill another in a fight. Even a serious injury could prove fatal for an apex predator like a Bald Eagle.

Above: The initial attack.
Below: The adversaries both gripping the fish-head.

By now the female in the nest got tired of being a mere spectator and launched herself toward the fray. The interloper managed to get his head free, saw the female approaching and, I think, made a very intelligent recalculation of the odds and quit the fight in full retreat. The resident male, still in possession of the head and probably pretty winded, declined to pursue his beaten rival and instead took the fish to the nest where he seemed to enjoy the plaudits of his mate as he stored it in the pantry.

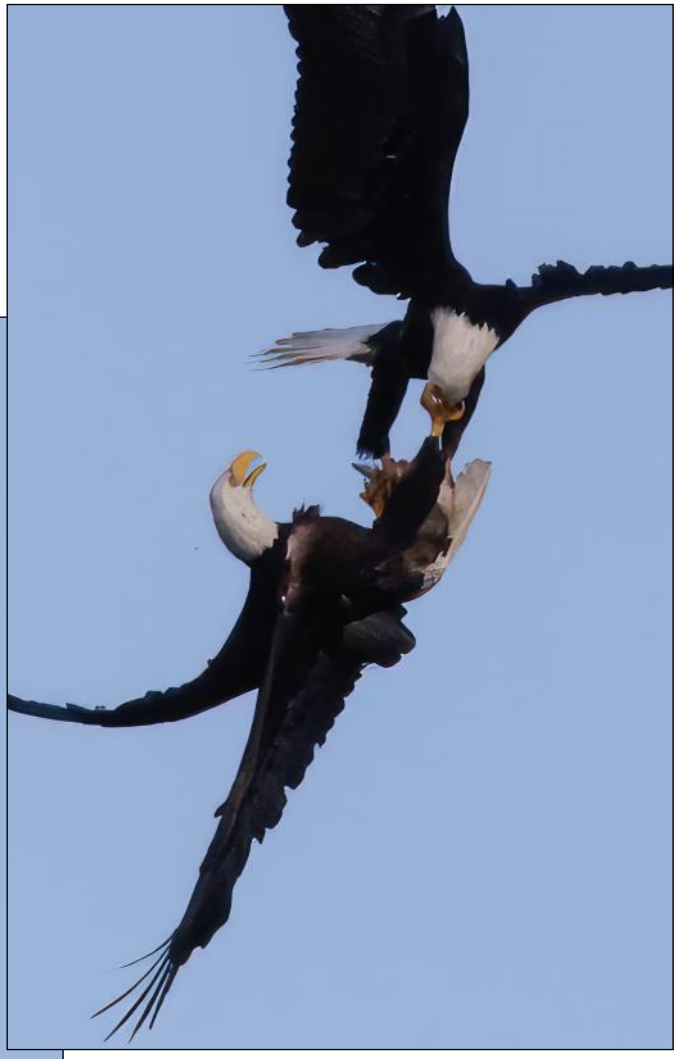
This, of course, was basically a food fight with possibly some territorial animosity involved. It is quite possible that the second male has a family of his own to feed and a coho head with its

rich, fatty contents is probably worth some effort.

I was extraordinarily fortunate here. The camera was set up and ready on a tripod and the whole affair took place within the frame and required no shifting of focus by me. The light was ideal with a light overcast. A photographer's dream.

Right: The resident male getting that crucial head-lock.

Left: The resident gaining sole possession of the prize.



BCFO Research Grants

BCFO encourages submission of proposals from groups or organizations for financial assistance for bird surveys and other ornithological research. It also wishes to foster greater connections between applicants and the society. Potential applicants are reminded that:

1. Requests for funding must be for planned, rather than completed, projects.
2. Projects must be conducted within British Columbia.
3. Under normal circumstances applicants must be members of the BCFO.
4. Projects and their results are to be reported in BCFO's journal, British *Columbia Birds*, or in the newsmagazine, *BC Birding.*
5. In order for BCFO directors to give a timely response to project proposals, deadlines for submission are January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1.
6. All reasonable requests up to a $2,000 limit, and within the financial strength of the organization, will be considered. Larger requests require approval at an AGM.

Full guidelines are available online at bcfo.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/bcfo-grant-application-update16nov2018.pdf

Photo Essay 5

Red-naped Sapsuckers Breeding Cycle

William Murdoch, Burnaby

First, a pair of Red-naped Sapsuckers built their nest, which took two weeks. Next, they were on their honey-moon. Finally, a fledgling appears. (See also back cover.)

Birding Alaska

Lee Harding, Coquitlam

Although almost twice the size (1,717,856 km^2) of British Columbia, statistics do not capture the grandeur of Alaska. Many of its roads trace the tops of eskers, sinuous glacial features – actually, upside-down rivers – many miles long and hundreds of feet high. From these, one can look out across vast valleys and majestic mountain at every turn.

For birders, besides a lot of territory and diverse northern habitats, it offers

Arctic tundra along the Beaufort Sea coast, and fjord/glacier ecosystems along its southern and western coastlines. Although we in BC are no strangers to glaciers and fjords, the Alaska's north temperate to subarctic and Arctic ecozones have seabird species that are rarely seen here. Nor are we strangers to Arctic birds, most of which migrate through or winter in BC; but in Alaska, one can see them in their summer-breeding plumages.

I invited my brother, Jeffrey, a keen birder who had never seen the Arctic tundra. This would be a chance for him to see Arctic birds in their breeding plumages and add a few to his life list.

We contacted our cousin, Barbara, who lives near Anchorage.

"Forget renting an SUV," she said. "I have a Dodge crew cab and an RV trailer. I'll drive you to Prudhoe Bay and we'll camp along the way."

But as Robbie Burns said, "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft a-gley." The other thing to know about Alaska is that its roads have a well-deserved reputation for ruining plans. We never made it to Prudhoe Bay.

Jeff had invited a friend, Jim from Portland, who would arrive later, and while waiting for him, we took an excursion on the Glen and Taylor Highways to Chicken, near the Yukon Border, and Eagle, a former trading post further north on the Yukon River. This is boreal forest: white spruce and poplars on dry sites and "drunken" black spruce in the bogs. There were Red-necked Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneyes and Common Loons in the lakes and Bohemian Waxwings, White-winged Crossbills, moose and black bears in the trees and Bank and Cliff Swallows in banks and cliffs along the way. The road is paved as far as Chicken, and then gravel to Eagle.

The first breakdown was on the Taylor Highway to Chicken, near the Yukon border, when, after 400 miles of banging across frost heaves and potholes, the water tank broke loose from the bottom of the trailer and dragged us to a standstill. A pair of placer miners helped us strap it up so we could drive and invited us to visit their mine, which we did the next day and saw real gold in their son's pan. We returned to Barbara's home and left the water tank inoperable and strapped on, but replaced the hinges, with bigger screws, of several cupboard doors in the RV that had shaken off.

We drove south to Seward and booked an eight-hour pelagic cruise to Northwestern Glacier in Kenai Fjords National Park for the next morning. This, paraphrasing Longfellow, is the coastal forest primeval; the giant Sitka spruce are "bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight." There were Arctic Terns along the route at, appropriately, Tern Lake, and both mountain goats and Dall's sheep high up on alpine meadows. That evening, birding by road along Resurrection Bay, we found some Marbled Murrelets, several gulls including Glaucous, and other birds.

The fjord trip was fantastic: although not specifically a birding tour, it was eight hours of non-stop marine wildlife. Jeff and I stood to gain a few lifers and weren't disappointed. We saw Black Oystercatchers, Common and Thick-billed Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, Marbled, Kittlitz's (lifer) and Ancient Murrelets (lifer), Parakeet (lifer) and Rhinoceros Auklets, Horned and Tufted Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwakes and Red-faced, Double-crested and Pelagic Cormorants and Bald Eagles. I'd seen Red-faced Cormorants in Japan, but far away. These were nesting on cliffs right above us as the captain nosed his craft into a cleft in a tiny

Thick-billed Murre (above left) and Tufted Puffin (below) In Kenai Fjords. Photos by Lee Harding.

cove. We also saw sea otters and several pods of orcas and humpback whales. One group of ten humpbacks was "cooperatively feeding": diving deep and circling, slowly rising in a spiral while emitting bubbles to entrap bait fish, all whales bursting at once to the surface with maws agape. While the whales were deep, the gulls, kittiwakes and seabirds would disperse a bit, but just before the whales burst to the surface, all the birds would race to that spot to grab fish. The tour boat crew lowered a microphone into the water and broadcast the sounds: bubbles, swirling sounds and, just before surfacing, the whales began singing. Then they burst out, blowing with a whoosh and splash, and all the birds—and some of the tourists—screamed at once.

When Jim arrived, we started again for the Arctic, passing Mount Denali rising majestically against a clear, blue sky. Camping at Byer's Lake, our nighttime listening revealed a Boreal Owl (lifer). North of Fairbanks, however, the truck's brakes overheated and Barbara had trouble keeping her lane on some long, curvy descents on gravel. The trailer's brakes were not grabbing in sync with the truck's brakes. We turned back, but took a circuitous route home by turning left at Denali National Park, going east on the Denali Highway, past Paxton, and thence southeast to connect with the Taylor Highway.

Above: Hoary Marmot on Thatcher Pass. Below: a common hybrid on the Kenai Peninsular: Glaucous-winged × Herring Gull.

The Denali Highway is a great drive, meandering mostly above tree line, dipping frequently into taiga. It gave me the chance to photograph some northern birds that I hadn't seen for years, such as Boreal Chickadees, Common Redpolls, Solitary Sandpipers (a Tringa), Long-tailed Ducks, Red-necked Phalaropes, Red-throated and Arctic Loons, Grey-cheeked Thrushes and Arctic Warblers. The last, Arctic Warbler, is an Old World warbler, all of which are Eurasian except this one, which extends just into Alaska. We dearly wanted to see ptarmigans (I'd seen all three, but not for decades; Willow and Rock Ptarmigan would have been new to Jeff and Jim) but only heard them once. For these, one needs to walk and, Barbara's not being a walker kept us close to the truck.

While Jim took the glacier tour that Jeff and I had done earlier, Jeff and I birded Kenai Peninsula. At Anchor Point near Homer, we saw hundreds of Arctic Terns (but no Aleutians, regrettably), Surfbirds, Black Turnstones, Common Murres, Marbled Murrelets, Horned Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Glaucous and Glaucous-winged gulls, Sooty or Short-tailed Shearwaters, Greater Yellowlegs, and one each of Rock Sandpiper, Whimbrel and Short-billed Dowitcher.

We saw 108 bird species. Jim ended with seven species added to his life list; Jeff added eight and I had four.

The trip, being serendipitous, was not at the best time for birding. Next time, we'll plan it for May or June. And I think, to see the Arctic coast with all of its Arctic tundra and marine species (eiders!) in breeding plumages, one should fly to Prudhoe Bay or Barrow; or if driving, accept the expense of a durable SUV and not depend on a cousin's truck and trailer, however graciously proffered.

The Faire Isle Puffins

Kenneth Whyte, Vernon

In June 2013 we completed an ocean trip with Adventure Canada to the Orkneys, Shetlands, Faroe Islands, and Iceland.

The highlight for me was observing and photographing puffins in Faire Isle. Faire Isle is Britain's most remote inhabited island and lies between Orkney and the Shetland Islands. It is one of only four sites chosen by the UK government, through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, for intensive monitoring of seabirds.

Puffins are still very easy to see up close on the island during the summer, with a good number of very approachable birds nesting just a few minutes' walk from the landing area where we landed in the Zodiacs.

Puffins usually reach breeding age at 5–6 years old, and often live for 20 years with some individuals reaching 30 years of age. In Faire Isle they make use of old rabbit burrows for their nest. The first birds return to Faire Isle in late March, and all have departed again by mid-August. Puffins lay only a single egg, in late April or early May. Both parents incubate it for 36–45 days, and they share the feeding duties until the chick is ready to fledge. The fledging period is very variable, ranging from 34 to 60 days, depending on the area and year.

Adult birds desert their young shortly before they are ready to leave the nest. The timing of the breeding in puffin colonies is highly synchronized, and so the departure of all adults takes place within a few days. The young birds leave their nest burrow and make their way to the sea, normally under cover of darkness to avoid predators. In some colonies, for instance in Iceland, nearby bright lights confuse the young birds, which then fly into the light and end up on city streets.

Breeding success has generally been relatively high on Faire Isle, but despite this, numbers appear to have fallen dramatically in recent years. A long-term study of a large puffin colony on Faire Isle has caused "considerable concern" after showing that breeding numbers have halved to 10,000 individuals.

Atlantic Puffin Photos by Kenneth Whyte. The flowers are Sea Pinks.

The Journey of a Bank Swallow

Story by Lars Sander-Green, Wildsight, Golden

Photos by Rachel Darvill, Golden

In late July, a fledgling Bank Swallow emerges from its burrow in a steep cliff alongside the Columbia Wetlands. Shortly after it first takes flight, likely within days or weeks, this young swallow will begin a journey that could take it as far south as Chile for the winter. But exactly where bank swallows from the Columbia Valley spend their winters — and which route they follow for roughly 10,000 kilometres — is a mystery for scientists who study the birds.

Answers to those questions could help us understand why populations of Bank Swallows in Canada have plunged by 98% over the last four decades.

The global crash in insect numbers is likely part of the problem, but what about habitat destruction, climate change or pesticides? Knowing where Bank Swallows spend the rest of their lives is a first step to finding out why their numbers have fallen so quickly and what we could do to help them recover.

It's with those questions in mind that Wildsight Golden's contract biologist Rachel Darvill, working with Environment and Climate Change Canada, fitted 100 adult Bank Swallows with tiny tracking devices over the past two years. When the swallows pass within about 15km of a Motus Wildlife Tracking Station, their location will be recorded in a database, eventually painting a clearer picture of the travels of Columbia Valley Bank Swallows.

Bank Swallows, which weigh only about 14 grams, feast on the many insects that emerge from the Columbia Wetlands, swallowing hundreds of insects per day. These swallows move so quickly that it's a real challenge for Rachel and her 70-strong crew of volunteers to get an accurate count of active nests at breeding colonies as they fly in and out of their burrows.

Bank Swallows, along with their close relatives Barn Swallows, are a designated species at risk in Canada. Scientists at Environment and Climate Change Canada have expanded the tracking project, aiming to tag fifty swallows from each province in the country this year as part of a project looking to evaluate migratory connectivity for Bank Swallows throughout Canada.

To help narrow their winter location down further, because Motus tracking stations are not equally distributed throughout the Americas, the Bank Swallow tagging teams across Canada have also collected tail feathers from the same tagged swallows. By analyzing the isotopes of common elements like carbon, hydrogen and nitrogen found in them, which vary in environmental concentrations from north to south, scientists will be able to get a general idea of where the birds regrew those feathers when they molted during their time in South America.

The hope is that within the next year or so once all the data has been analyzed, we'll know a lot more about Bank Swallow migration patterns.

The Columbia Valley has excellent breeding habitat for Bank Swallows, with steep cutbanks of soil that's soft enough for swallows to dig burrows, but cohesive enough to make a safe home. Male swallows tunnel up to 1.8m deep into the bank and then males and females build a nest at the end. Rachel and her crew have identified about 110 breeding colonies between Canal Flats and Donald, many with hundreds of burrows each, leading to the protection of these banks as critical habitat under the federal Species at Risk Act.

While Wildsight Golden has built or is working on eight large wooden nesting structures for Barn Swallows, creating new homes for Bank Swallows isn't as straightforward — so protecting existing colony sites is crucial. Rachel is working to do just that, including a project with BC Parks to re-route a hiking trail at Windermere Lake Provincial Park that passed right through a colony and another project with the District of Invermere to protect and improve an old earthworks pile that swallows have taken up residence in. With Bank Swallow populations having already fallen so much, we can't afford to destroy their homes, even in colonies outside their normal habitat.

Rachel's team's data has already shown some important results. Many volunteers are either experienced bird-

Above: Bank Swallow restoration project at Windermere Lake Provincial Park. Right: Mist netting at a Bank Swallow colony. Below: Setting up a new Motus Station near Invermere.

ers or have been trained to recognize the subtle differences between a Bank Swallow and a similar-looking Northern Rough-winged Swallow, which also nests in bank burrows. Thanks to the work of these volunteers, who collect data by observing swallows in their colonies, we know that the numbers of Bank Swallows nesting at colonies in the area is usually lower than expected, though we don't know exactly why. They've also observed that none of the fifty swallows they marked with a band last year came back to the same colony this year, though Rachel wonders if this is because they understandably didn't like being caught in a mist net — or if something more might be happening.

This year's cohort of fifty tracked swallows began their long journey south in July, pinging the tracking stations that Rachel's team have installed along the Columbia Wetlands for the last time. If all goes to plan, their tiny tracking devices, weighing just a third of a gram, will be picked up through the US, south into Mexico and then through Central and South America. Protecting all the habitat they need to thrive could require international cooperation from Canada to Chile and every important habitat in between. We'll be hoping that these swallows' journeys will help us learn more about them, so we can help recover their populations in the Columbia Valley — and across the Americas.

Wildsight Golden thanks their funders for the Upper Columbia Swallow Habitat Enhancement Project including the Columbia Basin Trust, the Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program, the RDEK Columbia Valley Local Conservation Fund, BC Parks, and the Province of BC plus their many partners, including the Ktunaxa Nation, the Shuswap Band, Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Lake Windermere District Rod & Gun Club, and the Lake Windermere Ambassadors.

If you'd like more information or would like to volunteer to help Bank and Barn Swallows in the Columbia Valley, contact swallows@wildsight.ca.

North Okanagan Hummingbird Banding Program

Karen Siemens on behalf of North Okanagan Naturalist Club

Our program is sponsored by the North Okanagan Naturalist Club (NONC) and headed by Gail Loughridge. Under the guidance of Cam Finlay, Gail started the banding program in 2004. We report our findings to Dr Alison Moran, director of the Hummingbird Project of BC based at Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) in Victoria.

We have three species of hummingbirds that breed in our locale which we band – Rufous, Calliope and Black-chinned. We have had Anna's venture into our territory occasionally but not as a breeding bird yet.

The Calliope is the smallest of our hummingbirds weighing between 2.5-3 grams, the Rufous is next averaging 3.2 -3.5 grams and the Black Chinned can weigh up to about 4.2 grams. All this is dependent upon the time of year. After spring migration, the weight is low. After summer breeding and feeding on nectar and plenty of insects it is high.

We have two sites for banding. Site 1 is located just north of Lumby. This site follows the protocols of the Hummingbird Network of North America (savehummingbirds.org), based in Arizona. Banding is done every two weeks for five hours beginning at 6:00 AM. The statistics from this site are sent to Dr Moran who in turn forwards them to the Hummingbird Monitoring Network. Clearcut logging has occurred above this site recently so we are watching to see what effects this may have on our counts. Since 2010 there have been 1,400 birds banded. 52% were Calliope, 39% Rufous and 9% were Black-chinned.

Site 2 is at Westside Okanagan Lake, 30 minutes from Vernon. Banding is for two hours every two weeks at 7:00 AM. This area was ravaged by the White Lake fire in 2021, but thanks to a border of deciduous trees the banding site was saved. Since 2013 there have been 645 birds banded. 64% were Rufous, 30% were Calliope and 6% were Black-chinned.

Birds that already have a band attached are called "recaptures." At Site 1 there have been 58 recaptures, all banded in Lumby. At Site 2, there have been 35 recaptures, all banded at that site. It is encouraging to see the birds returning to their place of breeding and birth.

The birds are captured in specially designed traps and removed by the bander. They are taken to the table and a "blanket" is put around the bird to keep it calm. The tarsus measurement is recorded and a predetermined size band according to sex and species is attached. The females have a larger size band applied because their tarsus is larger during the breeding season. The bird is examined for parasites, pin feathers, molt, fat, and feather condition, then is measured, weighed, fed and released. The welfare of the bird is our primary concern and if a bird is stressed it is immediately let go.

There is a knack to trapping the birds and our trappers are very good at what they do. Our recorders are very skilled and work with the bander to process the bird in the shortest time possible. They watch the bird to ensure it is not stressed.

Every two years there is a 2–3 day workshop with all the provincial banding groups. We are brought up to date on any new techniques or information that will aid us in being the best caretakers while banding these amazing little birds. The information we gather will help to protect the birds and their environment.

BC teams are in a unique position to be banding in the summer breeding grounds for North America's hummingbirds. Because of this we have developed reference materials that reflect our breeding females and newly fledged juvenile hummingbirds.

Notes of interest:

- First Black-chinned was banded in Lavington BC in 2007
- First Anna's (female) was banded in Lumby BC in 2020 (first recorded sighting in Vernon was 2014)
- A Calliope female banded in Lumby on June 1, 2011 was recaptured in Fort Worth Texas in July 2011.

Below: a Rufous male being banded.

BC's Fossil Bird Tracks 101

Charles Helm, Tumbler Ridge

Northeastern BC is recognized as one of the world's hotspots for Mesozoic (i.e., the 'Age of Dinosaurs') bird tracks and trackways. These date to the latest Jurassic Period (around 145 million years old) and most of the Cretaceous Period (145–72 million years old). In fact, at the time of the first report of bird tracks from the region in the early 1980s,[1] this provided the oldest evidence in the world of avian tracks (they were an estimated 117 million years old). It was also only the third report ever made of Mesozoic bird tracks, which were assigned to *Aquatilavipes swiboldae* and were attributed to a probable small shorebird. Soon after their description, they were inundated beneath the waters of 'Dinosaur Lake' in the Peace River Canyon.

Further discoveries had to wait for the formation of the Tumbler Ridge Museum and its palaeontological work, but since 1994 a steady stream of discoveries has been made. Two discoveries were made in 2005: crane-like tracks, also dated to 117 million years, were identified on the shore of Williston Lake, the large dam on the Peace River, and were named *Limiavipes curriei*.[2] In the same year, seventy-two 110-million-year-old plover-like tracks were found southeast of Tumbler Ridge on Mt. Babcock. They were named *Paxavipes babcockensis*, which translates as 'bird track of the Peace from Babcock'.[3]

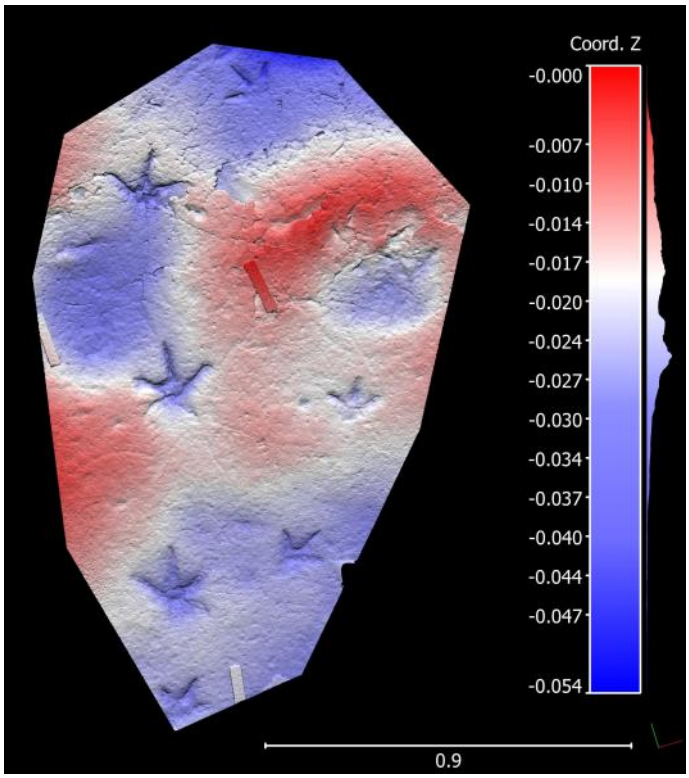
In 2014 a loose slab from nearby Mt. Roman, first identified in 1994, was airlifted by helicopter to the Tumbler Ridge Museum. Not only did it contain fifty 100-million-year-old three-toed tracks, possibly attributable to *Aquatilavipes swiboldae*, but under optimal lighting fainter, larger tracks exhibiting faint hallux impressions were noted. This contributed to the naming of *Ignotornis canadensis*.[4]

A 2014 discovery in the Tumbler Ridge mountains, not yet assigned to genus and species, was in rocks about 145 million years old. The bird tracks it contained are therefore some of the oldest ever identified, close to the time when birds evolved from theropod dinosaurs. A loose slab on nearby Mt Spieker, also containing bird tracks, was laboriously recovered and hauled to the Museum, where it resides in the collections area.

Complementing these discoveries were some very large tracks, known from elsewhere as *Magnoavipes* (translated as 'big bird-foot') and *Saurexallopus.* A problem is that no body fossils of birds of this size are known from the Cretaceous Period, and some researchers have contended that medium-sized non-avian theropod dinosaurs known as ornithomimids (bird-mimics) may have made the *Magnoavipes* tracks, with a similar argument being advanced for oviraptosaurs for the *Saurexallopus* tracks. Regardless of how one chooses to consider this debate, it is safe to say that these were large bird-like tracks, made by large bird-like creatures. In recent years, they have both been identified in the Tumbler Ridge area (95 million years old for *Magnoavipes*, both 112 and 72 million years old for *Saurexallopus*), and possible older *Magnoavipes* tracks have been found near Hudson's Hope.[2,5,6]

Less contentious were tracks from the splendid Ninesting Creek tracksite, in the Tumbler Ridge foothills. Here, on a 112-million-year-old surface, *Saurexallopus* tracks and the first pterosaur tracks from BC occurred on the same surface as trackways of the largest undisputedly avian tracks thus far reported from the Mesozoic in North America (Figure 1). These were assigned to the genus *Wupus*, which was first reported from Korea (also in association with pterosaur tracks). As a bonus, the surface also contained traces of fresh-water bivalves, on which the assemblage of birds, pterosaurs and (possibly) oviraptosaurs might have been feeding.[6]

Finally, some remarkable surface exposures between Tumbler Ridge and Chetwynd yielded the swim traces and tracks of giant crocodiles, made 97 million years ago.[7] Close inspection of one of these surface exposures revealed a short trackway containing three tiny tracks of a size made by a bird the size of a sandpiper or small tern. The middle track was the best preserved. The impressions made by the outer toes



Right: 3D photogrammetry image of part of the Ninesting Creek tracksite: Saurexallopus trackway is on the left; Wupus tracks and trackway are on the right.

were curved inwards. This is regarded as a proxy for some degree of webbing, and these tracks were interpreted in an article in *British Columbia Birds* as showing the oldest reported evidence of webbing in birds in North America (Figure 2).[8]

However, this is not the final word. Two discoveries in recent months in the Tumbler Ridge area have added to the fossil-bird-track inventory, and funding is being sought to recover these by helicopter and crane. Once formally studied, these will hopefully also be reported in the scientific literature, and in *BC Birding*.

Every discovery of fossil bird tracks can be regarded as a minor miracle: track-containing sediments were buried for millions of years, then re-exposed through erosion or cliff collapse, and identified and recovered in the brief window of time between re-exposure and disappearance. Bird tracks, especially the tinier ones, are small, fragile, and shallow. Whereas large dinosaur tracks can be recognized with relative ease by a trained eye, identifying shallow bird tracks ideally requires a bright LED light shone from an angle. For the moment, this is seldom achieved, as northeastern BC has a cornucopia of fossil tracks and a deficiency in palaeo-ornithologists. We can ponder on how many thousands of fossil avian tracksites have come in our province's northeast without ever being identified.

In combination, these findings form an important part of the global avian track record. Many of these bird tracks are exhibited in the Tumbler Ridge Museum. They form "guaranteed sightings" for visitors, and help to provide a unique perspective on deep avian time.

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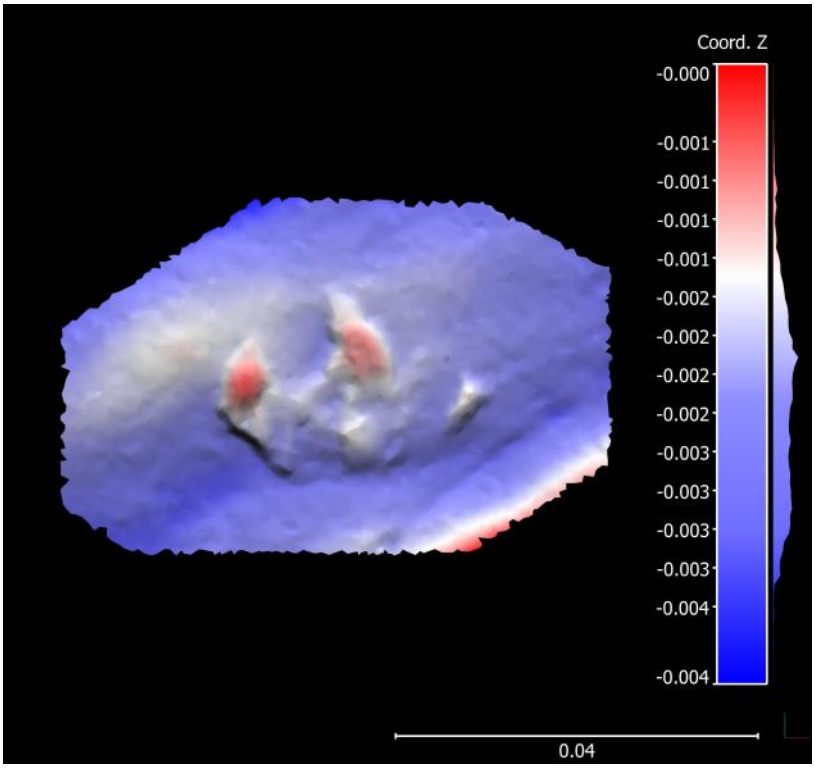
Below: 3D photogrammetry image of small avian track from between Tumbler Ridge and Chetwynd, showing incurving of outer digit impressions.



Book Review

Empids? Not So Tough!

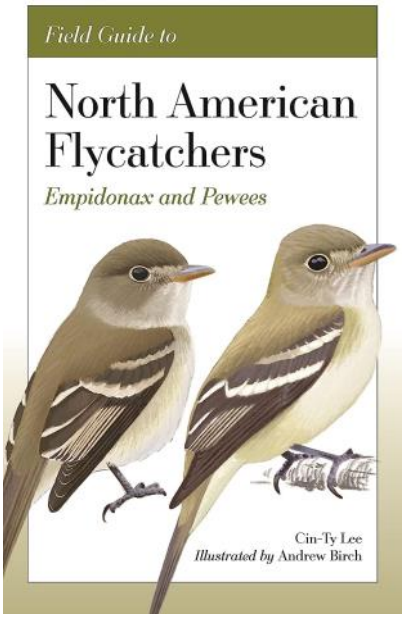
Clive Keen, Prince George

Field Guide to North American Flycatchers: Empidonax and Pewees, by Cin-ty Lee, illustrated by Andrew Birch, Published April 2023 by Princeton University Press, 157 pages, flexibound, $C24.95.

Empids and their lookalikes are the bane of many, perhaps most, birders. Faced with apparently indistinguishable features, many of us give up on visual IDs, falling back on aural cues alone. This book allows us to think, and look, again.

Unlike the birds, the book is not at all intimidating. It's a slim volume, clear and to the point, and quickly shows that empid identification is within our grasp once we know what to look for. It gets right down to it by listing and describing the features we must pay attention to:

- Crown shape
- Forehead angle
- Bill length
- Lower mandible colour
- Tail length
- Tail width
- Primary projection



- Wingbar contrast
- Wing panel contrast
- Upper/underpart contrast
- Eye-ring
- Overall colouration

Each of these is covered in a one- or two-page section with illustrations enabling you to see exactly what is meant. It was a particular delight to see "primary projection" explained and illustrated in a way that conveys the important point instantly.

The book argues, rightly, that once we learn to see, rather than ignore, the listed features, we can quickly home in on the most likely suspect. Throw in additional factors such as behaviour and habitat, and identification can in many cases be made quickly and with confidence, even without the sound.

The bulk of the book is a field guide, describing each bird and listing the distinguishing set of features. Lumpers may be pleased to find that the author clearly suspects that we should have stuck with *Traill's* and *Western** Flycatchers, but he nevertheless does his best to pin down whatever differences there are within each complex.

In the days before Merlin Sound ID and widespread bird photography the book would have been well worth carrying into the field, since it includes sonograms and illustrations showing the differences between the most similar species. Today, the book is more likely to be used back home, to check over recordings, notes, and photographs.

Conclusion

Buying this book is a no-brainer for serious birders. It is exactly what we needed. It won't make empid identification a snap, but it shows that with a little perseverance, it is not beyond any of us.

*Since the book was published, and this review written, Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatchers have indeed been relumped by the AOS into Western Flycatcher. Will we next get Traill's back?

Test For the Cin-ty Lee Approach

The photograph to the right was taken on August 6 to test the method described above. Dusky Flycatcher ticked all the relevant boxes: short primary projection, partly orange-yellow lower mandible, messy eye-ring, weak wingbar and wingpanel contrast, gray colouration, round/flattish crown shape and medium bill length. But the other most likely candidates all failed on at least three counts:

Hammond's would have smaller, darker bill, much longer primary projection, and more wingbar and panel contrast. Alder would have weaker eye-ring, be more olive-brown and have stronger wingbar contrast. Least would have smaller bill, be more olive-brown and have greater wing-panel contrast. QED, Dusky.

Gone Pishing

Bird Events at BX Dog Park

Chris Siddle, Vernon

The star of the show: Frankie. Photo by Chris Siddle.

Our small black dog agitates for two walks a day. I have the kind of personality that feels uncomfortable if my wife and I fail to meet this canine quota. I can't seem to ignore Frankie's pacing, stopping in her restless round in front of the couch to stare at us, ears pricked forward, tail held high (but curled), eyes shining and expression alert, her whole dog being straining, as if snap, "Come on. Come ON!"

There are two convenient places to walk Frankie. I briefly described Vernon's Mutrie and BX Dog parks in "Birding the Dog Parks" in the December 2019 issue of *BC Birding*. BX Dog Park underwent big changes in the spring of 2023. The first change was the climate, the drought. Since early May, the North Okanagan has been a furnace producing brutal afternoon and early evening temperatures. Time-lapse footage would show the park's grass growing, turning brown, shriveling, and turning to dust. In the place of grass, there is bare earth, the abandoned diggings of pocket gophers that have tunneled out of this blasted place, and a few tough stringy weeds that can take Sahara-like conditions. Ok, so I exaggerate a little. Let's just agree that week after week it has been unusually hot and dry. I miss our old climate

The second change came in the form of dog park improvements. The federal government gave the municipal government $155,000 which was passed on to Vernon's parks department which hired contractors over the early spring to excavate a large retaining pond next to BX Creek and to gravel most of the park's paths.

The pond branches off BX Creek which is a mountain stream with its headwaters around Silver Star ski village. With high May temperatures and rapid snowpack melt, BX Creek shot out of the hills like a fire hose gone wild. The pond filled instantly but then surprised many people by forming within a few days an elliptical sand and gravel bank at its upstream end. The contractors planted aspens on the pond's south bank which all died in the drought and have been replaced by Mother Nature by an assortment of thigh-high weeds. After spring run-off the water levels dropped a little, the pond became calm though constantly refreshed by artfully constructed rapids both up and downstream, and small fish began jumping for insects from its mirror-like surface in the evenings. Very soon waterfowl new to the park (Green-winged Teal hen and Common Merganser) added themselves to the park's bird list.

When I first wrote about BX Dog Park three and a half years ago, the park's checklist stood at 89 species. The new pond created new bird opportunities and the list has grown to 113. Spotted Sandpipers were quick to arrive. For a few days the female courted two males among the dying aspens on the south bank. Copulation was witnessed on 12 June. Somewhere beyond the dog-proof fence protecting the new pond, the female laid her four eggs in a straw-lined depression in the ground. I spotted the first downy chick on 29 June, 17 days later. Given an incubation period of 20-24 days for the species, it seems that the copulation I witnessed must have been for the final egg, or there was a second nest I didn't know about.

During July I saw the sandpiper chicks around the sandbar most mornings. Eventually the brood was reduced to a single chick. However, that canny chick survived July and was still alive as of mid-August.

The slow early morning walks that Frankie and I took during June and July added several more species to the breeding bird list. The gem was a green flycatcher once known as a Western Flycatcher, then re-named Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and now once again a Western Flycatcher.

During the unusually vigorous spring freshet, BX Creek jumped its streambed to cut a gravel bank two metres high. In June although I didn't know it at the time, a Pacific-slope Flycatcher built its little cup-like nest in the space where a large rock had popped out of the cliff, laid its eggs, and had its clutch parasitized by a Brown-headed Cowbird. When I discovered the nest on 10 July, only a sullen, hungry cowbird chick remained in the nest. There was no sign of any flycatcher chicks. Although I had recorded the occasional Pacific-slope Flycatcher in the park during previous years, this

Ground nesting species like Spotted Sandpipers usually suffer total nest predation at dog parks, but the pair at BX Creek luckily had their nest protected by fencing.

was my first nest record for this species.

Mourning Doves are abundant in BX Dog Park from mid-February to mid-October. This spring I discovered four nests in hawthorns between the south edge of the park and BX Road. All were small rudimentary piles of twigs and thin sticks. Each female covered the little nests very effectively to hold her clutch of two white eggs in place. At one nest I watched as a male dove arrived with a twig and walked along the hawthorn branch behind the female to present her the twig over her shoulder. Clumsy presentation I thought, until I read the introductory chapter to pigeons and doves in *Birds of the World* (Volume 4, page 87). Apparently male Mourning Doves are psychologically incapable of presenting nesting material to a female any other way. Who knew? I also read that pigeon and dove nests in general are of miminal design. The Portuguese have a delightful myth to explain why: while God was explaining to birds how to build nests, doves were too busy playing to pay attention.

Other birds that nested in and around the park included a hen Mallard with (originally) six ducklings, three of which made it to flight school, Gray Catbird, House Wren, American Robin, House Sparrow, House Finch, Nashville Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pygmy Nuthatch, Violet-green Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, and Spotted Towhee.

Red-tailed Hawks have a long-established nest in the top of a large Ponderosa Pine about 200 metres from the parking lot. This spring instead of progressing from territorial displays high over the tree to repairing the nest and copulating, the pair met with a delay and disappeared from the nest area. I thought they had become casualties of the record-setting hot May, until suddenly they were back, the male a champion provider. Some days after dropping off a pocket-gopher or a snake at the nest for the incubating female, he would leave only to return ten or fifteen minutes later with more prey. On 11 July, a date by which most of our local Red-tails had seen their young fledge, the BX Dog Park pair still had one chick barely into its first feathers still in the nest and its sibling just beginning to explore the branches immediately above the nest. Finally on 24 July both juveniles had fledged, a full month late.

Frankie reminds us twice a day that it time for walkies. She snuffles her way around the new and improved park with us just as she has done for years. She seldom strays; she's a good dog. She minds her own business and is happy after the walk to jump in the car for the ride home (window open, her brachycephalic muzzle into the slip stream). This summer we take her to the park earlier and later than usual because it's coolest then. The Okanagan's climate is different and harder to take. But Frankie's enthusiasm to visit the park remains strong, as does my desire to follow her to find out more about the lives of the birds that inhabit it.

Pacific-slope (Western) Flycatchers prefer vertical surfaces with ledges or shelves that support the nest from below and from one side. This July 2023 nest at BX Dog Park contained a cowbird chick. Photos by Chris Siddle.

Bird Photographers' Corner

Clive Keen, Prince George

Nikkor Z-Series 800 mm Lens

In the December 2022 edition of this magazine I raised the question of whether Nikon's new Z-series 800 mm prime lens – which was receiving rave reviews – might be the perfect birding lens. Well, after waiting 13 months for one to be delivered, I've been trying to find out.

There are certainly lots of good things to say about the lens. First, for such a big piece of glass, it's really quite manageable. At 5.26 pounds, it weighs only a pound more than my Tamron 150-600 G2 zoom, and is actually easier to carry. A supplied shoulder strap attaches to two lugs on the side of the lens, so it hangs cleanly lens-downwards. This makes it much more comfortable to carry than the Tamron zoom, which has to hang horizontally from a strap attached to the tripod collar, and tends to swing as I walk.

Second, the lens is remarkably easy to use handheld even for quite extended periods of time. It is nicely balanced, and far lighter than the 800 mm lenses of yore, which tended to exceed ten pounds. I can easily hold the camera to my eye for about the same amount of time as I hold my binoculars.

The third and perhaps most important thing I immediately noticed about the lens is that it allows photographing from distances that won't disturb birds. From an ethical point of view this is a great step forward, but it also means that you're more likely to photograph the bird rather than the space where the bird used to be. You are also able to crop your photographs much less, giving you all the quality gains that that brings.

And talking of cropping: when I switched the camera from FX to DX mode, I found I could take shots from a distance (see the Harrier below) which seemed to be almost cheating. Handholding at an effective 1200mm, and still producing sharp images, does seem close to fraudulent. The excellent image stabilization system in the lens is a major part of the trickery: the image in the viewfinder, and thus on the sensor, always seems perfectly steady.

One of the key selling features of the lens is that it's rated as extremely sharp, and indeed the lens forgives a huge amount of cropping, which is still often unavoidable in birdtography. Another indication I found of the lens' sharpness is that Topaz's AI Sharpen program essentially leaves its images alone, whereas it works hard and significantly improves the sharpness from the Tamron 150–600.

The lens does take a bit of getting used to. There are five function buttons, four of which I've disabled at the moment, because I keep pressing them unintentionally, causing me confusion while trying to take a shot. I unintentionally turn the control ring sometimes too, but am sticking with it, because I've set it to change the ISO, which is marvellous when a bird takes flight and I need to change ISO instantly to set very high shutter speeds.

The Perfect Birding Lens?

Yes and no. In many circumstances the lens is a dream, producing images far beyond the aspirations of years past. And yet in other circumstances, it would mean missed shots. When I analyzed my favourite shots taken with the 150–600 zoom, I found that around 40% were taken at less than full extension. If the birds are relatively tame, close, or large, 800 mm gives too much magnification; a zoom, by contrast, gives you the option to throttle back and get the composition you need. For a general-purpose birding lens, superzooms can be a better bet. And talking of which, Nikon has just introduced a Z-series 180–600 mm lens which costs about a fifth of the 800 mm. It would be my recommendation for those planning to own just one birding lens. But if you can stretch to two, this 800 mm is a marvellous addition.

Below: a shot that would never have been attempted without the reach and sharpness of the 800 mm prime lens. Northern Harrier, Shelley lagoons, 23 July 2023, Nikon Z7 ii, 1/800 sec, f6.3, ISO 500, DX crop, cropped again.