

BC BIRDING

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John Gordon (Surrey) found this mystifying bird in Jackman Wetlands in Aldergrove – see page 3 for an identification.

Publisher

BC Birding is a newsmagazine 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 \$16 annual premium.

About the BCFO

Membership in BCFO is open to anyone interested in the study and enjoyment of wild birds in BC. 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. Annual Membership dues are:

General Membership: \$30

Junior Membership (<19, Canada): Free

Newsmagazine Submissions

To submit or suggest material for this publication, contact the Editor by email at clive_keen@hotmail.com.

Submissions sought: birding experiences, observations about bird behaviour, project reports, site guides, birding equipment, birding technique, specialist birding (e.g. sea-watching or hawkwatching), bird photography, trip reports, reflections on birding, and other subjects of broad interest to birders. This is a newsmagazine rather than an academic journal, so reference lists etc are usually inappropriate.

Text length and style: brief items are always welcome, but average submissions tend to be in the 400–800 word range. Maximum length accepted: 1,500 words.

Articles: submit in plain text, either as the content of an email, or as an attachment (preferably Word).

Photographs: send as separate attachments, NOT embedded in text. Be sure to name the photographer and suggest a caption.

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

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

Advertising Rates

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

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AGM DATES

June 13–15, 2025

BCFO 35th Conference and AGM,
Dawson Creek.

June 15–17, 2025

Post-conference extension trip.

ZOOM PRESENTATIONS

Zoom presentations for BCFO members take place on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:00 PM, with a focus on birds and birders' travels. The first presentations after the summer hiatus are as follows:

17 September 2025

TBA – Michael Force.

15 October 2025

Vancouver Island Big Year – Liam Ragan.

19 November 2025

TBA – Rob Butler.

For updates see:

bcfo.ca/zoom-presentations-schedule/

Front Cover Photograph

In early May John Gordon (Surrey) photographed what he at first thought was a Townsend's Warbler, but on close examination proved to be a rare Black-throated Gray x Townsend's Warbler hybrid.

President's Message

Nathan Hentze, Victoria

The BCFO Annual General Meeting and Conference are just around the corner (in the northeast corner, of the province). Preparations have been going on, in some form or another, for over a year. Having borne witness to the organizational requirements of a couple BCFO conferences now, I wanted to start by thanking all those involved in the planning. The AGM/conference is the crown jewel in the BCFO birding year, and this year's Dawson Creek program is no exception. I hope that many of you will be able to make it to that very special part of the province. But for those of you who cannot, you will be missed, but your presence in BCFO is important and appreciated regardless.

I'm personally greatly looking forward to the conference, catching up with many birders I see only once a year or less, hearing the great line-up of talks, and hopefully seeing many birds I haven't seen in BC in quite a few years. Maybe I'll even get a new BC bird if a Ruby-throated Hummingbird co-operates. But of all the amazing birds of the Peace, perhaps Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is a good personal mascot for the conference.

Much like the flycatcher, I'll be flying up in early-mid June, present for a relatively short period of time, and, at least according to my kids, tend to repeat myself when talking (though might do so less if they ever listened the first time...). I saw my first Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in the province almost to the

day, nineteen years before this year's conference. I had moved to Prince George the month before and decided to make a solo trek to the Dawson Creek area to pad my BC list. That flycatcher was somewhere up a dusty, bumpy, unpaved road, which I trekked up in a little blue Mazda 626, while logging and pickup trucks flew past. Several oil patch workers stopped to ask if I needed assistance, but since none of them had ever even heard of a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, they could provide none. At long last I heard the flycatcher calling, and was able to get great looks before I retreated to paved surfaces. In

total I saw fifteen new BC birds over that three-day trip, including my lifer Cape May Warbler.

I hope that those in attendance at this year's conference will likewise come away with memorable sightings and experiences, in celebration of all the birds of the province. I hope that too, for those not in attendance.

A full detailing of the past year's activities will be presented at the June AGM, with written reports from the various committees thereafter published in the September newsletter. In the meantime, happy birding!

Welcome New Members

Monica Dahl, Courtenay

Sylvie Schimann, Prince George

Val Hardy, Kelowna

Tania Tripp, Duncan

**Ron Long, Port
Moody**

**Toby St Clair,
Vancouver**

**Joan Kerr,
Beaverlodge**

**Jeanne Smith,
Beaverlodge**

**Al Mottishaw,
Dawson Creek**

**Ken Otter, Prince
George**

**Brian Paterson,
Dawson Creek**

**Ally Nichols,
Fort St John**

**Lisa Blanchard,
Maple Ridge**

**Inge-Jean Hansen,
Dawson Creek**

**Amelia Preston,
Victoria**

**Christopher
Parsons, Kelowna**

**Emily Upham-Mills,
Nanaimo**



BCFO 35th CONFERENCE & AGM, June 13 – 15, 2025, Dawson Creek, BC

Schedule of Events

**FULL DETAILS OF THE CONFERENCE ARE INCLUDED IN THE MARCH 2025 EDITION
AND AT bcfo.ca/2025-conference-agm/**

Friday, June 13

Registration, Social and Saturday Field Trip Signup: 5:00 PM until 8:00 PM at the George Dawson Inn, Tremblay Room. Pick up your conference registration package and socialize with fellow birders. There will be appetizers and a cash bar. Sign the conference waiver form; review the BCFO Code of Ethics and make your field trip selections for Saturday morning.

Saturday, June 14

Breakfast: For those staying at the George Dawson Inn, Breakfast will be available at 5:00 AM in the Tremblay Room. The hotel restaurant is open for guests and non-guests, and Tim Hortons and McDonald's are across the street. Meet in the parking lot at 5:20 for field trip departure at 5:30 sharp! Snacks & drinks will be available during the field trips to hold people over until lunch.

Conference Field Trips: 5:30 AM sharp departures from the George Dawson Inn parking area; return approx 11:30.

- Trip #1: McQueen Slough, Comstock marsh, north of Rolla (access to some sites may be weather/road dependent)
- Trip #2: Swan Lake & Road 201
- Trip #3: Taylor (Big Bam & Johnson Roads)
- Trip #4: Bear Mtn/Radar Lake / Pasture Road (exact route will depend on road conditions)
- Trip #5: Brassey Creek & Arras

Lunch: 12:00 to 1:00 PM in the Tremblay Room .

Afternoon Speakers: 1:00 to 3:00 PM. Amie MacDonald & Kianna Leung (Bird Studies Canada) *Tracking birds and bats in northern BC with the MOTUS wildlife tracking system* followed by Sandra Milligan (North Island College) *Birdbrain?!*

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

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

Banquet: 6:30 to 7:30 PM.

Steve Cannings Award Presentation: 7:30 PM.

Keynote Speaker: 7:45. Dr Ken Otter, UNBC – *Drivers of Cultural Evolution in White-throated Sparrow Song – Lessons from Citizen Science Initiatives.*

Sunday, June 15

Breakfast: As above.

Morning Field Trips: As above, departing at 5:30 AM from the George Dawson Inn parking area.

Lunch: 12:00 to 1:00 PM. Tally-up of bird species on summary charts.

Farewell

News & Notes

It's Lillooet Next

Were you unable to attend the 2025 conference? To help ensure you won't miss out next time, here's a note from Ian Routley, Chair of the 2026 AGM Planning Team:

Lillooet will be the host of the 2026 BCFO AGM, June 5–7. We last hosted the BCFO AGM in 2007. Lillooet is on the rain-shadow side of the coastal mountains and is traditional St'at'imc territory. We offer a mix of both interior grassland species as well as more coastal birds. As with most of the province, fires and climate change have influenced our local avifauna and it is now difficult to predict what a given spring will bring in abundance. We remain the first site in Canada to have a record of a Cook's Petrel; come and visit us in 2026 to see what other birds you can add to the BC avifauna record for Lillooet.

BC Bird Alerts

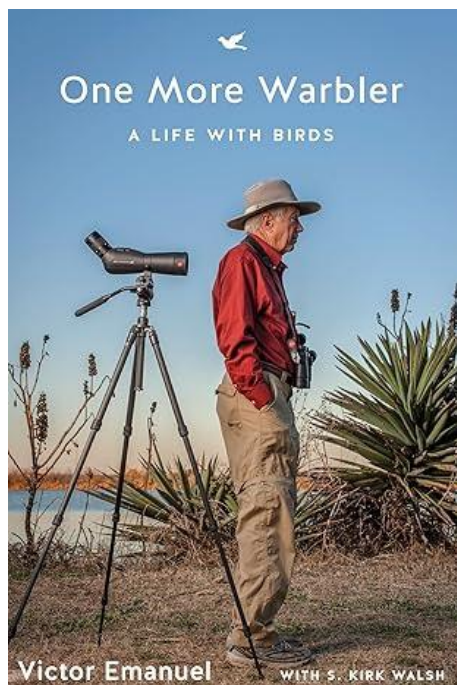
Since the deadline for the March edition of this magazine, the following alerts were issued:

- BLUE GROSBEAK, Peachland, May 25–28
- SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER near Tofino, May 23–24
- BRAMBLING, Burnaby, May 21
- BLACK-THROATED SPARROW, May 18
- BLACK PHOEBE, Victoria, March 29
- WHITE-WINGED DOVE, Vancouver, March 22–April 17
- TUFTED DUCK, Vancouver and Richmond, March 1–April 19
- GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE, Chemainus, March 1

See bcbirdalert.blogspot.com

Victor Emanuel

One of the most important architects of nature tourism, Victor Emanuel, died on 11 March, 2025, at the age of 84. Victor Emanuel Nature Tours first started operation in 1976, when nature tourism and ecotourism were virtually unknown. VENT has prospered in the



years since, taking birders and naturalists to all corners of the globe. The success of the company inspired many other operators to enter the field, making such tours practically *de rigueur* for the serious birder. Victor's memoir, *One More Warbler, A Life with Birds*, was published in 2017.

Wings Over the Rockies 2025

Rob Butler, New Westminster

It doesn't take much to draw me to the beautiful East Kootenays. The stunning landscapes and internationally recognized wetlands are a naturalist's dream location so when the organizers of The Wings Over the Rockies Festival inquired about me speaking at their gala, I jumped at the opportunity. The festival, now in its 28th year, draws nearly 2,000 birders and nature lovers from

across the province, Canada and the USA. A few of the out-of-town birders told me that they had discovered the festival online and added it to their travel plans. That's a great option while exploring the beautiful Columbia Valley wetlands.

This year's event featured *Wildflowers*, a film by Meghan J. Ward about Mary Schäffer Warren's 1908 expedition to Maligne Lake. Warren was a trail-breaking adventurer in the Canadian Rockies. Also on the ticket was an evening of music by legendary Harry Manx, whose solo show brought the crowd to its feet. I spoke after the gala dinner about establishing a *Mountain Way of Life* based in nature.

There was a host of outdoor events each day, with expert guides such as the one I joined to explore a route off Westside Road. Led by Festival Board Member and expert birder Brian Wesley, I along with 16 other keen birders spent a morning in the sunshine searching for birds south of Invermere. A Yellow-rumped Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Cassin's Vireo greeted us at the parking lot before we wound our way through Douglas-fir forest where we heard Hammond's and Dusky Flycatchers.

Openings along the road became sparrow country, with six species putting on a performance: Chipping, Song, Vesper, White-crowned, Clay-colored and Lincoln's.

Nearing the road's summit, Brian requested everyone be as silent as possible in hopes of seeing a Dusky Grouse. Breast feathers from two sparring male grouse were the best we could do but a three-some of Canada Jays graciously filled in for the grouse. Farther up the road where the hill began to level Brian once again signalled to move quietly on toward a small pond. To our delight there were a few Ruddy Ducks paddling in such a small pond along with a Barrow's Goldeneye, a few Bufflehead and Mallards, and along the shore a single Solitary Sandpiper poked about in search of insects. A Townsend's Solitaire whistled our

attention from a nearby tree where it obligingly perched for all to see. On our return along the road a Peregrine Falcon streaking past overhead brought astonished smiles to everyone.

The following day I joined Chris and Shelagh Wrazej for a quick ride on e-bikes followed by a visit of the Wilmer National Wildlife Area to see Trumpeter Swans, Sandhill Cranes and Vaux's Swifts.

If you haven't attended a Wings Over the Rockies Festival, plan to do so next year. The 29th annual festival will feature over 100 events, May 4 – 10, 2026. The theme will be Adventure in Nature and the guest speaker will be adventurer Adam Shoalts. Visit www.wingsovertherockies.org for further festival information.

Birding Capital of Canada?

On May 10 in Beacon Hill Park, during World Migratory Bird Day, Rocky Point Bird Observatory declared the BC Capital Region the Birding Capital of Canada. It is not simply hubris: the region has 423 eBird species, more than any other region in Canada. Essex County in Ontario, which includes Point Pelee, might have been thought a stronger contender for the title, but it has significantly fewer eBird species, at 411. (Thanks to Jacques Sirois for the information.)

Birds Need Insects – Stories Wanted

Rob Butler, New Westminster

When I was a boy our family made an annual trek to the Okanagan Valley where we camped for a two week summer holiday. One of my memories of the journey was how the family car was splattered with insects. So thick were the insects that some drivers installed bug screens on their front bumper to keep the bodies out of their car radiators. Those days seem to be mostly

gone it seems and alas, with them so are insect-eating birds. I am looking for dates and locations when insects were numerous and approximately when you noticed a decline. If insects are still numerous, I would like to hear about that too. Your story might be similar to my childhood memory of summer holiday journeys or when you had an abundance of moths at your porchlight at night. Any anecdote is welcome. Please send your story to me at robwbutler@shaw.ca. If I get enough stories, I will compile them into a future news item.

Thermal Imagers for Birding

Thermal imaging monoculars, once marketed mainly to hunters, are starting to find a place in birding. They are not just useful for night-time birding – owls and nighthawks can be located with relative ease – but have a role to play in daytime. Birds that are camouflaged or hidden in shadow or foliage can be found quickly and easily through their thermal glow.



Thermal imagers started to show their ornithological value during bird surveys, enabling far more accurate estimates of roosting and nesting numbers. This would justify what was until recently their high cost: often around five thousand dollars. Now that much less expensive imagers are becoming available, hobbyists are starting to take notice. Birds that can take a long time to find, such as snipe, can be detected instantly, and challenging birds such as grassland sparrows can cease to be sources of frustration.

Few birders have acquired imagers as yet, though, so there is little shared information about the most suitable

brands, types and features. For those thinking of dipping their toes, the following pointers should be useful:

1. Look for the compact imagers that slip easily into a pocket. Birders are already encumbered with binoculars, cameras, and perhaps tripods; one more piece of bulky equipment would likely be left at home.
2. Avoid imagers designed just for hunters. They might be great for spotting moose at a kilometre, but can have too narrow a field of view for birds in the immediate vicinity.
3. Features, and thus prices, vary hugely. For anyone simply wanting to see if the technology could be of value to them to locate skulking birds, brands at the lower end of the price scale would suffice. [Bushnell](http://Bushnell.com), for instance, offers a product that covers the basic functions at just \$300.

A video explaining the value of thermal imaging for birders can be found at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs2qABJRJ-g.

The featured Pulsar Axion imager is at the high end of the price range, at \$2,700, but the advertisement gives a good overview of what such instruments can offer.

If you have experience with thermal imagers, and can give any advice about use, features or brands, write and tell us about it.

Bird Friendly Cities

32 Canadian municipalities have now been given the Bird Friendly designation, which recognizes communities that are taking meaningful action to protect birds, such as reducing bird-window collisions and cat predation, and preserving critical habitats.

The Bird Friendly program is a federal government-supported initiative of Nature Canada. For more information head to naturecanada.ca.

BCFO Young Birders' Award Winners



Above: Markus Duhme (Vancouver) with friendly Chickadee. Right: Yuseon Park accompanied by a Wilson's Warbler.

Markus Duhme

Carlo Giovanella recommended Markus Duhme (now aged 15) for a BCFO Young Birders' award after initially noticing this young lad with a big camera intently engaged in the search for a Prothonotary Warbler. The lad knew exactly what he was doing, and how to approach the challenge. Two years later, Carlo contacted Markus' father and a Reifel trip ensued. Markus proved to use camera and binoculars like an expert, and recognized birds instantly to create the eBird list. The photos he has contributed to various sites have already won several awards. Carlo was soon convinced that he met all the expectations for receipt of a BCFO Young Birder's Award.

Yuseon Park

Yuseon Park (now 14 years old) was nominated for an award by Rémi Torrenta. Yuseon arrived in Vancouver two years ago from South Korea, and has since created a young birder club, has regularly submitted eBird checklists, has developed bird photography skills, volunteered at VARC and Wildresearch banding stations, took part in the Coastal Waterbird Survey at Deep Cove, in the Fraser Estuary Key Biodiversity Area Bird Count, and in the Roberts Bank Shorebird. She is actively looking to pursue a career in ornithology.



Award Winner Update

Seth Benoit was a 2024 Young Birders' Award winner.

It Shouldn't Be There - But Was

Seth Benoit, Westbridge

In January I was invited to attend, and also to guide, at the annual Creston Bird Festival. So, from our home in the Kootenay Boundary region, my Dad and I headed east in the Central Kootenay. On our way we picked up many nice species, including Canyon Wren, Lewis's Woodpecker, Sora and tons of waterfowl. As all birders know, time tends to slip away and there always seems to be more stops than planned. By the time we got to Creston, it was dark. But it had been a great day.

We had a blast over the weekend. It was my first time professionally guiding which was super cool. I was quite happy when I got the whole group onto a motionless snipe-head poking out of the marshlands. My dad and I met a really nice group of birders, and we ended up spending quite a bit of time with them.

I soon learned that my favourite place in the Creston Valley was Duck Lake. It was the presence of shorebirds that made it particularly interesting to me. During the course of the weekend, if I wasn't actively guiding, I seemed to end up at Duck Lake, sometimes with friends, sometimes with my dad. I'm sure we spent at least ten hours there during the weekend.

With the festival finished on Monday, and most people gone, we had little left to do but pack up. While driving back through Creston we decided to do a last check at Duck Lake and see if any new species had come in overnight. I love shorebirds. They were plentiful this weekend and I was keen to see more!

THE BCFO YOUNG BIRDER AWARD

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

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

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

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

If you know of a potential candidate for this award, contact any of the BCFO Directors – see page 2 for addresses.

So, we found ourselves at the lake yet again. After the first scan, we didn't find much. A couple Killdeer, that was it. We turned around thinking maybe we had wasted our time, but I got out and began scoping the flats just in case. Pretty soon I came across a small group of shorebirds all together sleeping. Somehow, I had missed them on my first scan! Most were identified fairly quickly as Dunlin, a species we hadn't yet seen, plus a few plovers.

Then I noticed a different calidris shorebird which I could not immediately ID. I was a bit confused after checking the field marks. Overall, it looked most similar to a Dunlin (which was my initial thought), but it had characteristics that were just "off". It was larger, had greenish legs and an almost straight bill. It also showed no signs of entering breeding plumage, which I knew a Dunlin should by mid May.

After watching it for a while my dad suggested Red Knot, which I had considered, but immediately dismissed thinking it was impossible. Instead, we kept watching and trying to make an ID

using more likely species. We left thinking that it may have been a really weird Dunlin, but I was still uncertain.

We left the lake with tons of pictures and great looks. I sent a few emails out to birders I thought would be able to make a positive ID. A couple of hours after my initial sighting, I got replies to my emails. I was super excited to learn that it was indeed a Red Knot after all! That was one of my most exciting birding moments and a memory to remember. It was also the first record for the southern interior and a life bird for me, so we were very hyped the rest of our trip.

This turned out to be one of the rarest birds I have ever found, so it was quite a memory. It's always very rewarding when you put so much hard work into an ID and it ends up being well worth the effort. I learned a valuable lesson that day: never brush off an odd bird as something common just because it shouldn't be there. Trust your ID because you might just make birding history!

Avian Encounters

A Beautiful Sunday Morning

Ron Long, Port Moody

A few months ago I bought a bicycle and began riding regularly on the dikes along the Pitt River. The dikes are popular and during the day are crowded with dog walkers, hikers and other cyclists, so early morning has become my time. Often I would take a break, sit on a bench and look along the dike for a kilometre in each direction and see no one. The quiet is glorious – nothing but birdsong all around me.

The other day I noticed a pair of Ospreys just beginning to build a nest on top of a piling at the edge of the river opposite the mouth of Deboville Slough. On seeing the nesting activity I realized that there was a rare photographic opportunity here. The light was perfect and I would be able to approach close enough for good telephoto pictures.

When biking I don't usually carry my big camera and lens – they are heavy – but the next day (Sunday) I was back at first light and suitably equipped for serious photography.

It was a beautiful morning, sunny and mild, and the Ospreys were flying back and forth bringing sticks for the nest. I waited until they were away then moved carefully closer to the piling and sat down on a log. I am very aware of my effect on the natural behaviour of the birds I photograph. If the Ospreys didn't return soon I would move away, but they were back within minutes and continued their collecting forays. The key to successful bird photography is very slow movement or, preferably, no movement at all. And so I kept very still and quiet.

Sitting there, with birdsong and activity all around punctuated by the calls of a Barred Owl behind me, I became



just a part of the scenery and it was absolutely wonderful. I checked my camera settings and made test exposures to make sure I was ready for the arrival of the birds.

Each time an Osprey returned to the nest it would flare dramatically as it landed which gave me spectacular full-frame photographs. My feet were soaked, my shoes covered in mud and my backside numb from the hard log but I could not have been happier.

Every arrival provided perfect photos. The birds almost always landed facing me and, as I had anticipated, the light on them was perfect. I shot and shot until, two hours later, my camera battery finally died. I had almost a thousand (976) photos and, although I was thoroughly enjoying myself, I decided it was time to leave. So once again I waited until the birds were away then stiffly made my way back.

You may wonder – why so many photos? Firstly, for me nothing could be more fun. Secondly, it was a unique opportunity and I wanted to be sure I had the best possible shots. It was certainly not a matter of taking hundreds of pictures and hoping some might turn out. Thanks to my tests I knew they all would be good technically. It is things like wing position that are different every time. Even with so many photos there is always one that stands out. And that one is worth all the effort.

Multiple Raptors

Shawn Mason, North Vancouver

Local birders from Pemberton were fascinated to find this (red-listed) Northern Hawk-Owl hunting the fields. Heavy snow had melted down and easily exposed prey.

In a couple of hours of birding we found six raptor species that were taking advantage of the warmer weather. The Hawk-Owl gave us a great show of his hunting skills.

Photo by Ellen Ramsay.



Avian Encounters, cont.

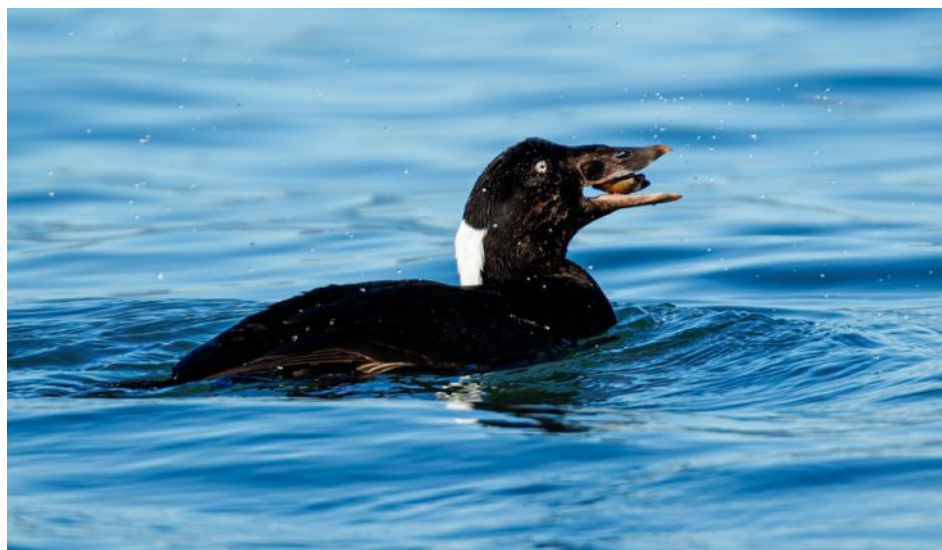
Intersex Surf Scoter

Frank Lin

As an environmental educator for Stanley Park Ecology who leads birding tours for the public as well as wildlife surveys such as the Coastal Waterbird Survey with Birds Canada, one of the highlights for me this season was observing this particular Surf Scoter at Second Beach in Stanley Park. This appears to be an intersex female which has developed some aspects of male plumage. I had first seen this individual back in March 2023, and it was particularly striking in that it had an all-black forehead and bill, lacking the white forehead patch and colourful bill of an adult male surf scoter – the eyes were pale but had some dark flecking around the iris.

At the time there was some debate among birders whether it was young male with an aberrant molt or an intersex female that had developed male plumage (uncommon but more often seen in other ducks such as Mallards).

It is important to note that immature male Surf Scoters have highly variable plumage in their first three years. Some second-year males lack the white



Above: Surf Scoter. Below: Redhead. Photos by authors.

forehead patch but would already have a bright orange bill similar to adult males, while this bird still shows a dark blackish bill with just an orange tip. The eye markings were quite intriguing and unlike a typical Surf Scoter of either sex – the iris being pale with dark flecking spots around the iris.

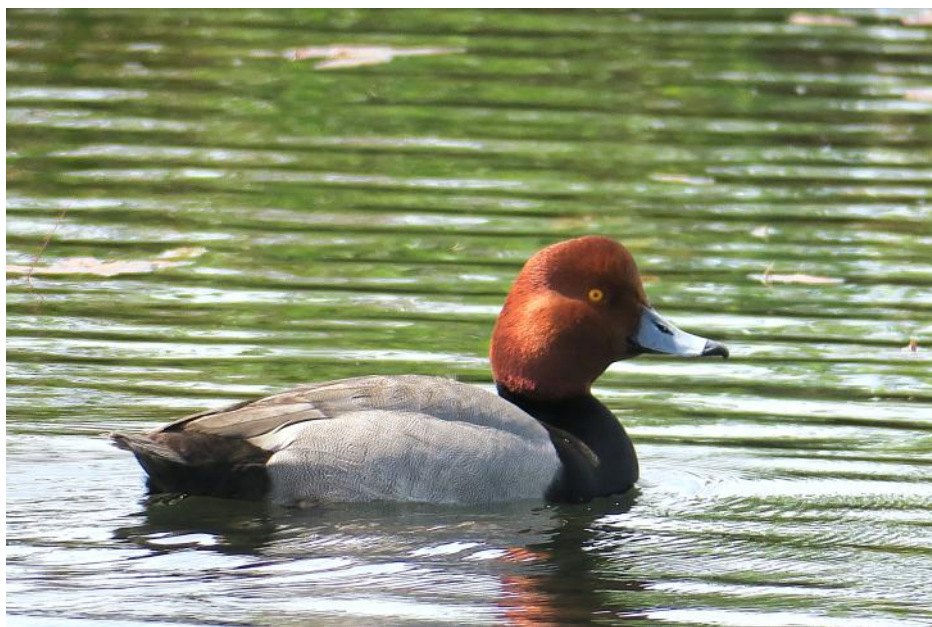
Last spring (March 2024) another fellow birder saw the same bird again in nearly the same plumage at the same location, and I was delighted to find this bird in December, seeing it a few subsequent occasions up until late March with other Surf Scoters. The fact that it is in nearly the same plumage

for the past two years suggests it at least hatched in 2022. It is particularly fascinating to know that this same bird has returned to this location and I hope it will return in years to come.

Odd Duck

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

On May 5 while at the Long Beach airport, I bumped into Ian Cruickshank, Mike McGrenere, and Susan Donneke. They were just leaving and tipped me off that there was a male Redhead on the long pond. Fortunately it was still there and I got lucky. It's the first male Redhead I've ever seen on the west coast. The species is seen few and far between on the west coast. And what a handsome bird.



Change of Diet

Dennis Forsyth, Denman Island

I am currently monitoring an active Bald Eagle nest near the Gravelly Bay ferry terminal on Denman Island. Mostly the male has been bringing fairly mature-looking Pacific Herring to the nest, but a few days ago while he sat guard above, the nesting female

made a sortie on her own. She did not fly out over the water but headed inland instead. Clearly she was soaring above several rural and semi-agricultural properties located nearby. As I watched with binoculars she suddenly dropped out of sight in a fairly shallow soaring dive, and came in with what was clearly a former domestic chicken. Certainly her male partner was impressed but I'm not sure that the owner of the chicken was. And I am pretty sure the chicken itself was past caring.

Wet and Windy

Kate Farrell, Nanaimo

There was a windy and wet start to a trip out on the Salish Sea with Rocky Point Bird Observatory and Eagle Wing Tours, but the skies cleared giving great sightings of a juvenile Brown Pelican, large groups of Bonaparte Gulls, and some Pigeon Guillemots on the rocks sheltering from the storm. There was also a far sighting of a Fork-Tailed Storm-Petrel but sadly no shot.



Above and right: Brown Pelican and Pigeon Guillemots by Kate Farrell.

Bottom left: Red Crossbill by Kathryn Clouston.



Crossbills Galore

Kathryn Clouston, Courtenay

It has been a crazy year for Red Crossbills in the Comox Valley. We usually

only see them occasionally in the winter but this year they started appearing in late summer and are continuing until now. I got photos at the Courtenay Airpark of birds almost close enough to touch.

Exotic Goose

This Ruddy-headed Goose was spotted by Andy Buhler in the Falklands – see next page.



Birds & Bergs in the Southern Seas

Andy Buhler. Vernon

Since our retirement, international travel and birding have been both our interest and our enjoyment. Travel destinations have been dictated by where we would find both interesting places to explore and new birds to see and enjoy. However, in the last couple of years our bodies have begun to tell us that we must remember that we retired over twenty years ago. Knees and hips complain that hills have been getting higher. Somewhere along the way "endurance" has not "endured" as it once did. Our last two birding tours have found us puffing on the roadsides and wiping our brows while most others on the tour still strode past to check out the latest bird find. Maybe it

really was time for us to listen to our bodies. Maybe it was time to think about a bit of non-birding travel. Maybe we should consider a cruise, even though we had always considered that mode of travel as one designed specifically for "old folks". (Is one considered *old* in one's 80s?)

Following our personal mantra of "do it while you still can" we booked a cruise to Antarctica with Wells Gray Travel. At least from the ship we should be able to spot some penguins and those would be new to our bird list. And there would be a few ports where we could get off and scan the streets and trees for a few land birds.

Our cruise went from late January 2025 to late February 2025. It was one of our better travel decisions. Not only

That was a real treat and though we did not get the big bird list we might have got with a birding guide, we did spot some interesting birds on our own while doing the guided Falls walks. Some of our sightings included: Plush-crested Jays, Rufous Horneros, Chestnut-eared Aracari, Toco Toucan, Cattle Tyrant, Blue-and-white Swallow, Southern Lapwing, Pale-breasted Thrush, Chalk-browed Mockingbirds, Chopi Blackbirds and Great Dusky Swifts, all of which were new to us. There were also Tropical Kingbirds, Burrowing Owls, Neotropic Cormorants, Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures just to bulk up the list. Surprisingly, we saw no Rock Pigeons or House Sparrows while there, though they were seen later on.

The Falklands

Our next couple of days were sailing days. Then we were very fortunate to be able to make a one-day stop at the Falkland Islands. That stop is not always possible. There are no dock facilities to moor a cruiser at Stanley, the capital. All ships must anchor out in a bay and landfall requires the use of small tenders to transport passengers from ship to shore. If the weather is too stormy, which it can often be, then there will be no landfall and the ship will just cruise on past.

We were fortunate not only to land, but also to be able to book a half-day tour to Bluff Cove where there was a small King and Gentoo Penguin colony. The penguins and we shared a beachfront. Rangers told us not to cross over the flag line that separated us from the birds. They did say that the penguins were not trained to follow the same instruction so they might cross the line and attack any loose shoelaces or open toes. During our visit both sides of the flag line behaved themselves. We just watched the penguins as they just watched us. However, there were a couple of bonuses at this stop. Firstly, the tour organizers offered a free bev-

Below: Plush-chested Jays. All photos by author.



did we get to explore new and interesting places but we also unexpectedly got to tally about 70 species of birds, 40 of which were lifers. The biggest bonus: we found that we could always keep up with the rest of our travel companions, young and old, as long as we were on the same deck. The only real downer was that we did not have the camaraderie of sharing the sightings with our travel companions. Their focus was traveling, not birding, though we did actually convert a couple of them by the end of the trip.

Iguazu Falls

Our cruise started in Buenos Aires, Argentina and, before we headed off to sea, Wells Gray had planned an overnight stay at Iguazu Falls.

erage and two pieces of homemade baking at their beachside SeaCabbage Café before we left. Secondly, there were other birds on, or above, the beachfront. We were able to spot the following: Flightless Steamer Ducks, Kelp Geese, Upland Geese, Ruddy-headed Geese, Magellanic Oystercatchers, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant, Two-banded Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, White-bridled Finch, Brown Skua and Southern Giant Petrel. Not too shabby for one afternoon on a supposedly non-birding cruise! There were also House Sparrows on the Falklands. They had actually proved their utility by learning to eat the earwigs that were plaguing the islands. Not a House Sparrow's normal plat de jour.

The Bergs

The next twenty-two days were spent sailing down to the Antarctic Peninsula and back up to Ushuaia, at the base of South America. This was The Bergs portion of the trip and it included everything from breakaway ice sheets that were several kilometers long to "brash ice" that was the mini-bits of ice that dust the waters near the calving glaciers. Growlers and bergy bits were those other ice chunks, smaller than bergs but larger than brash ice. (Check the web for sizes if you want.) The voyage through the Southern Sea's variety of ice forms, past stark snow-capped



Above: Nobody at home at Port Lockroy Research Station – except some penguins.

Below: There was a film about another such encounter

up-thrusts of glacier-coated granite, and within waving distance of some of the most remote of research stations was quite thrilling. And so were the sightings of penguin groups resting on floes, "porpoising" as they chased after their fishy prey and then struggling to climb high up on the scree of steep cliff faces. Whale sightings were frequent and we did spot occasional White-chinned Petrels and Black-browed Albatross.

The final leg of the cruise was

northwards mostly along the Beagle Channel on the westward side of Chile. There were several ports of call. History talks given in this part of the world differ from what we learn about in North America. The explorers and heroes of this area were Magellan and Darwin to name just a couple. We learned a lot that we had not even considered before, but all was not just history talks and travelogues. We were also able to add to our bird sightings: Variable Hawk, Crested Caracara, White-crested Elaenia, Monk Parakeets, Imperial Cormorants, Magellanic Cormorants, Dolphin Gulls, Kelp Gulls, Eared Doves, Black-necked Swans, Spot-flanked Gallinule, Yellow-billed Duck and Great Grebe.

We also learned that cruises can be enjoyable for those old in body but young at heart. The food was good, the beds were comfy, there were no biting or other insects, the walks (aboard and on shore) were doable for a couple of slowing-down seniors, the travel was interesting and informative and we got a number of lifers. Need we say anything more?



\$5,000 Reward for True Megs

Joachim Bertrands, Victoria

Grants for Driven Young Birders

“A lost species is one not confirmed alive by photographic, audio or genetic information for over 10 years in the wild and has no ex-situ population under human care.”

—Long and Rodríguez (2022)

Sure, birding is fun, but (re)discovering something new on a global scale is really where it's at. *Search for Lost Birds* (www.searchforlostbirds.org) is an initiative to rediscover a specific set of about 120 species not documented anywhere on the planet in the last decade. Some of these are right there, thriving and waiting to be documented, but due to a variety of reasons haven't seen a birder in recent years. Think Snow Mountain-Robin, last photographed in 2018 in the highlands in West Papua, which could soon join the list indeed, mainly due to access issues! But besides this, far more enigmatic species are listed as well, some with populations in free fall, or maybe have already vanished from the face of Earth. Mysteries, waiting to be discovered!

In exciting news, we at Ornis Birding Expeditions (www.ornis-birding.com) are now funding grants in collaboration with the project of up to \$5,000 USD to inspire driven young birders (aged 18–30) to seek out and document the world's most poorly known birds. Our team hopes that this will help the next generation of bird-watchers turn their passion into impactful work which helps fill some major gaps in global ornithology. Submissions close on the 20th of December 2025. Please share this with any young

birders or birding groups that you know, and visit www.ornis-birding.com/grant for more details on how to apply and the conditions.

We always try to be on the cutting-edge of birding ecotourism, and in fact our team managed to document two lost birds during tours last year (Mussau Triller and Bougainville Thicketbird), neither of which had been scientifically evidenced for more than 20 years. These were the foundation behind the grants, giving us the idea of helping to get skilled young birders out into regions which are rarely visited. You can find out more about the Search for Lost Birds and the Ornis discoveries by visiting:

searchforlostbirds.org/news/found-two-lost-birds-in-a-week-almost

Ornis

Ornis Birding Expeditions is a tour company founded by a team of driven young birdwatchers who have worked their whole careers as global leaders and are genuinely excited by the least-known and hardest-to-find species across the world. Real megas! We are proud to be funding this grant, hoping to inspire the world's most skilled and

dedicated naturalists to spearhead pioneering birding whilst aiding conservation and generating eco-tourism opportunities.

Search for Lost Birds is a global partnership between American Bird Conservancy, Re:wild, and BirdLife International. Species distribution and population are the foundation for conservation planning, but some birds have escaped scientific detection for decades. In extreme cases, it's unclear whether they still exist at all. More than twenty birds have been found since the project began in 2021, several of these on Ornis Birding Expeditions tours.

Note

Joachim Bertrands, Chair of the BCFO Rare Birds Records Committee, is Tour Leader of Ornis Birding Expeditions. See www.ornis-birding.com.

Below: The Bougainvillea Thicketbird, a lost bird for over 20 years, was documented in 2024 on an Ornis Birding Expeditions tour.

Photo by Julien Mazenauer.



Adventures with Antpittas

Marian Porter, Salt Spring Island

Antpittas are a very enigmatic family of birds found in Central and South America that are secretive in their mountainous forest understory habitat. They have round bodies, long legs and a wide-eyed expression and I never miss a chance to see one. This has led to many adventures in the high country of Ecuador and Colombia.

Virtually unseen despite loud and haunting vocalizations, an “antpitta revolution” was initiated by an Ecuadorian farmer named Angel Paz who coaxed a Giant Antpitta he named Maria out of the forest with earthworms in 2005. The feeding methodology was quickly adopted throughout Latin America as feeding stations made antpittas accessible to birders. The tendency of antpittas to take food from humans may have developed from natural foraging behaviours following large mammals such as bears and tapirs that expose invertebrates while

disturbing forest litter. I have been pursuing antpittas since watching Maria’s daughter at Refugio Paz de Las Aves near Mindo, Ecuador.

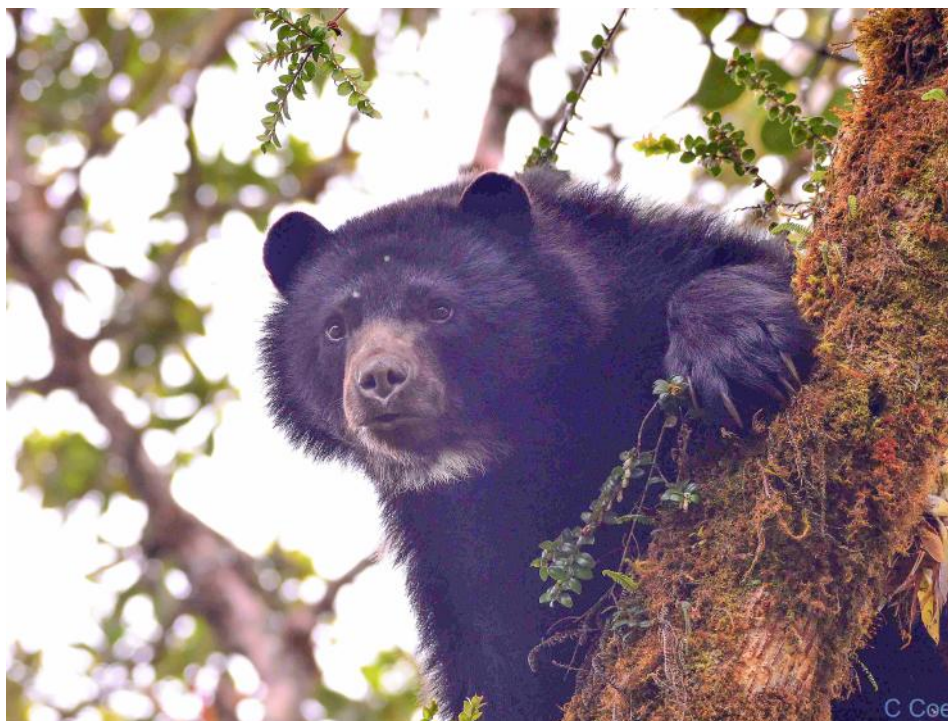
After a productive day of birding in the Andean mountains of the Chingaza National Park region of Colombia in 2024, a rather excited birding group gathered uphill from the remote road prompted investigation. Nearby up a tree was my long-sought-after Spectacled Bear, young and uncertain of people and dogs in its territory. I have experienced close encounters with bears many times in my life, but never had the opportunity to look one in the eyes. Time stood still as I recalled the many times I had missed

bears in my Andean trips in Peru and Ecuador. I was relieved when the group left and the bear could descend from



Above: Cundinamarca Antpitta. Below: Spectacled Bear.

Photos by Colin Coe.



the tree and escape to the forest. It was only then I learned it had been separated from its mother, who was likely nearby.

My husband and I were with the owner and a driver from Icaro Birding, and had just departed a small reserve named Observatorio de Aves Los Andes, known locally as “Fredys”, named after the landowner. We had just missed the Muisca Antpitta at the Reserva Bosque Guajira, where it would not appear for playback tapes. Fredy had habituated antpittas on his farm to set feeding times with earthworms where they could safely appear in a small open arena from surrounding vegetation. A Muisca Antpitta quickly responded to repeated calls of “Chavita”, meaning “little girl” in Spanish, followed by two offspring.

I had seen eight species of antpitta in similar circumstances on an American Birding Association tour in the western Andes of Colombia in 2023 where birders were charmed by the trusting bond between the guides who fed the birds and the individuals that seemed to respond to their name and repeated phrases of endearment. A memorable bird was a Slate-crowned

Antpitta named “Nana” at the Rio Blanco Reserve. Some species of the genus *Grallaria* swing their bodies from side to side in a unique twitching motion and Nana gave a great demonstration. A well-known Ochre-breasted Antpitta at Refugio Paz was named “Shakira” after the popular Colombian singer with similar movements.

The 2024 Colombian trip ended with a day at the natural Refugio del Tororoi in pursuit of the Cundinamarca Antpitta before returning to Bogota. Discovered in 1989 by an American diplomat and assessed as vulnerable to

extinction in 1994, deforestation had resulted in an endangered status by 2011. The Herreria family bought a small farm near the original discovery site and found a Cundinamarca Antpitta in 2017.

Working with the Camana Foundation the Herreria Trail with an antpitta feeding station was developed for ecotourism. A 446-acre reserve was created along the border of the Herreria property in partnership with the American Bird Conservancy, Camana Foundation and Conserve Birds Initiative. Ariel Herreria called in an adult female

“Nana” and her fledgling “Baby”. Ariel’s son Yersson was training to be a guide and expertly identified birds along the trail while his younger sister Shaira entered the list into eBird. Their mother gave us a hot lunch by nectar feeders attracting hummingbirds and flowering shrubs with colourful flowerpiercers and tanagers.

I reluctantly left after a heartfelt hug from Shaira and the warmth of a family whose life had radically changed from farming to ecotourism, giving both the Cundinamarca Antpitta and their children a brighter future.

Costa Rica Challenge

John Gordon, Surrey

This Slaty-backed Nightingale Thrush – a target bird – proved a bigger challenge than anticipated. A shy forest-dwelling species, they are more active around dusk. They occur between 800 and 2,300 metres on the Caribbean

slope and locally on the Pacific slope of Costa Rica. On the first stakeout evening the bird didn’t show but on the second, as darkness descended, the bird ventured out into an opening. It is one of my favourite images from the 315 seen species I encountered on my

Spring 2025 trip to Costa Rica. It was shot with a Nikon Z8 with 500mm PF 5.6 lens at ISO 6400, 1/200 sec, f5.6.

You can see much more from the Costa Rica trip at:

www.johngordonphotography.com



Figuring Out A Way

Dennis Forsyth, Denman Island

My first, and by far my best, teacher when I had finally realized that I needed to find a teacher if my photography was ever going to improve, had a mantra. "You can only photograph what is there. Don't look for an excuse to pack up and go home – figure out a way to photograph what is in front of you." She was more than a gifted teacher of photography – she was a kind of philos-



is located so that in the early morning, by far my favourite time for photography, the rising sun is coming up directly behind the nest. I'm trying to shoot right into the sun.

There are solutions. Sometimes I luck out and it is overcast. But usually I just need to deal with what I've been dealt. Because I'm primarily looking for action shots, I need to keep my shutter speed up, 1/800th or faster. So, I will use shutter priority and then play with f-stops and ISO settings. I want to limit the amount of light hitting the sensor so that I don't blow out all the highlights and whites. So, I crank these way back. And there's an advantage: when I set an f-stop at f-22 or higher I am keeping more of the image from front to back in focus. And, by lowering the ISO to something below 400 I'm also improving the image quality. The less grainy the better.

And then, of course, there is the magic of Photoshop or Lightroom to help me clean things up when I get home.



habitual bonding exercise among eagles. But I anthropomorphize enough to think that he's bragging about what a superior provider he is. Then the female begins taking the fish apart and feeding her babies. And with some adjusting in Lightroom, I end up with some decent images of an exciting morning.

Shot with a Canon EF 300 mm prime lens on a Canon R-5.

Photos by author.

opher who managed to turn this habitual excuse-seeker into some kind of problem solver.

A pair of Bald Eagles have found a nesting site that is almost perfect from a photographer's point of view. It is nearly at the exact level of the viewpoint but slightly lower. So, I can see in to it fairly easily. It is relatively close so that I can get by with a medium telephoto, in this case a 300mm prime. It has one serious drawback. The vantage point for a photographer is small. I am limited to a narrow field of view. And, the nest



Photographing North American Warblers –

Adrian Dorst, Tofino

– In Mexico

Most birders who engage in photographing the objects of their affection will tell you that the most challenging subjects are the small passerines. Among them are, of course, that mostly very colourful lot of wood warblers, of which there are 48 species that breed in the ABA region (north of the Rio Grande). As someone who has spent much of his life attempting to capture images of birds, starting with a simple box camera in the mid 1950s, I can verify that this assertion is true. In my large collection of bird images today, there is still a paucity of captivating shots of wood warblers.

This past winter I got a chance to add to my collection from a most sur-



Above: American Redstart. Below left: Black-throated Gray Warbler. Bottom: Lucy's Warbler. All photographs by author.



When photographing small passerines you rarely experience ideal conditions, and this situation was no exception. My subject was shaded from the early morning sun because the

sun rose on the east side of the building and it was on the west side. This fact enhanced the uniformity of the light (good) but lowered the shutter speed and the sharpness (not so good). But you do the best with what you've got, and for this, the camera's modern technology helps a great deal. I use a Canon Powershot G3X with 50X magnification capability (extrapolated).

prising location – the kitchen window of my rental accommodation in Mexico. It began in early February when I glanced out of the window and was surprised to see a male American Redstart doing a little dance on a limb at eye-level or just below. Not one to miss an opportunity, I jumped into action, being careful to keep my visible movements down to a minimum lest I scare the bird. Frightening the birds would nevertheless happen quite frequently because they are remarkably shy.



Soon, other warblers appeared, and for the next hour and a half I was too busy watching and shooting to be able to finish my morning tea. For many a morning over the next three weeks, I would forego an early-morning hike and instead take up a position by the window at 7:15 AM sharp, and prepare for a couple of hours of high excitement as various species of warblers appeared and reappeared. In all, twelve species of North American wood warblers made an appearance, most of them numerous times.

Five of them were familiar birds to those of us who live in BC, such as the Orange-crowned, Yellow, Wilson's, Black-throated Gray, and McGillivray's Warbler. But even those are not easy to capture back home. There were always a few Nashville Warblers and an occasional Yellow-rumped Warbler. The Tropical Parula, which breeds north of the Rio Grande only in extreme southern Texas, I never did succeed in photographing, nor the Black and White Warbler, although they both showed up sporadically. Despite the long reach of my zoom lens, more often than not, these small birds were close to the outer limit of the camera's ability.

One morning I was utterly surprised to see a Louisiana Waterthrush perched on a branch a short distance from the window. The fact that the casa is situated on top of a high hill



Above: Yellow-throated Warbler. Below: Louisiana Waterthrush.

with no streams anywhere in sight, unless one counts the sewage seep below the window, made this a highly incongruent sighting.

Most exciting for me were the very plain, but rare and exotic (to me) Lucy's Warbler, which breeds in the American southwest, and its antithesis, the strikingly handsome Yellow-throated Warbler. This warbler of the Carolinian forests of the eastern US, shows up occa-

sionally at Point Pelee after overshooting the lower 48. After seeing it there on several occasions in the 1960s, its beauty had left an indelible impression in my mind and as a result it had achieved favourite warbler status. It was now showing itself reliably, if briefly, on a daily basis and there was no letup in my efforts to achieve the perfect shot.

One day in late morning, long after all the other warblers had departed to escape the brilliant sun and I was relaxing on the top deck of the building, the Yellow-throated Warbler unexpectedly made an appearance a mere 12 or 13 feet from where I was sitting, apparently stopping to size me up for a few seconds. That was all the time I needed. I raised the camera I had on my lap and got off three quick shots before it flew. I was over the moon with delight, knowing that I had achieved a portrait-quality shot of my favourite wood warbler.



Skookumchuck Prairie Bird Count

Rémi Torrenta,
BC Projects Coordinator, Birds Canada

...And Some intense Efforts to Locate Long-billed Curlew Nests

On May 13, 2025, Birds Canada organized the first Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) bird count in the newly-designated Skookumchuck Prairie KBA. Four survey teams (20 volunteers in total) surveyed from 6:00 AM until 1:00 PM using the KBA Monitoring Project on eBird. A total of 117 species were detected that day in the entire area – a result that exceeded our expectations by far, and showed that this incredibly-diverse area in the foothills of the Rockies deserves its status as "Key Biodiversity Area".

Among the Species at Risk that were reported is the Long-billed Curlew, a species that our team at Birds Canada is monitoring in the region this year (see below). 19 individuals of this Threatened species were seen that day, but curlew density in the KBA used to be much higher a few years ago. This is worrying, especially given the amount of optimal prairie habitat that is available within the KBA. This corroborates the observed decline of grassland birds in Canada (-67% in average since the 1970s, according to the new State of Canada's Birds 2024 Report).

Grassland birds were a highlight for a lot of surveyors for sure, but Wasa Lake stole the spotlight with Caspian Terns and uncommon shorebirds using the habitat – including Whimbrel, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Red-necked Phalarope.

Another observation of note is three Rock Wrens using Northern Rough-winged Swallow holes! A behaviour that, to our knowledge, has never been documented before. While they got in and out of the holes and the thermal camera detected heat signatures at the entrance of the holes, it

has not been confirmed yet if Rock Wrens are nesting in those holes, or if they were just prospecting potential habitat. Also, swallows were detected a few days later in the holes located in the same vertical sand structure. It is definitely not the typical Rock Wren nest habitat (i.e., crevices among solid rocks) and nest placement... but still cool to see this potential new interaction between the two species.

According to Dianne Cooper, the KBA Caretaker who co-organized and invited many people from the Rocky Mountain Naturalists: "The count added three new species to the area: Whimbrel, Caspian Tern and Rock Wren. Another rare one was Semipalmated Plover. We had 228 species before the count, and now we have 231 species. 74% of all species in the East Kootenay's 312 species on eBird have been recorded in the KBA – a very high diversity (note that 17 East Kootenay species are not recorded on eBird)."

The eBird Report can be found at: ebird.org/tripreport/369819.

Thank you to all volunteers who contributed to the success and beautiful energy of the bird count.

This bird count occurred in the middle of fieldwork season for our team at Birds Canada, which has been studying Long-billed Curlews in this part of the Kootenays for a few weeks (since May 1). A few years ago, we captured and tracked curlews within the KBA, using satellite tags, which provided information about migration patterns for the BC population.

This year, we came back to find and monitor nests in different areas (Skookumchuck Prairie KBA, Wycliffe Buttes, Ktunaxa Reserve Lands), in order to compare survival and productivity between different land use types (e.g., prairies that have not been intensively managed for a few years, versus farmland and pastures that have been more recently and more intensively grazed by cattle). The particularity of

our field season is that we are testing a few different methods/technologies to find and monitor curlew nests: manual searches and mapping curlew territories; transect surveys using a drone equipped with thermal camera; etc. Drone surveys have never been used in Canada for grassland birds, and their efficiency has yet to be proven for us. So far, despite intense survey efforts and countless mornings spent in the prairies before sunrise, we have not been able to detect any nest using the thermal signatures provided by our drone. This method has been successful for British researchers studying Eurasian Curlews.

It is also very challenging to find nests by just observing curlew activity and nesting behaviours. Although we managed to observe lots of display flights/behaviours, a few copulation events, and a multitude of interactions between paired curlews and unpaired males (surprisingly very frequent!), the paired male and female curlews will NOT switch incubation roles – supposedly during the early morning – when we are present on their territory, making it tricky to locate nests. I am always fascinated by how thousands and thousands of years of evolution have wonderfully resulted in the smartest strategies to avoid disclosing nest location to potential predators.

Stay tuned as our team is not giving up yet! The ultimate goal is to provide recommendations for landowners to better manage habitat for the species conservation.



Monitoring Sandhill Cranes

On the Douglas Lake Plateau

Alan Burger – Nicola Naturalist Society

Few wildlife experiences in the BC Interior are as thrilling as hundreds of Sandhill Cranes taking flight and circling overhead, with their bugling calls and elegant flight filling the air. The Douglas Lake Plateau near Merritt is a major stop-over site for the cranes that pass through on the interior flyway. The late Rick Howie estimated that up to 25,000 cranes stop over on their spring northward migration. The importance to cranes was a major reason why this area was declared an Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (IBA) more than 20 years ago. At 1,552 square km, this is the largest inland IBA in BC. The Nicola Naturalist Society, based in Merritt, is

the custodian of this IBA, along with the Kamloops Naturalist Club.

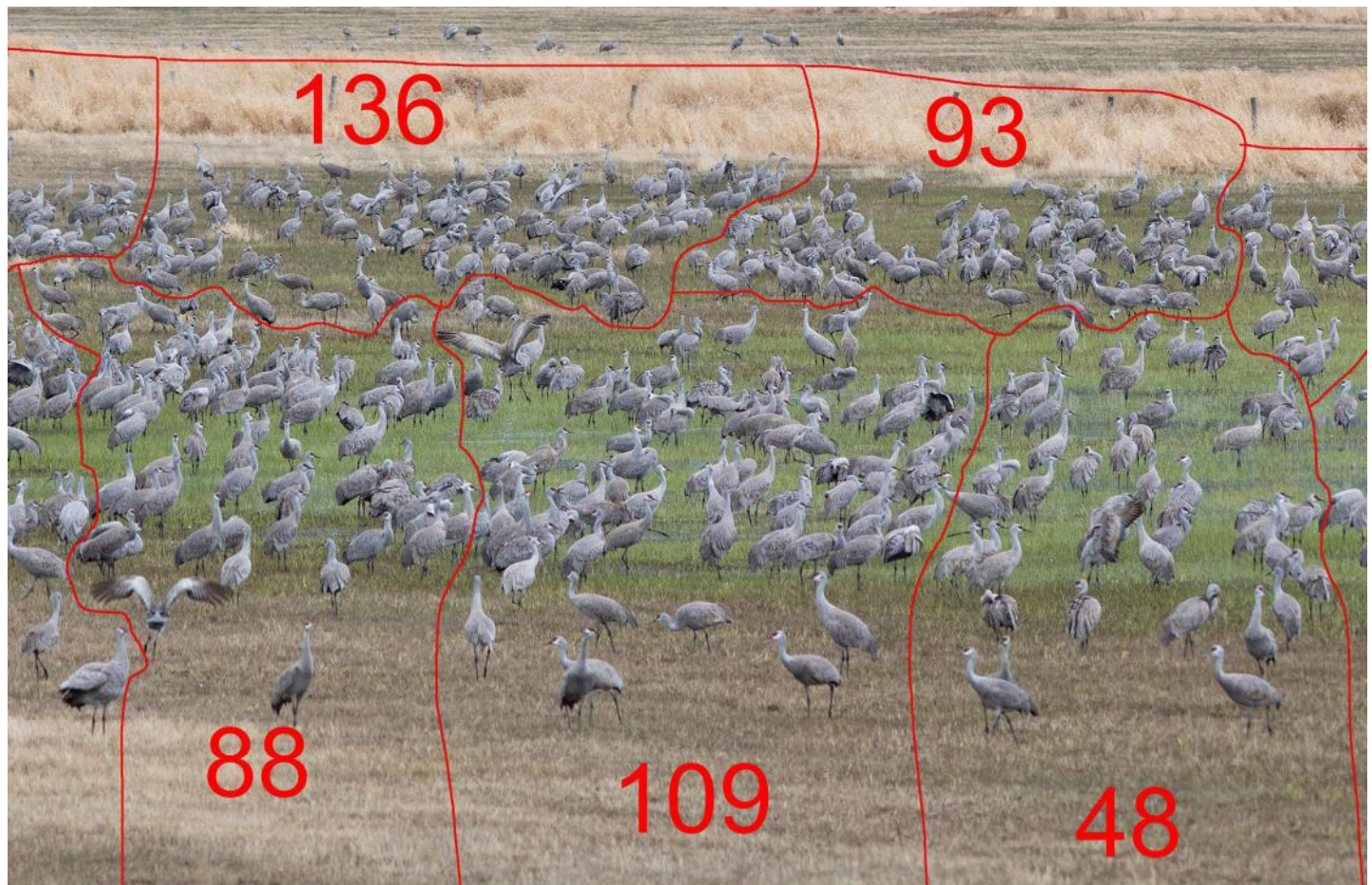
For many years the Nicola Naturalists led sporadic trips to the plateau to look for cranes, with varying success. In 2019 we tallied over 8,000 cranes on one visit, with a single flock of over 7,000 cranes. But the following year, on the same weekend, we found only two cranes! So in 2024, with funding from the BC Nature IBA Program, we started more intensive surveys.

The funding allowed us to hire a contractor, Opal Charters, who lives on the Upper Nicola Band Spax'mn Reserve within the IBA. We set up a 32 km monitoring route on the public road and divided this into eight sections to determine the key habitats for

the resting cranes. We did both morning and evening surveys – the cranes usually arrive in the late afternoon or evening, spend the night resting, preening and feeding and then, around 10:00 the following morning, take off to resume their northward migration. Opal covered the week-days and our club volunteers did the weekend surveys.

Between 7 April and 7 May in 2024 we tallied 11,557 cranes on morning surveys and 6,342 cranes on evening surveys. Along the survey route, 92% of the cranes were counted in one large pasture near Chapperon Lake. The Douglas Lake Ranch managers call this the "Big Meadow" which they deliberately flood each spring to promote

Below: An example of photos used to count sections of large flocks of cranes. Photo by author.



summer growth of grass for their cattle. The mix of wetland and grassland seems ideal for the cranes. Cows wander freely among the cranes and even cowboys on horseback don't panic the cranes. This is an excellent example of how range management can benefit both ranchers and wildlife: "What's good for the herd is good for the bird".

How does one count a flock of several thousand cranes moving about on the ground? We take high-resolution photos of sections of each flock and stitch these together in Photoshop to cover the whole flock. We then divide up the panorama photo into manageable sections and laboriously count cranes in each section. Flocks of cranes passing overhead are counted in the same way.

But in 2024 we evidently missed a few days with cranes, so in 2025 we planned an expanded survey, focused on the more-reliable morning counts. Funding this year came from a Club Support Grant from BC Nature and BC Naturalists' Foundation and a grant from the BC Field Ornithologists. We again hired Opal Charters to do the

weekday surveys and our club covered the week-ends.

Between 29 March and 9 May 2025 we tallied 18,713 cranes. This is a minimum estimate for the plateau, because we couldn't access all the likely stop-over sites and some cranes were hidden behind vegetation in our census photos. So Rick Howie's estimate of 25,000 cranes coming through the Douglas Lake Plateau is likely quite accurate. The Douglas Lake Plateau IBA is on the cusp of becoming a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) because, in addition to its importance for cranes, it is also a haven for many rare species like Lewis's Woodpecker, Burrowing Owls, Badgers, Great Basin Spadefoots and many more.

The Nicola Naturalists thank our sponsors for the funding, the Douglas Lake Cattle Company and the Upper Nicola Band for their support of this



Cranes in flight by author (above) and Loekie van der Wal (below)

project, and Opal Charters and our many club volunteers for their dedication to the project.



...And on the Subject of Cranes

In March 2025, the Eastern Migratory population of Whooping Cranes was estimated to be 70 individuals. Just sixteen of these are wild-hatched and the rest are captive-reared. But in May, nesting was being observed, and the first two chicks had appeared.

The eastern population of migratory Whooping Cranes was created as a failsafe in case of disaster hitting the Wood-Buffer population. Careful counting of that parent population was discontinued after 2023, but it had at that point risen to 536. The relatively high count doesn't mean we should relax, but we can be far more optimistic than in 1941 when the total world population comprised 21 individuals.



Bird Feeder Rules

Anonymous, BC

Sometimes I really wish birds could read. If they could, I would put this sign next to my feeders:

Rules for this Feeder Station

1. No more than six siskins or redpolls at a time.
2. Unruly behaviour will not be tolerated.
3. SHARE. Respect the right of others to eat.
4. Do not kick seeds you don't like onto the ground.
5. Squirrels will be served only if respectful and orderly
6. Maximum visit by corvids: three minutes, once per day.
7. All food to be consumed on premises (special dispensation for chickadees and brooding parents).
8. Raptors must practice catch-and-release.
9. Before leaving clients must note the location of any and all windows.
10. Guests who shit in the water dish will have privileges revoked.



Below: another of Ian Routley's reasons for attending the 2026 BCFO AGM (see pages 6 and 29) – a Lewis's Woodpecker he photographed in his yard at Lillooet.



Book Review

Birds of North America: A Photographic Atlas

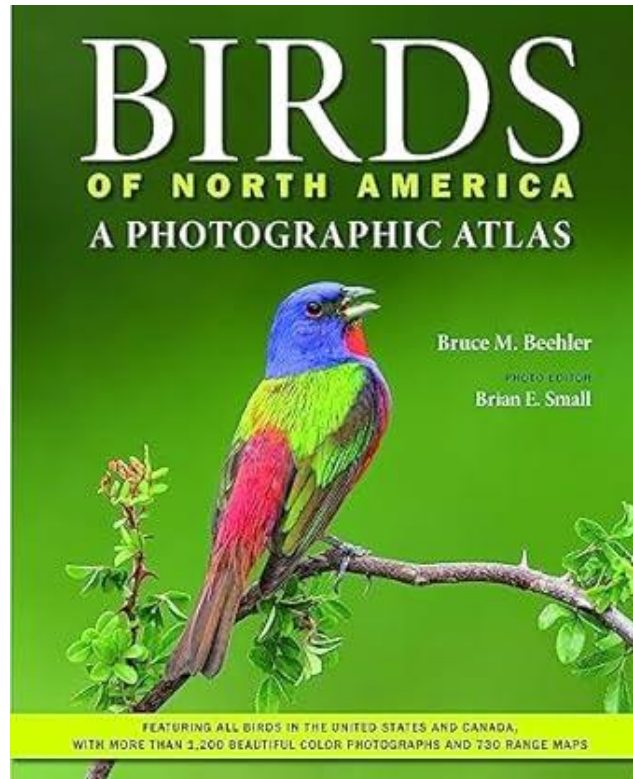
by Bruce Beehler with Brian Small, photo editor. 2024. Johns Hopkins. 1200+ colour photographs. 730 range maps. 560 pages. 23 cms × 28 cms. Hard cover. \$75 (Can.)

Reviewed by Chris Siddle, Vernon

Birds of North America: A Photographic Atlas is a big, beautifully designed reference book not intended for field use. Written for beginning and intermediate birders, it has the kind of easy-to-absorb text that will repay constant study. The range maps are up to three times the size of most field guide distribution maps and show areas of breeding, year-round occurrence wintering grounds, areas of migration and rare occurrence. Each regularly occurring species is illustrated by a single sizable colour photograph. The map and the photo are accompanied by a paragraph that introduces each species habitat, diet, nest and eggs and status in North America.

Bruce M. Beehler is a scientist and conservationist with much field experience in both New Guinea and the United States. The atlas is sponsored by the American Bird Conservancy, a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving wild birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. Beehler, a former board member of the ABC, wanted to create a handbook that would attract more people into the realm of birding. The 700+ range maps were crafted with the assistance of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, especially through its citizen science application, eBird. State bird atlases also fed detailed range information to the maps.

The distribution maps are the heart of all bird atlases. Aside from being bigger and thus easier to use, are the maps in this book any more accurate than those maps in the National Geo-



graphic guide or Sibley guides? Probably, I think. But I have one reservation. Even though the atlas features “all birds in the United States and Canada”, I failed to find any Canadian atlases or other Canadian publications listed in the bibliography. Certainly for British Columbia the maps as a whole are no more accurate than in the National Geographic or Sibley guides, and some replicate errors of fact or omission. Particularly irritating are the maps that fail to show Vancouver Island and/or Haida Gwaii.

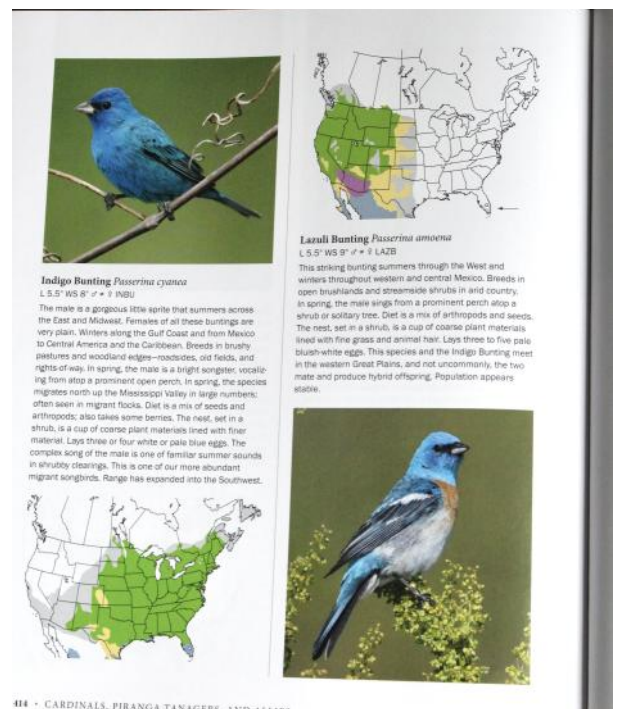
The final third of the book contains brief summaries to rarities and vagrants of neotropical, European, Asian, and oceanic origins, each in its own section. Also summarized with a brief paragraph each are Hawaiian birds, mainland localized exotics and extinct species.

The final 50 pages of text are an introduction to bird-watching, giving advice

about bird apps and websites, gear, trip planning, attracting birds at home, as well as information about bird family accounts and conservation.

The purchase price of this volume will make most birders pause before purchasing. However, I find *Birds of North America: A Photographic Atlas* very handy as a single distributional reference, particularly for the contiguous United States which appear to have been fairly well researched. For a birder planning a trip to the Lower Forty-Eight an evening or two browsing

through the maps will be time well spent, as well as a very pleasant experience because of attractive photos and text. The summary accounts of accidental and vagrant species and the section on Hawaiian birds are also quite useful. Highly recommended.



Briefing I

Summary by M Church, Vancouver

Darwin at Work – a Glimpse of Species Occurrence and Evolution

A set of seemingly unrelated studies of birds' feeding habits and their relation to geographical range of occurrence provides some insight into the origin and loss of species. Using data on feeding of frugivorous birds comprising 97 species at sites on six continents, researchers have found that in environments with scarce food resources – typically, environments that determine range limits – obligate frugivores focus their attention on the largest fruit that their bill can handle. (An “obligate frugivore” is a bird that feeds largely or entirely on one or more fruit species and requires access to those fruits for survival. In contrast, non-obligate frugivores may exploit their target fruit when it is available, but may switch to other food resources when the fruit is scarce.) Similar conditions affect the occurrence of seed eaters, except that seed size is less often the critical constraint. Rather, the ability of the bird to penetrate the seed shell in order to access the nourishing seed inside – hence, the force that the bird can apply with its bill – becomes a limiting factor in where the bird might live successfully.

It turns out that selectivity of food items by size (or by other characteristics) works two ways in determining the occurrence and even the evolution of species. Within a population, individual birds and their physical features vary in size. For obligate frugivores feeding on a particular fruit, typical fruit size will exert an influence on the birds' foraging success, favouring birds whose beak capacity best matches the characteristic fruit size. Simple occurrence of this condition from generation to generation, acting most strongly in years with limited fruit availability, will

favour survival of individuals with the most appropriate bill size. This will eventually become an accomplished evolutionary feature that may define a new bird species.

The celebrated Darwin's Finches of the Galapagos Islands present a stark example governed by food sources. As the seed-eating finches moved from island to island, they encountered progressively harder seed shells on more arid islands. Hence larger and stronger bills were favoured for efficient feeding in such places, whence the origin of the family of closely related finches, largely distinguished by relative bill size, and a clear example of adaptive evolution.

The impact of variation in food source driving evolution in the feeding species can work in reverse, on the food source. In Europe, significant reductions in the numbers of bird and animal species that feed on fruit and seeds has led to consequent reductions in the spread, germination and growth of the plant species favoured by the missing animals. In a comprehensive study, researchers listed 592 plants, mainly species that bear fruit containing their seeds, and 398 animals (largely birds) that feed on the fruit. The lists yielded more than 5,000 pairings of animal and vegetable food source. More than a third of the animals appear on the IUCN list of threatened species, while nearly 80 of the

pairings were cases in which both animal and plant are declining. Hence seeds are less widely scattered and the plants have become scarce. The result represents a significant contribution, beyond deliberate human interventions, to the loss of species of plants and animals in European ecosystems from arctic to mediterranean.

References

Hargreaves, A.L. & Alexander, J.M. 2024. A hard fruit to swallow. *Science* 385: 260-261. (This is a commentary on Martins et al.)

Mendes, S.B. + 7 others. 2024. Evidence of a European seed dispersal crisis. *Science* 386: 206-211.

Martins, L.P. + 25 others. Birds optimize fruit size consumed near their geographic range limits. *Science* 385: 331-336.

Podos, J. & Schroeder, K.M., 2024. Ecological speciation in Darwin's Finches: ghosts of finches future. *Science* 386: 211-217.

Stokstad, E. 2024. Seed disperser declines threaten Europe's plants. *Science* 386: 136. (This is a commentary on Mendes et al.)

Below: The Cactus Finch of the Galapagos Islands thrives in arid conditions, having evolved a notably long and pointed beak. CNK photo.



Poetry Corner

Chris Siddle, Vernon

"Hurt Hawks" by Californian poet Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962) captures for me the implacable spirit of the Red-tailed Hawk. The poet describes a hawk with a broken wing wandering the land on foot near the poet's home. The complete poem is too long for inclusion, so a heavily edited version is presented here. If these excerpts capture your interest, read the complete poem at poetryfoundation.org.



Briefing 2

Summary by M Church, Vancouver

Common Murres Crash – in Record Style

On the west coast of North America Common Murres occur from the Bering Sea south to northern California, wintering as far south as the Mexican border. Large breeding colonies occur in Alaska in both the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. At the top of their food chain, principal food sources for the murres include small schooling fish and immature stages of larger fish. In 2015–16 an extreme marine heat wave occurred in the North Pacific Ocean, severely affecting water temperature as far north as the Bering Sea. Populations of small fishes collapsed, with dramatic effects on the murres.

Systematic population estimates are available for four monitored colonies in each of the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, with population change estimates for four further colonies in the Gulf. Year-by-year comparisons of population numbers in each colony compared with 2014 numbers, accepted as a reference population size, reveal that,

prior to the marine heat wave (2008–2013), populations were already generally decreasing, but at a diminishing rate, and slightly increasing in two of the Bering Sea colonies. After the heat wave (2016–2022) populations have stabilized at one half to one quarter the 2014 size.

During the 2014–2016 period, many dead, severely emaciated murres washed up on beaches, two-thirds of which were females. A general reduction in productivity in the marine food chain under the influence of the suddenly increased marine water temperatures appears to be the principal reason for the abrupt decline of the murres. After the heat wave, populations of Common Murres appear to be maintaining themselves but show no indication of increasing to pre-heat wave levels. Part of the reason for this situation may be the predominant loss of female birds during the period of strong thermal stress.

It is also true that half or more of the warmest years in the region have occurred since 2014; the regional ma-

rine ecosystem and food chain may be adapting to the new, apparently more variable marine climate, creating a modified food chain that supports fewer regional top predators. Nor were the murres the only top predators affected. Alaska Pacific Cod declined by 80% in the Gulf of Alaska during the heat wave, while Humpback Whale numbers declined by 20%. Such changes are observed elsewhere in the world, but they are usually modest in character, as were ongoing population changes pre-2014 in some of the Alaskan murre colonies (indicating stress on the murre population before 2015).

The loss in 2015–2016 of half or more of the population at all colonies – each representing a distinct population – is the largest and most abrupt population change in response to environmental change currently on record for any animal species.

Reference

Renner, H.M. + 5 others. 2024. Catastrophic and persistent loss of common murres after a marine heat wave. *Science* 386: 1272-1276.

Hurt Hawks by Robinson Jeffers

The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder,
The wing trails like a banner in defeat,
No more to use the sky forever but live with famine
And pain a few days: cat nor coyote
Will shorten the week of waiting for death
... at night he remembers freedom
And flies in a dream...
The curs of day come and torment him
At distance, no one but death the redeemer will humble that head
The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes...

...the great redtail
Had nothing left but unable misery
We had fed him for six weeks, I gave him freedom,
He wandered the foreland hill and returned in the evening, asking for death
Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old
Implacable arrogance. I gave him the lead gift in the twilight. What fell was relaxed,
...but what
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded river cried fear at its rising
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.

The Palaeo-Ornithologist

Heron-like Tracks – Then and Now

Charles Helm, Tumbler Ridge

There is no denying that identifying birds from their tracks can be challenging. After all, there is a limited number of track forms and track types, and many hundreds of possible trackmakers. Size remains a useful criterion, especially for the larger species, but has its limitations when it comes to smaller species.

Heron tracks, however, are distinctive. The digit impressions are narrow, with fairly large angles separating them. The middle toe (digit III) impression points straight ahead, and the hallux impression (digit I) typically points straight backward. However, and importantly, the hallux impression is offset slightly medially compared with the digit III impression, as is evident in the photo below, which

Right track of a Great Blue Heron – note how the digit I impression is slightly offset medially.



depicts a right Great Blue Heron track. Very few other birds, other than the Hamerkop of Africa, exhibit this readily identifiable heron-track pattern.

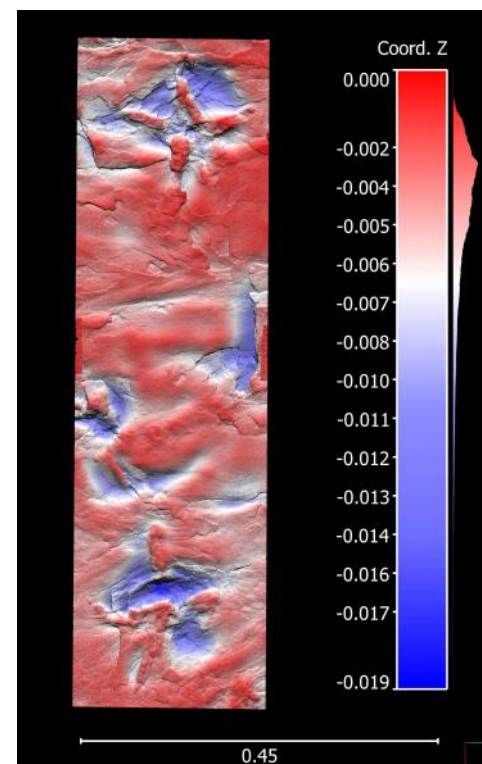
In a recent publication, I teamed up with colleague Guy Plint. The initiative had begun with comments from our mentor, the late Martin Lockley. Martin had reminded us that the oldest heron-like tracks ever identified were from the Cretaceous Period, northeastern BC, from the Pine River between Chetwynd and Dawson Creek. In geological time, that is not that long after the evolution of the first birds from theropod dinosaurs.

Guy and I proceeded to write the findings up, with Martin as the posthumous lead author, and the results were recently published in the journal *Historical Biology*.¹ The illustration to the right shows a 3D photogrammetry image of the two tracks – the heron-like pattern can clearly be seen, especially in the distal track. This does not imply that herons as we know them today existed back in the Cretaceous, but rather that the distinctive track pattern was already evident then.

I am privileged also to be researching Pleistocene tracks and traces in cemented dunes (aeolianites) on South Africa's Cape south coast. We have previously published on 41 fossil avian tracksites that we have identified. A 2023 publication of ours in the journal *Ostrich*² reported on the first heron-like tracks we had encountered, probably registered by a Little Egret. However the tracks, although identifiable, were not of great quality.

Fast forward to early 2025, when colleagues, including Indigenous San Master Trackers, found a beautiful heron-like trackway on the ceiling of an overhang. These “natural casts” represent the layer that filled in the actual tracks. A couple of weeks later I was able to

visit the site and document the tracks. The trackmaker, probably a Little Egret or a Hamerkop, was walking diagonally down a dune slope, hence the left and right tracks display different features. The digit I and digit III traces seem unusually long, compared to the width of



3D photogrammetry model of the Cretaceous heron-like trackway from northeastern BC; horizontal and vertical scales are in metres.

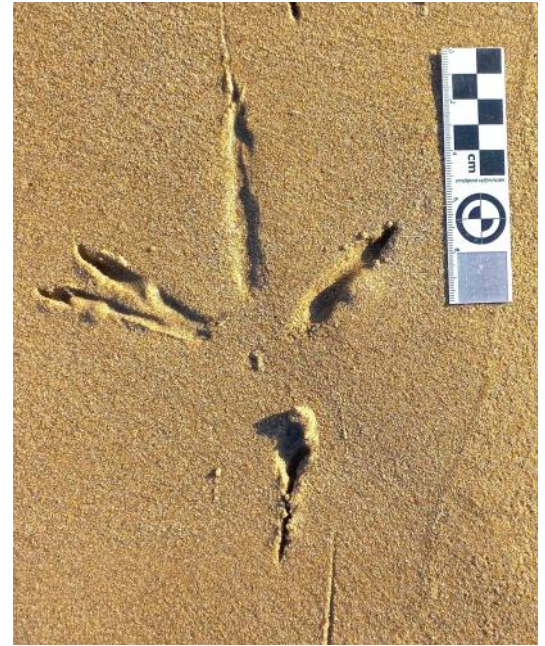
the tracks (see next page). This almost certainly is related to claw-drag traces, as are often encountered where herons or hamerkops have walked today (see final photo on the next page). The quality of these tracks is greatly superior to those in the 2023 report, and the results will be submitted soon to a peer-reviewed journal.

In combination these sites offer an intriguing contrast: the oldest heron-like tracks thus far identified, as well as the youngest. The Cretaceous tracks from northeastern BC are maybe about 100 million years old. The Pleistocene tracks from South Africa are about 100,000 years old. An age contrast, indeed, but evidence of a long-standing track lineage that persists to this day.



Left: One of the tracks in the recently discovered Pleistocene heron trackway in South Africa – note the unusually long digit I and digit III traces; scale bar = 10 cm.

Right: The left track of a Grey Heron showing claw-drag traces of digits I and III; scale bar = 10 cm.



References

1. Lockley, M.G., Plint, A.G., Helm, C.W. 2025. Heron-like tracks from the Dunvegan Formation (Cenomanian), British Columbia: evidence for convergence in

avian foot morphology. *Historical Biology* (published online): <https://doi.org/10.1080/08912963.2025.2477201>.

2. Helm, C.W., Lockley, M.G., Carr, A.S., Cawthra, H.C., De Vynck, J.C., Dixon,

M.G., Gräbe, P-J., Rust, R. 2023. New Pleistocene avian ichnosites on South Africa's Cape south coast. *Ostrich* 94(2), 100–116.

Below: A Lazuli Bunting photographed by Ian Routley at Lillooet by the Fraser River, reminding us again of the possibilities for the 2026 AGM (see pages 6 and 24.)



Bird Photographers' Corner

Clive Keen, Prince George

Practice, Practice, Part 1

Most arts require practice. Piano playing, dancing, singing, skating, acting, drawing, you mention it – they all have their exercises. Why should bird photography be any different? Well, it's not. Simply learning the capabilities of one's camera is not enough. The crucial thing is to be able to put them to use without delay – in the second, or half second, before that Ivory-billed Woodpecker on your feeder goes back into hiding.

Birds in flight are a slightly more pertinent example. There's simply no time to dither over shutter-speed and focus-area mode while remembering how to switch to high-speed continuous. You have to make such adjustments almost instantly while struggling to get the bird in the middle of the viewfinder and keep it there.

A piece of good advice to beginning birders is: always use your binoculars whenever you spot a Robin. Sure, it's only a bird you've seen countless

times, but it's great binocular practice, and will help you get onto rarer birds more quickly. Similarly, a bird photographer seeing a duck in flight can practice getting on to it as fast as possible with all the correct settings. You soon find out if you don't *really* know your camera, and you'll also find that time spent in practice – you'll need plenty – is far from wasted.

Another common opportunity demanding a lot of practice is photographing birds on the ground. "Shoot at the height of the bird" is one of the best mantras in bird photography. This used to mean a lot of lying down, and thus getting close and personal with mud and chiggers. Now that we have flip-up monitors, we can use them to solve the mud-and-chiggers problem. You need to squat, hold the camera close to the ground, frame the bird using the flip-up screen, and focus (see next page for an example) using the monitor's touch-screen. It sounds straightforward, but in fact takes practice, particularly if the subject is hopping around. Dedicating some time to this can pay off handsomely down the line.

A number of other scenarios benefit from practice, but fortunately can be mastered in much less time. Take birds ensconced in foliage. All those branches, twigs and leaves before and behind

the bird can be a magnet to the autofocus system. Being ready to use manual focus is often key. This is quite easily practiced: just pick out a specific leaf or pine cone or twig, get manual focus to roughly the right plane, and switch back to auto for fine tuning. Not hard, but it needs practicing quite often, or rust sets in.

Some other scenarios also merit such practice:

- Instant exposure compensation to deal with tricky light or light / dark subjects.
- In dim light, progressively reducing shutter speed and ISO to obtain the lowest ISO shot which is still sharp.
- Switching autofocus area modes to deal with changing focus needs, such as when the dozing bird on a post wakes up and prepares to take off.
- Recomposing the image after locking in the correct point of focus.
- Quickly locating a distant object when using a long lens.

Scenarios such as these can be practiced during an ordinary birding trip. If there's no birds around, just pretend, and go through the necessary motions as if there were. See how long you take. Repeat as necessary until you can complete the exercise fast without fumbling. People looking on might think you're crazy, but then, that's nothing new for bird photographers.

Next Time

Part two of this article will include a list of specific activities allowing you to test and hone your photographic reflexes. Meanwhile, do you have specific bird-photography exercises that help keep you sharp? Let us know.

Left: Manual assistance to the autofocus is often needed for birds ensconced in foliage, and was used with success for this nest-sitting Orange-breasted Fruiteater. Photos by author.





(See previous page.) Holding the camera close to the ground and focusing with the flip-up monitor can produce ground-level shots without the need to sprawl in the mud. This Long-billed Curlew was spotted in the famous Walrath Road curlew field near Prince George.

Equipment Review: SpeediGimbal

Dave Whiting, Kamloops

One of my challenges as a bird photographer is carrying a camera with a heavy telephoto in the field and having a way to steady the shot without carrying and setting up a tripod. Birds move often and quickly! I have the strength to hold the camera steadily only for a short length of time.

I recently acquired a SpeediGimbal to attach to a monopod and camera and I find it very useful, particularly for those shots where your camera is trained on the bird and you are waiting for it to turn its head, reveal catchlight in the eye, or take flight. (See next page for an example.)

When photographing small birds

my camera kit consists of an OM-1 Mark 2 camera with a 300mm prime lens and a 1.4 teleconverter. Being a micro 4/3ds camera, this provides me the full-frame equivalent of a 840 mm lens with an aperture of f5.6. Attached to the camera is a wide shoulder strap and a hand strap. Total weight is 5 lbs 5 oz (2.4 Kg).

When in the field I carry my camera with the sling over my left shoulder and my right hand gripping the camera using the hand strap. My monopod is a "walking stick" in my left hand. The Speedigimbal consists of a ball and a cup. I attach the ball to the top of my monopod and the cup I attach to the tripod mount of my lens. When I wish to attempt a photo, I swing the camera

up and place the cup over the ball on the monopod. With the ball in the cup I can pan from left to right and up and down. The weight of the camera and lens is supported by the monopod. There are YouTube videos demonstrating the product at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCJXCLySlzA

The product can be purchased at speedigimbal.co.uk.





Mountain Bluebird photographed by Dave Whiting in the Kamloops area. See the equipment review on page 31.