



BIRDING

NEWSLETTER OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

ISSN 1206-1611

Volume 7 Number 4

December 1997

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B.C. BIRDING is published four times a year by
British Columbia Field Ornithologists (BCFO),
 P.O. Box 8059, Victoria, BC V8W 3R7.

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

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

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Membership Dues:

Individual memberships	\$25.00
Library subscriptions	\$25.00
Junior memberships (age under 18)	\$10.00
U.S. and foreign memberships	(US)\$25.00

Memberships are for the calendar year.

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Send material for publication in any format to the editors. We especially welcome bird-finding information for our "Site Guide" series and any articles about birding experiences, preferably but not necessarily, in British Columbia. **Deadline for receipt of material for publication is the 15th of the month preceding the March, June, September & December issues.**

Advertising rates available upon request.

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Missing Some Earlier Issues?

BCFO still has a limited selection of back copies of both the annual peer-reviewed journal **British Columbia Birds** and this quarterly newsletter **BC BIRDING** available for sale. The prices (which include postage and handling) are \$8.00 for the journal and \$3.00 for the newsletter. Contact: Editors c/o PO Box 8059, Victoria, BC V8W 3R7 for information or to place an order.

EDITORS' NOTES AND NOTIONS

Well it is nearly CBC time again so we have been canvassing the province to provide you with the most up-to-date information available to us. We really thank those who reduced our phone bill by sending us information before we had to call.

This issue may look a little bit different from previous issues because we have upgraded our word processor. Send us a note with comments. We have reached the bottom of our in-basket for the first time this year so we must again ask all members to make a new year's resolution that this will be the year to write - Right?! Thank You.

Again we have a full issue. There is information on a helpful birding device by Karen, a useful update on bird name/position changes by Wayne, a birding travelogue to distant parts by Hugh, CBC dates by A&M (with extra thanks to the Wiggers for the Washington State info), exciting plans and dates for the 1998 AGM from your BCFO directors, a review of two new bird guides by Bruce, plus a very interesting article by Lloyd on an eastern shorebird workshop. Remember to give some time to our advertisers - their fiscal support helps our organization grow and they have services which we felt would be useful to our members throughout the province and beyond.

Ken asks that listers please remember to get their various list numbers to him by/before the end of January '98 if they wish to have their lists published in the March issue. The AGM, the extension trip, and the assistance of a number of helpful birders in 1997 may mean that even the Buhlers can get on a list or two. We have had our highest "year" count ever this year with many lifers. Thanks to all the birders who assisted.

Gary reminds everyone to submit their rare bird sightings forms to him for vetting by the Bird Records Committee.

At this time we would like to extend our thanks to all members who have assisted through the year to help make BCFO a viable organization, from the Directors who have provided so much more than just direction, to members near and far who have assisted in innumerable ways by volunteering time, energy, expertise and, most importantly to us, by providing your editors with another eighty pages of helpful and interesting material for our fellow birders. We hope that BCFO has made a difference to your birding experience. Seasons Greetings and Good Birding. A&M



President's Report

Is the name of our organisation - British Columbia Field Ornithologists - intimidating to the general public, or the average bird watcher? That sentiment has surfaced a number of times recently - but certainly was never intended. Your directors are anxious to dispel this myth, and get the word out that we are birders and birdwatchers, and not pointy-headed boffins. If the membership can spread the word, and sign up some new recruits, that would be appreciated.

Our next AGM will be at Creston in the southern Rocky Mountains in mid-June 1998. We hope to see a large turnout to this exciting birding spot, in its magnificent setting. Our appetites whetted by the success, both ornithologically and socially, of the extension to the Peace River in 1997, we plan in 1998 to visit the flatlands of Alberta, and possibly the mountains of Waterton National Park, **on a prairie birding tour just prior to the AGM.**

A couple of reminders. Do not forget to submit your rare bird reports to Gary Davidson at the BCFO Rare Bird Committee. Those interested in listing, should be calculating their BC Ecoprovince lists. How many birds is it possible to see in the Sub-Boreal Interior, and who is the champ there? The Listing Supplement was in the September issue of **BC BIRDING** and should be submitted to Ken Morgan by 31 January.

Enjoy your BC winter birding.
Tony Greenfield, BCFO President



EDITORS' NOTE: Xantus's Hummingbird sighted in Gibsons, BC. I guess that Tony G. was just doing our Victoria Costa's Hummingbird one better.

REMINDERS

1. Mark your calendars for the next BCFO AGM - Creston, 19-21 June, 1998 - and be prepared for another great time socializing with birders from around the province, listening to some informative presentations, and visiting a superb birding area. In addition -
2. Mark your calendars for 15-19 June, 1998 for a possible pre-AGM birding tour into southern Alberta. Read Tony's editorial and his announcement in this issue for further information.
3. Remember to send in your Bird Listings to Ken Morgan by, or before, 31 Jan.
4. Remember to send in any and all rare bird sightings to Gary Davidson.
5. Make 1998 the year that "you" wrote an article/site guide for this newsletter. We did not have to nag members in 1997 but now, unfortunately, the basket is totally empty. Please help keep the editors happy!!!
6. Link up with friends new and old and assist in a CBC or two. It's great fun and a very helpful way to finish out the year. Check the listings in this newsletter.
7. Take some time for yourselves and your families - time speeds by so quickly that sometimes we forget to stop and smell the roses or to appreciate the birds around us.
8. Best wishes for a great Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year from your Editors and from all of the BCFO Directors.

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— April

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Call **Great Expeditions at**
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Join Dr. Fred Cook, Chair of Wildlife Ecology at Simon Fraser University, on an all day boat cruise in the Gulf Islands. Pacific Herring will be spawning, allowing you an opportunity to see marine mammals, seabirds and bald eagles congregating in the hundreds to feast upon the spawned eggs and fish. The cruise leaves from Canoe Cove. Please call Capilano College at **(604) 984-4901** to book this trip.

Trip: March 28, 1998

Cost: \$90.00

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UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

- Jan. 7-10 1998 **NINTH NORTH AMERICAN ARCTIC GOOSE CONFERENCE / WORKSHOP**, Victoria, B.C. Contact: Sean Boyd, Pacific Wildlife Research Centre, Cdn. Wildlife Services, R.R. 1, 5421 Robertson Road, Delta, B.C. V4K 3N2; phone (604) 946-8546.
- Jan. 21-24 1998 **PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP 25TH ANNUAL MEETING**, Monterey, California. Contact: Mike Parker, ph. (510) 946-8546 or Alan Burger, Biology Dept., University of Victoria, Victoria, BC V8W 3N5, phone (250) 479-2446.
- Feb. 12-16 1998 **WASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, 10TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE**, Mt. Vernon, WA. Field trips every day & night, dinner speakers, paper presentations, and an exhibitors' / vendors' room. For a brochure contact Jan & Keith Wiggers, 902 District Line Road, Burlington, WA, USA 98233. Email kwiggers@fidalgo.net Phone (360) 757-0772. Early registration is recommended because field trips and meals are limited.
- April 6-12 1998 **JOINT ANNUAL MEETING AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, ASSOC. OF FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS, COLONIAL WATERBIRD SOCIETY, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, AND WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**, co-sponsored by **RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION**, St. Louis, Missouri. Contact: Bette Loisel, Dept. of Biology, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, MO 63121, USA; ph. (314) 516-6224.
- July 24-29 1998 **SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY ANNUAL MEETING**, Guadeloupe, French West Indies. Contact: TBA.



Finnsticks

by Dr. Karen L. Weibe
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Figure 1: Elsa Lehtikoinen demonstrates a finnstick.

History

The finnstick is not a new invention, just a little-known one. I first saw a birder looking through binoculars balanced on the end of a stick at Hanko, the Point Pelee equivalent at the southern tip of Finland. I immediately started to chuckle and jabbed my Finnish birding companion in the ribs, "See that? Must be some Brit", I said. "Actually, that's a very useful Finnish invention", Seppo replied proudly. I learned that the finnstick has two major functions:

1. to reduce the vibrations while looking through binoculars, and
2. to allow the arms and hands to rest while holding binoculars.

With the stick, one can watch birds intensively for several hours without discomfort. (Figure 1) This makes the support especially useful for marathon birding events such as Christmas bird counts, waterfowl counts or migration watching. In fact, the common name in Finnish for the stick is "staijikeppi" or "migration-watching stick"². A synonym is "monikayttoesine" (all-purpose object) which refers to the fact that the stick comes in handy for many things like swatting mosquitoes, clearing vegetation, scratching your back or even sword-fighting if there are no birds around. The first finnsticks were used around 1968 and today nearly every serious birder in Finland owns one. If you are interested in more details about their development and history see the article in the Finnish birding journal *Alua* 1/1996.

Making Finnsticks

No two sticks are alike because there is no commercial supplier; to make one requires a little time but is not very difficult or expensive. The majority of finnsticks are made of two parts: a small wooden block carved to fit the underside of the binoculars which is fastened to a pole about $\frac{3}{4}$ meter long. Usually the base is made of a hardwood such as oak because it is durable, but it is not uncommon to use one of any type of softer wood such as pine. The trick is to get the correct shape to support your binoculars securely (see examples in Fig.2). You may need to take into account the distance between your eyes, ie. the normal position of your binoculars when you use them. The length of the pole varies according to individual preference, but the end usually rests on the chest or stomach. Cut it a bit long at first and later you can adjust the size for maximum comfort.

During my year in Finland, I noticed many creative and artistic variations on the theme. The "pole" was often an old hockey stick – a quintessential symbol of Finnish (and also Canadian!) culture. Some were carved from a single piece of beautiful maple, others from an old canoe paddle or even from materials like rubber or metal. One had the pole-section constructed from an old collapsible tripod leg so it could fold neatly into a backpack. A few competitive birders even marked their pole with "lifer-notches" to commemorate past exploits – sort of like the Red Baron. Rarely, the binocs were tied to

Finnsticks (continued)

the finnstick with strings or rubber bands so that the user could quickly drop his/her arms to use a scope and let the whole binocular-stick complex dangle from the neck, but this looked uncomfortable to walk around with.

So, why not try making a stick of your own? It is fun to let your artistic side run wild and come up with a unique and functional creation! Especially for people without scopes and tripods, finnsticks greatly increase endurance when looking out over the water. Just remember to keep the binocular strap around your neck while using it.

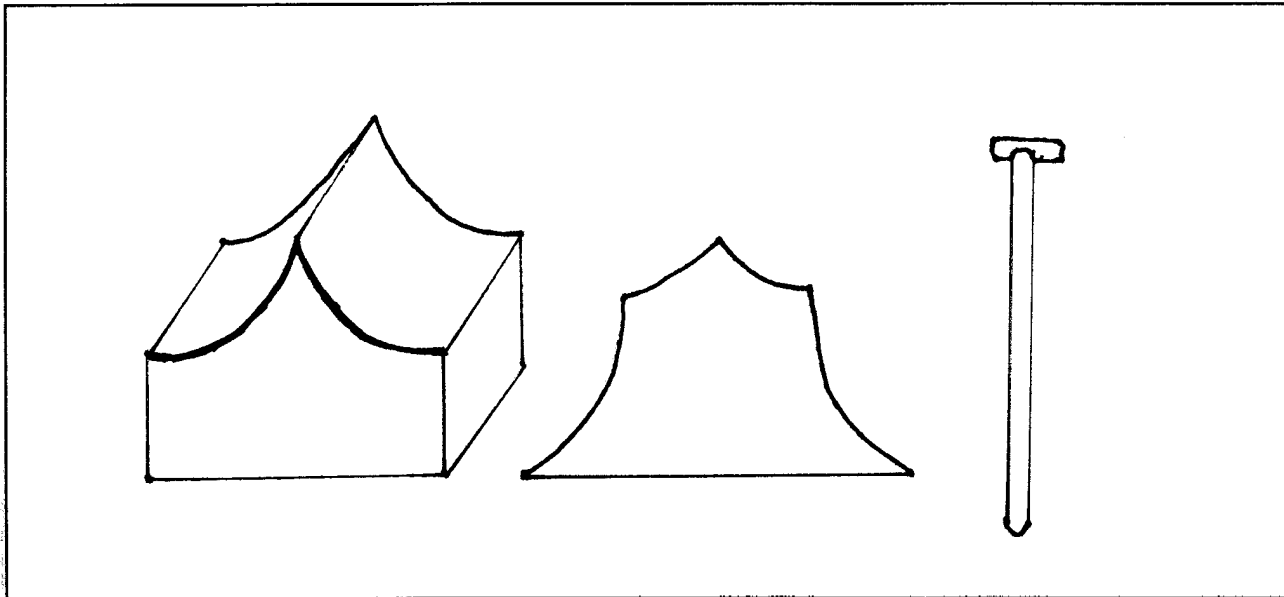


Figure 2: Two examples (front profile) of wooden blocks cut to fit under the barrel (centre section) of binoculars. On the right is a side-profile of the wooden block fastened to a pole.

¹according to a recent survey, Finland has more birders per capita than any country except Britain, so these guys have a lot of expertise.

²there are many fanatical migration-watchers in Finland, Even in the coldest and most brutal weather, birdtowers are crammed with people who spend several hours (or whole days) there hugging their thermos of coffee. News of rare birds is spread rapidly by an electronic pager system. Every serious birder wears one of these pagers on the belt.



ED's NOTE: There is also an article in **BIRDING** 25(4):264-5 entitled "The Finnstick" / by Annika Forsten and Walter S. Collins which readers might also find interesting. There were also some positive Letters to the Editors about Finnsticks in both **BIRDING** 26(2):88 and 27(1):11, stimulated by the initial article.

GUIDELINES FOR SITE GUIDES

Site Guides should be about 2-3 pages in length. They should include a map (hand-drawn is fine) with distances to viewing areas clearly indicated from the starting point. Landmarks and terrain should be noted, along with the birds seen in season. Any unusual or special species should be given and a local contact person is always helpful information. Hazards and closed areas should also be indicated so that we may all experience safe birding. Items of historical or geological interest along the route should also be noted. Many birders are interested in a broad range of natural history areas and it is nice to be able to stimulate the grey cells while patiently and quietly awaiting the possible appearance of an elusive lifebird.

**RECENT CHANGES IN PLACEMENT, AND COMMON AND SCIENTIFIC NAMES,
OF BIRDS OCCURRING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

by R. Wayne Campbell
Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks
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Every few years a group of professional ornithologists, comprising the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature, review scientific studies of birds in North America. Their findings, which consider the differences in morphology, vocalizations, habitat preferences, interbreeding, and migration patterns, result in updates to the official list of North American birds published by the American Ornithologists' Union known as the **Check-List of North American Birds**. This large book lists changes in placement and scientific names of birds in North America because of generic allocation, DNA-DNA hybridization studies, changes in common names to conform with international standards, newly described species, changes resulting from splitting from extralimital forms, and also corrects spelling for birds.

The last major check-list (sixth edition) appeared in 1983 and the seventh edition is scheduled for publication in 1997. Meanwhile, "supplements" are issued frequently to keep us informed of recent changes. The forty-first supplement has just been published in the ornithological journal **The Auk** and includes the following changes that affect the names, placement, and taxonomic order of birds in British Columbia.

FORMER

Short-tailed Albatross
(Diomedea albatrus)

Black-footed Albatross
(Diomedea nigripes)

Laysan Albatross
(Diomedea immutabilis)

Family Cathartidae (American
Vultures) removed from the
order Falconiformes (Diurnal
Birds of Prey)

Falcatad Teal
(Anas falcata)

Spruce Grouse
(Dendragapus canadensis)

Check-list order of grouse:

Spruce Grouse
Blue Grouse
Willow Ptarmigan
Rock Ptarmigan
White-tailed Ptarmigan
Ruffed Grouse
Sage Grouse
Sharp-tailed Grouse

NEW

Black-footed Albatross
(Phoebastria nigripes)

Laysan Albatross
(Phoebastria immutabilis)

Short-tailed Albatross
(Phoebastria albatrus)

Family Cathartidae inserted in
suborder Ciconiae (Storks) of
the order Ciconiiformes (Bitterns,
Herons, Egrets, Ibises, and Storks)
following family Ciconiidae (Storks)

Falcatad Duck
(Anas falcata)

Spruce Grouse
(Falcapennis canadensis)

Check-list order of grouse:

Ruffed Grouse
Sage Grouse
Spruce Grouse
Blue Grouse
Willow Ptarmigan
Rock Ptarmigan
White-tailed Ptarmigan
Sharp-tailed Grouse

FORMER (continued)

Family Phasianidae (Partridges,
Grouse, Ptarmigan, Turkeys,
Bobwhites and Quail)

American Golden-Plover
(Pluvialis dominicus)

Check-list order:

Pomarine Jaeger
Parasitic Jaeger
Long-tailed Jaeger
South Polar Skua...

Parakeet Auklet
(Cyclorhynchus psittacula)

Olive-sided Flycatcher
(Contopus borealis)

Check-list order for

families of Passeriformes:

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)
Alaudidae (Larks)
Hirundinidae (Swallows)
Corvidae (Jays, Magpies and Crows)
Paridae (Titmice)
Aegithalidae (Bushtits)
Sittidae (Nuthatches)
Certhiidae (Creepers)
Troglodytidae (Wrens)
Cinclidae (Dippers)

Muscicapidae (Kinglets, Bluebirds,
Thrushes and Allies)

Mimidae (Mockingbird, Thrashers
and Allies)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

Laniidae (True Shrikes)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

Vireonidae (Vireos)

Emberizidae (Wood-Warblers, Sparrows
Blackbirds and Allies)

Fringillidae

Passeridae

Black-capped Chickadee
(Parus atricapillus)

Mountain Chickadee
(Parus gambeli)

NEW (Continued)

Family Phasianidae (Partridge, Grouse,
Ptarmigan, and Turkey).

All New World Quail and Bobwhites raised
to family Odontophoridae and follow family
Phasianidae in check-list order.

American Golden-Plover
(Pluvialis dominica)

Check-list order:

South Polar Skua
Pomarine Jaeger
Parasitic Jaeger
Long-tailed Jaeger...

Parakeet Auklet
(Aethia psittacula)

Olive-sided Flycatcher
(Contopus cooperi)

Check-list order for

families of Passeriformes:

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

Laniidae (True Shrikes)

Vireonidae (Vireos)

Corvidae (Jays, Magpies and Crows)

Alaudidae (Larks)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

Paridae (Titmice)

Aegithalidae (Bushtits)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

Certhiidae (Creepers)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

Cinclidae (Dippers)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

Muscicapidae (Bluebirds, Thrushes
and Allies)

Mimidae (Mockingbird, Thrashers
and Allies)

Prunellidae (Accentors)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

Parulidae (Wood-Warblers)

Thraupidae (Tanagers)

Cardinalidae (Grosbeaks and Allies)

Emberizidae (Towhees, Sparrows, Longspurs,
Buntings and Allies)

Icteridae (Bobolink, Blackbirds, Grackles,
Orioles and Allies)

Fringillidae

Passeridae

Black-capped Chickadee
(Poecile atricapillus)

Mountain Chickadee
(Poecile gambeli)

FORMER (continued)

Boreal Chickadee
(Parus hudsonicus)

Chestnut-backed Chickadee
(Parus rufescens)

Check-list order:

Black-capped Chickadee
Mountain Chickadee
Boreal Chickadee
Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Family Muscicapidae (Kinglets,
Bluebirds, Thrushes, and Allies)

Check-list order:

...Family Laniidae (Shrikes)
Family Sturnidae (Starlings)
Family Vireonidae (Vireos)...

Solitary Vireo (all B.C.)
(Vireo solitarius)

Family Emberizidae (Wood-Warblers,
Tanagers, Sparrows, Blackbirds,
and Allies)

Check-list order:

White-throated Sparrow
Golden-crowned Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Harris' Sparrow

Check-list order:

Great-tailed Grackle
Common Grackle

NEW (continued)

Boreal Chickadee
(Poecile hudsonicus)

Chestnut-backed Chickadee
(Poecile rufescens)

Check-list order:

Black-capped Chickadee
Mountain Chickadee
Chestnut-backed Chickadee
Boreal Chickadee

Family Muscicapidae (Bluebirds,
Thrushes, and Allies).

The kinglets, genus Regulus, now have the rank of family (Regulidae) and follow the Family Cinclidae (Dippers) in check-list order.

Check-list order:

...Family Mimidae (Mockingbirds,
Thrashers, and Allies)
Family Sturnidae (Starlings)
Family Motacillidae (Wagtails
and Pipits)...

Blue-headed Vireo (ne B.C.)
(Vireo solitarius)

Cassin's Vireo (s B.C.)
(Vireo cassinii)

Family Parulidae
(Wood-Warblers)
Family Thraupidae
(Tanagers)
Family Emberizidae
(Emberizids)
Family Cardinalidae
(Grosbeaks and Allies)
Family Icteridae
(Icterids)

Check-list order:

White-throated Sparrow
Harris' Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Golden-crowned Sparrow

Check-list order:

Common Grackle
Great-tailed Grackle



Birding in Antarctic Waters

by Hugh Westheuser
1177 Bazett Road,
Kelowna, BC V1Z 2T4

In late February 1996, my wife and I ventured to the Antarctic Continent on a trip sponsored by Long Point Bird Observatory and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. The executive Directors of these two organizations, Michael Bradstreet and John Lounds were our leaders. The Travel Company looking after all arrangements, was the Toronto based, Marine Expeditions. They were well organized, very safety conscious and had among their staff, a marine biologist, an historian and two Canadian chefs. And they had no influence on me to write this!

Our route south lead through Toronto; Miami, Florida; Santiago, Chile; and finally to Ushuaia, Argentina, the southern-most community in South America. From here, the Russian, Class A Ice Ship, "Akademik Boris Petrov", was at our disposal for the voyage to the ice continent - Antarctica. Enroute through Drake Passage we would sail through the "Antarctic Convergence"; that wide imaginary, watery line, where the frigid Antarctic waters meet the slightly warmer waters of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The sudden mixing of these waters is apparently enough to kill or incapacitate many tiny animals and plants, which cannot tolerate rapid changes in temperature or salinity in their environment. This makes this zone particularly popular among sea birds which gorge themselves on the plankton. Nowhere else in the world can you see greater congregations of sea birds.

Unfortunately on the way south, we ran into weather the sailors referred to as a Class 11 Gale. Apparently a Class 12 Gale is a full hurricane. The Captain ordered all hatches and doors closed and sealed, changed course and moved at a dead slow speed. No one was permitted on deck; not that anyone was so inclined, as some of the 40 to 50 foot waves crashed across the decks. Later, one of the Russian Officers described to me in poor, broken English and dramatic gestures, how fast his heart raced as the bow of the ship repeatedly plunged into the bottom of the waves, blacking out the radar screens. At night and without radar, they were unable to see if there were any icebergs in our path. At the time I was completely oblivious to these "titanic" concerns, lying on my bed (as were most of the other passengers) desperately wishing to be at any other place in the world.

Once in the shelter of the islands off the Antarctic Peninsula, the deck of the ship became as steady as a rock. The Antarctic is one of the last true wilderness areas in the world - where nature remains the supreme force; a place where human presence is only incidental and mystery prevails. What better reason to be there! The ship moved slowly among the many ice bergs, while we all remained on deck, fascinated by the spectacular scenery. Wildlife was all about us; whales, seals and birds. Wherever bare ground showed, penguins in huge colonies could be seen. Occasionally a small flock of penguins would swim by the boat. In the crystal clear water we could see them using their wings to propel themselves at great speed, using their feet as a rudder, and occasionally leaping clear out of the water. They all appeared to be adults who would be feeding on the krill, an abundant crustacean that thrive in the cold Antarctic waters and is the basic diet of fish, winged sea birds, penguins, seals and whales. Once they have a crop full of krill, they would return to the colony to feed their young still confined to dry land.

During the next 10 days zodiacs took us to many penguin colonies, where we could quietly walk about, not disturbing the birds in the least. The effects of tourism on these colonies has been recently studied by British scientists. On the way home we met two of them in Santiago, Chile. They had observed nothing to suggest the birds were

Birding in Antarctic Waters (continued)

disturbed in any way by all the attention of the inquisitive tourist, walking carefully about and pointing camera lens in their direction. (They had been studying one particular colony we had visited, for 15 years). The most common penguin was the Gentoo Penguin, followed by the appropriately named Chinstrap Penguin. The least common was the Adelie Penguin which breed much farther south than the other two. The Adelie and Emperor Penguin are the only two species known to breed on the south polar continent itself. The others breed on the many islands near the Antarctic Peninsula. The trip leaders felt that most of the adult Adelies had probably left the breeding grounds, abandoning the young, who would later follow them to open oceans where they will spend the austral winter. We had hoped to see a Macaroni Penguin, and while at sea, one or two other species. But no such luck! In fact we saw no penguin species in the open waters of Drake Passage.

These penguin colonies were alive with activity. The young, shedding the last of the juvenile down feathers, chased after any adult bird they thought had food. The adults were adroit at recognizing their own offspring. The young pecked at their bill, and were rewarded by the adult regurgitating copious amounts of krill directly into their mouth. Watching all this action and ready to exploit any weaknesses were Great Southern Skuas, and Antarctic (McCormick's) Skuas scavenging anything they could. But the most unusual bird in the penguin colony was the garbage collector - the Snowy Sheathbills. With stained snowy colored plumage, these unique birds are believed to be the connecting link between waders and gulls. When seen scavenging amongst the most unpleasant offal in the penguin colony, they look more like pigeons. Another occupant of several penguin colonies was the Blue-eyed Shag, sporting a fine tuft of plumes which form a crest over each eye, and a bright blue ring of skin around each eye. On one or two of the more northerly islands, a few Southern Black-backed (Kelp) Gulls were present and were observed feeding young.

On the fifth day, the ship sailed to Deception Island - a dormant volcano. Part of a wall had collapsed, and sea water had flooded the caldera. The extremely narrow entrance, known as "Neptune's Bellows", opened into a large sheltered bay, the site of an old Norwegian whaling station. Volcanic eruptions in 1967, 1969 and 1971 had destroyed much of the station, building and cemetery. However there was much to see. After a climb up the caldera wall past feeding Skuas and Southern Black-backed Gulls we came to "Neptune's Window", where Cape (Pintado) Petrels used austere, rocky nests. One contained a fully feathered young bird. It tested its wings while we were within a few feet of the nest, totally oblivious to our presence. It is an unmistakable bird, with white patches on its upper wing feathers, back and tail. We were to see many more of these birds at sea.

At Aitcho Island, near the north end of the South Shetland Islands, we were privileged to get within 30 feet of the nesting site of the Southern Giant Petrel. This is a huge Petrel with a wing span of over seven feet. Some of the young were covered with down, and it can defend itself by spitting quantities of oil through its nostril. We were cautioned not to get within firing range, as not only is it highly obnoxious fluid, but is very difficult to get out of clothing.

Ten days in Antarctic waters passed all too quickly, and now having obtained our sea-legs, we eagerly looked forward to the two day trip back across Drake Passage to South America. This time the weather was more cooperative, for the wind even at that latitude remained moderate, with seas running in the 3-4 meter range. The birders spent most of their time on deck checking off the many seabirds that can be found there. Five species of Albatross were seen - Wandering, Royal, Black-browed, Light-mantled Sooty, and Grey-headed. These birds plane with barely a wing beat, gaining height into the wind while losing some air speed before banking again into the wind. This is repeated over and over.

The effortless flight is fascinating to watch as the birds cruised by our vessel. Sooty Shearwaters were seen, as were Wilson's Storm Petrel, Black-bellied Storm Petrel,

Birding in Antarctic Waters (continued)

Cape Petrel, Antarctic Petrel, Southern Giant Petrel, Snow Petrel, Magellanic Diving and Common Diving Petrel. Both the Broad-billed and the Thin-billed Prion were identified.

This was indeed the "trip of a lifetime". Seeing all these new birds, plus six seal species and three whale species, will not soon be forgotten.

I am reminded of Robert Cushman Murphy's words:

*"I now belong to a higher cult of mortals
for I have seen the Albatross".*

**B.C. CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DETAILS, 1997/98**

This listing of Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) is published as a service to BCFO members who would like to take part in CBCs in their local area or in nearby areas. It includes counts with the name and telephone number of the organizer(s) and the scheduled date. A **DNA** indicates that the contact person is correct but **Date Not Available** at press time. We include eleven CBC dates from Washington State courtesy of the Wiggers who sent us sites down to about the Seattle area. Data were accurate as known to the Editors on **November 19, 1997**. Check with the area organizers for any late-breaking changes.

LOCALITY	DATE	ORGANIZER(S)	PHONE NO.
Bamfield	28 Dec 97	Alan Burger	(250) 479-2446
Bowen Island	DNA	Allan Shatwell	(604) 947-2133
Broughton Strait	3 Jan 98	Bob Waldon	(250) 974-2281
Castlegar/Trail (WKN)	3 Jan 98	Madge Hollington	(250) 365-2381
Chilliwack	20 Dec 97	Annabelle Rempel	(604) 823-6549
Clearwater	20 Dec 97	Helen Knight	(250) 587-6532
Comox/Courtenay	21 Dec 97	Barbara Sedgwick	(250) 335-0064
Cranbrook	28 Dec 97	Greg Ross	(250) 489-2566
Deep Bay	3 Jan 98	Barbara Sedgwick	(250) 335-0064
Duncan	3 Jan 98	Derrick Marven	(250) 748-8504
Fauquier	DNA	Ruth Bumpus	(250) 269-7481
Fort St. James	27 Dec 97	Joanne Vinnedge	(250) 996-7357
Galiano Island	27 Dec 97	Mike Hoebel	(250) 539-2003 (H)
		or	(250) 652-0396 (H)
Golden	27 Dec 97	Ellen Zimmerman	(250) 348-2225
Kamloops	21 Dec 97	Rick Howie	(250) 578-7542
Kelowna	20 Dec 97	Don Wilson	(250) 763-8036
		or Chris Charlesworth	(250) 765-6048
Kimberley	3 Jan 98	Mildred White	(250) 427-3605
Kitimat	20 Dec 97	Dennis Horwood	(250) 632-2004
Ladner	28 Dec 97	Jude Grass	(604) 520-3706
Lake Windermere District	26 Dec 97	Larry Halverson	(250) 342-3305
Masset	20 Dec 97	Peter Hamel	(250) 626-3585
Mackenzie	3 Jan 98	Derek Connelly	(250) 997-4001
Mayne Island	28 Dec 97	Michael Dunne	(250) 539-5745
Nakusp	3 Jan 98	Gary Davidson	(250) 265-4456
Nanaimo	28 Dec 97	Peter Van Kerkoerle	(250) 245-2530
Nelson	4 Jan 98	Burke Koral	(250) 354-0165
Oliver-Osoyoos	3 Jan 98	Tom Ethier	(250) 496-4171
		or Joan King	(250) 495-6907

LOCALITY	DATE	ORGANIZER (S)	PHONE NO.
Parksville-Qualicum	20 Dec 97	Will Lemon	(250) 757-2387
Pender Harbour	23 Dec 97	Tony Greenfield	(604) 885-5539
Pender Islands	28 Dec 97	Mary Roddick	(250) 629-3308
Penticton	20 Dec 97	Steve Cannings or Dick Cannings	(250) 492-2303 (250) 496-4019
Pitt Meadows/Maple Ridge	28 Dec 97	Kees van den Berg	(604) 463-8743
Port Alberni	3 Jan 98	Sandy McRuer	(250) 723-5436
Port Clements	3 Jan 98	Peter Hamel	(250) 626-3585
Prince George	21 Dec 97	Nancy Krueger or Cathy Antoniazzi	(250) 563-7896 (250) 562-3897
Prince Rupert	3 Jan 98	Robin Weber	(250) 627-1129 (H) or (250) 624-3207 (W)
Princeton	21 Dec 97	Madelon Schouten	(250) 295-7078
Quesnel	28 Dec 97	Adam Moss	(250) 747-3455
Revelstoke	20 Dec 97	George Winingder	(250) 837-3655
Rose Spit	1 Jan 98	Peter Hamel	(250) 626-3585
Salmon Arm	26 Dec 97?	Frank Kime	(250) 835-8537
Saltspring Island	14 Dec 97	Nancy Braithwaite	(250) 537-9335
Shuswap Lake	DNA	Rick Howie	(250) 578-7542
Skidegate Inlet	27 Dec 97	Peter Hamel	(250) 626-3585
Smithers	27 Dec 97?	Rosamund Pojar	(250) 847-9784
Sooke	27 Dec 97	Neil Hughes	(250) 642-5085
Squamish	20 Dec 97	Jim Wisnia	(604) 898-2000
Sunshine Coast	20 Dec 97	Tony Greenfield	(604) 885-5539
Terrace	28 Dec 97	Diane Weismiller	(250) 635-6984
Vancouver	21 Dec 97	George Clulow	(604) 438-7639
Vaseux Lake	28 Dec 97	Dick Cannings or Steve Cannings	(250) 496-4019 (250) 492-2303
Vernon	21 Dec 97	Mary Collins or Phil Gehlen	(250) 542-5673 (250) 542-8053
Victoria	20 Dec 97	David Pearce	(250) 658-0295
Wells Gray Park	27 Dec 97	Trevor Goward	(250) 674-2553
Whistler	27 Dec 97	Max Gotz	(604) 932-7247
White Rock and Surrey	3 Jan 98	Ian Robertson	(604) 530-1080
Williams Lake	DNA	Anna Roberts	(250) 392-5000

WASHINGTON STATE BORDER AREAS

LOCALITY	DATE	ORGANIZER (S)	PHONE NO.
Bellingham	21 Dec 1997	Joe Meche	(360) 738-0641
Edmonds	21 Dec 1997	Sally Van Niel	(425) 778-7568
Everett	27 Dec 1997	Christopher Hill	(425) 258-3680
North Cascades	20 Dec 1997	Bob Kuntz	(360) 424-9099
Padilla Bay	27 Dec 1997	Kraig Kemper	(206) 789-9255
Port Gamble	20 Dec 1997	Scott Downes	(206) 361-7073
Port Townsend	20 Dec 1997	Richard Johnson	(360) 385-5418
San Juan Ferry (Anacortes to Victoria)	30 Dec 1997	Jim Duemmel	(360) 733-3448
San Juan Islands Archipelago	20 Dec 1997	Barb Jensen	(360) 378-3068
Sequim-Dungeness	22 Dec 1997	Bob Boekelheide	(360) 681-4867
Skagit Bay	4 Jan 1998	Art Campbell	(206) 783-2449

NOTES: Interior Swan-and-Eagle Count (12 Jan) Rick Howie (250) 578-7542
Nelson Winter Bird Count 10 Jan 98 Linda Van Damme (250) 354-1182



The 1998 AGM and Birding Tour

*** Mark Your Calendars ***

by Tony Greenfield
P.O. Box 319
Sechelt, BC V0N 3A0

By all accounts, the 1997 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the BCFO at Prince George, which included a birding extension to the Peace River Parklands, was an outstanding success - so good, in fact, that your Board of Directors has decided to do it again - this time to the southeast.

Although plans are still underway, you should block off the dates of June 19 to 21, 1998 for the **AGM** and, if you really want to enjoy what BCFO has to offer, plan to participate in our **pre-meeting Prairie Birding Tour** from June 15-19, 1998.

The destinations? The prairies of southern Alberta for the birding extension, and the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area for the AGM.

At Creston, we will meet at the excellent interpretation centre, gallery and theater constructed at the CVWMA by the Federal Government. Technical sessions, a brief business meeting and a banquet are being arranged. Morning birding on Saturday and Sunday could include Duck Lake, Leach Lake, Six Mile Slough and maybe even the Selkirk Mountains. For you B.C. listers we will be looking for all six species of grebes (including Clark's Grebe), Forster's Tern, Black Tern, Wild Turkey, American Bittern, Black-backed Woodpecker, Long-eared Owl, Veery, and a host of nesting duck species and many others.

The four-night prairie birding tour will begin in Southern Alberta and we will explore the Alberta foothills, possibly into Waterton Lakes National Park, and then into the vast prairies and badlands. Our targets there will include Chestnut-collared Longspur, Logger-head Shrike, Upland Sandpiper, Least Flycatcher, and Prairie Falcon. With good planning we will seek out the habitats of Sage Grouse, Lark Bunting, McCowns' Longspur, Le Conte's and Baird's Sparrows, Ferruginous Hawk and White-faced Ibis. With good luck we will find at least some of these more elusive species. Come along and help us search!

Questions? - then talk to any of the hundred or so members who attended the Prince George AGM, or the thirty-four who continued on to the Peace, or call Tony at (604) 885-2409 or Bryan Gates at (250) 598-7789.

Plan to attend! Bring along a friend and new member for BCFO. Group transportation from Victoria and Vancouver will be arranged if the demand is there.



✧ **Derrick Marven Birding Tours** ✧
Presents

Winter Jamaica

A successful tour is judged by the calibre of memorable experiences of each participant.

Escape the brutal Canadian winter. Imagine a tropical island where the people are friendly, speak English, and the birds are incredibly beautiful and prolific - Jamaica. This enchanting island paradise boasts 26 endemics, all of which we should see during our stay at our delightful lodges, one of which is a century-old estate. Greater Antillean specialities are also found throughout this island paradise that is blessed with a wide range of habitats from dry coastal scrub to mountain rainforests that loom 7,000 feet into endless blue skies. Our relaxed tour is timed to maximize our chances of seeing both Neotropical migrants and as many as 50 Greater Antillean species.

January 17 - 26, 1998 @ \$2,995
(excluding meals)

*** Maximum time in the field ***

Our itineraries are designed to ensure that your tour is the best possible. We firmly believe that a small group and a high leader-to-participant ratio is essential to the benefits of any birding tour. Once you have taken a tour with us you are certain to go again.

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A successful tour is judged by the caliber of memorable experiences of each participant.

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*** Maximum time in the field ***

Winter in Jamaica

January 17-26, 1998 \$2,995 (excluding meals) double-occupancy from Victoria/Vancouver. Escape the brutal Canadian winter. Imagine a tropical island where the people are friendly, speak English, and the birds are incredibly beautiful and prolific - Jamaica. This enchanting island paradise boasts 26 endemics, all of which we should see during our stay at our delightful lodges.

Costa Rica

February 2-16, 1998 \$4,095 (with most meals) double and triple occupancy from Victoria. This legendary natural history destination boasts an avifaunal list of 855 species, expect to see about 500. Our relaxed tour will include stays at three of Costa Rica's best rainforest lodges.

April in South Texas

April 2-17, 1998 \$2,850 (excluding meals) double occupancy from Victoria/Vancouver. Texas has a vast and varied landscape that is home to more species of birds than any other state - and April is Texas at its best! Spring migrants pour northward and breeding birds are in full song. Three hundred species and some forty south Texas specialties are expected.

Southeast Arizona

April 18-May 1, 1998 \$2,350 (excluding meals) based on double-occupancy from Victoria. The sky islands - as the mountains of southeast Arizona are known - rank high as one of North America's favourite birding destinations. Dazzling Elegant Trogons sit in shady sycamore-filled canyons, while the songs of Red-faced Warblers drift through the oaks. Spectacular scenery.

Florida Specialties

April 25-May 9, 1999 \$3,5595 (excluding meals) based on double-occupancy from Victoria. Florida enjoys the only true tropical environment within the USA. During our tour we will search for the dozen West Indian specialties that inhabit the region. A special trip will be made to the Dry Tortugas to see the Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy colony and pelagics en route.

Detailed itineraries are available for all tours.

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1887 Frances Street
Duncan, BC V9L 4Z9

☎(250) 748-8504



**Two New Guides Worthwhile
in Spite of Their Shortcomings**

by Bruce Whittington
c/o the Field-Naturalist
1126 Blanshard Street
Victoria, BC V8W 2H4

I am always a little leery when I see a new bird book. I've come to rely on what I feel are the two best in the field, and I'm skeptical that there can be much improvement without essentially duplicating what has already been done by somebody else.

I have always liked Peterson's **Western Birds**. An artist's paintings are almost always better than photographs, because the bird is portrayed so that its significant markings can be seen easily. The late Roger Tory Peterson was a master at field guide art. Text faces the plates on the opposite page, an essential feature.

The range maps, by Peterson's wife, Virginia, are grouped at the end of the book. This is less convenient for the user, but the advantage is that these maps can be larger and more legible.

They are also the most accurate of any field guide I have seen. The Peterson also has the advantage of dealing with only western species, eliminating many from the process of identification. It's \$26.95.

The National Geographic Society's (NGS) **Field Guide to the Birds of North America** is also excellent, and is regarded by many serious birders as the best. It covers all North American species, and uses the same facing-page format. The maps are there also, but are frustratingly small; Vancouver Island does not even exist on many of them.

The plates generally show a degree of feather detail which is necessary only in a few difficult identification situations. They are by several artists, and I find this results in some inconsistency in the use of color and detail. The price is \$28.95.

A new guide called **All the Birds of North America** is from the American Bird Conservancy. A well qualified team of consultants and artists was used, so the book starts off on the right track.

Two New Guides Worthwhile (continued)

Its "revolutionary" system takes some time to figure out, because the introductory material is not at the beginning, but in the middle. But it is an attractive format, with birds in similar families grouped in habitat settings, rather than on blank paper. It uses the facing-page system, but like the NGS guide, the maps are frustratingly small.

There are many avoidable errors (Lewis' Woodpecker is shown as breeding on Vancouver Island. And Barred Owl is not, for example), but they are not so bad as to make the book unusable - just don't rely on it solely. It's \$28.50.

A book which has been available a little longer is the **Stokes' Field Guide to the Birds - Western Region** by respected bird writers Donald and Lillian Stokes. Like Peterson, it is limited to the west, with an eastern edition also available. It is less than complete, unfortunately; my preliminary skimming found no reference to Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, a rare but regular Victoria visitor.

It uses photographs, and the overall quality is good. The two non-breeding golden-plovers, though, have been photographed in different lights, and the result is that each displays the coloration that should be looked for in the other. It's just one example of why I don't like photographic field guides, but this is clearly the best of its kind.

The authors have stayed with the accepted taxonomic order for birds, rather than inventing hermaphrodite systems which are impossible to cross-reference with other books.

The range maps are mediocre, especially for a distinct location like Vancouver Island. There are errors here too; Spotted Owls are shown as breeding in Victoria, as is the Dusky Flycatcher. The best advice is to rely on more than one reference, and use the Victoria' Natural History Society's bird checklist.

These two new books are both useful additions to a birder's library, and could be used as stand-alone field guides. Personal preference will play a role here. However, neither will displace the Peterson or NGS guides in the one-two positions.

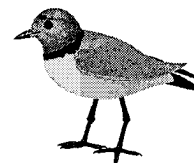
[EDS' NOTE: ¹ or an appropriate list for British Columbia or your particular geographic region. Article reprinted with permission of the author.]



The Cure for Shorebird Identification

by Lloyd Esralson
#309-14881 104th Avenue
Surrey, BC V3R 1M6

Although I have been birding for several years and have been making progress in field identification, there has been one area in which all of my efforts seemed to be producing the opposite effect. This was in the field identification of shorebirds - not some, but all shorebirds. Despite years of field work and immersing myself in articles and books dedicated to clarifying this, I still seemed to be slipping. Aging of shorebirds started to mean looking at a Western Sandpiper and seeing this same bird change into a Least Sandpiper, then a Semipalmated Sandpiper and finally back to a Western Sandpiper. There seemed to be something wrong. The problem was further complicated by the fact that none of



Cure for Shorebird Identification (continued)

the field guides showed all the species that I was seeing. For example, there was no record of the Medium-billed Dowitcher and I was seeing a lot of these. The guides only showed two species of Yellowlegs but I was certain that there were four, not only the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, normally seen in the guides, but also the Greater-lesser Yellowlegs and the Lesser-greater Yellowlegs. Trips to the Iona Sewage Ponds, the Reifel Bird Sanctuary as well as Blackie Spit and Boundary Bay were trying times indeed. It was time to seek professional help and no ordinary psychiatrist or psychologist would do. Several years ago I had heard of the Institute for Field Ornithology at the University of Maine at Machias and the excellent shorebird identification course offered by Wayne Petersen. These were desperate times and so, in August of 1996, I found myself on the plane flying to Boston for a weeks rest and then driving up to Machias where the workshop was to be held.

Driving up the coast through Massachusetts and Maine was beautiful and everything I imagined these States to be. Picturesque towns, spiralled churches and scenic coastline were everywhere. It was the New England of picture postcard fame. As I passed into the most North-Eastern County in Maine, namely Sunrise Coast, I noticed a distinct change in the appearance and feel of the country-side. The country was harsher, the blueberry barrens became apparent, the towns not quite as prosperous as those farther south, the disappearance of restaurants and taverns as a regular feature of every town. It was not as I had expected it but at the same time there was a pleasant and friendly feeling to the region. In many ways it was like the Canadian Maritimes. Arrival in Machias and finding the University was easy and I found myself checked into the residence and looking forward to the days ahead.

The introductory session was scheduled for 4:00 PM in the residences' common area. Here I first met Charles Duncan who turned out to be a Professor of Chemistry at the University and an avid birder as well as the director for the Institute for Field Ornithology, which was his creation and which, with the cooperation of the Board of Governors of the University, they had established about twelve years ago. Their goal was to develop working sessions on field identification and other topics of interest to birders. The facilities of the University were to be utilized during the off season and, hopefully, would generate some additional funds for the University. From a humble start, the Institute has grown both in the number of workshops offered and the development of a sizeable library devoted to Ornithology. The session on shorebird identification was one of the first programs to be started. Perhaps this was a result of my affliction being more prevalent than I had suspected. The second person I was to meet was Wayne Petersen and he was also involved in this from the beginning. Wayne was to be the main instructor. His credentials were impressive and included eighteen years of classroom experience, years as a tour guide for Field Guides as well as working full time for the Massachusetts Audubon Society. The introductory session ended up with pizza being delivered and then it was time to start my treatment. Things were looking up.

The classes started the next morning and sessions relating to identification, aging, migration, feeding strategies, food sources and vocalizations were interspersed with field trips to the local birding hotspots for shorebirds. The Columbia Falls Blueberry Barrens were searched for Upland Sandpipers and although we heard them calling, the views were disappointing. It was the only shorebird to be uncooperative. We also visited the Look Canning Plant, Little Machias Bay and the South Lubec Sandflats. One of the big advantages to birding in this area are the very high tides that come in at speeds that we are not familiar with. The fast moving tides force the birds to be more active and, consequently, they take flight more often. Vocalizations become more common and you have more opportunities to see the birds in flight while still allowing time to study them on the ground. Although we saw a large variety of species, the numbers of shorebirds in the Machias area have been dropping. In particular, the Wilson's Phalarope have

AUTHORS IN THIS ISSUE

Lloyd Esralson

A long-time chemistry teacher, Lloyd got started in birding nearly 15 years ago when a Vancouver-based Crested Mynah caught his attention during a rather dull staff meeting. Lloyd served on the BCFO Board of Directors for six years, most recently serving as secretary.

Karen Weibe

A naturalist and an artist, Karen sent us her article while she was working at UBC. Unfortunately, she recently moved to Saskatchewan without leaving a bio for us. So all we can reliably say is that she is a naturalist with a full-time job - an uncommon species in these difficult days.

Hugh Westheuser

Hugh, retired after 35 years in the RCMP mostly in BC and NWT, has been birding intermittently since being introduced to it as a very young person growing up on a farm in Southern Ontario. Birding became the safety valve from life's other pressures, and it has now become the impetus for much of his travel.


Bruce Whittington

Bruce writes a regular birding column for a Victoria paper, operates The Field-Naturalist, and is a member of the Victoria Natural History Society. He goes birding as often as he can get away from his natural history business.



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