



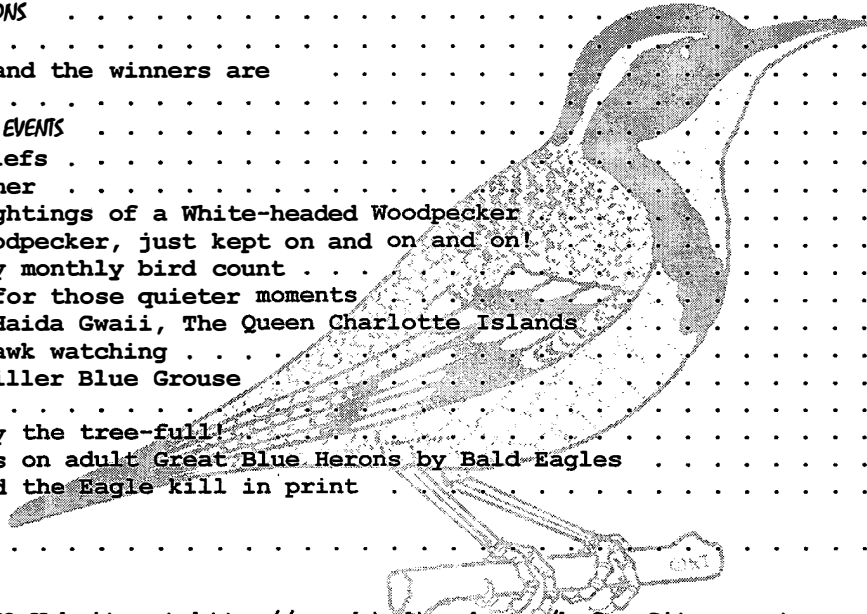
BC BIRDING

ISSN 1206-1611

NEWSLETTER OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS
Volume 12 Number 2
June 2002

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Check Out BCFO Website at <http://www.birding.bc.ca/bcfo>. Site courtesy of Kevin Slagboom.

BC 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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EDITORS' NOTES & NOTIONS

Here it is - our 10th anniversary issue as editors. We hope you will find it interesting. It has a real mix of submissions - from our regular columnists, from e-mail reports, from friends, from various members and directors, and from an advertiser of quality optics. As this is a special issue for us, as Editors, we have also included a quiz with two prizes from our very own eclectic natural history library. Read on!

BCFO events have been well subscribed again this year. The Puntzi Lake Extension Trip is full and there is a waiting list for the fall pelagic. Thanks to all who have supported these ventures and a very big thank you to all those, sung and unsung heros, who have worked to make these events happen. It is no small job to coordinate the many details necessary to ensure these quality events. Also a big thank you to all of the BCFO Directors for their able duties over one or more years. Unfortunately we will be losing several at this year's AGC so, members, please consider how you might assist in our organization.

In this issue Bryan and Jo Ann report on various BCFO happenings, Martin has sent us a list of upcoming events and BC Birding news briefs, John documents two interesting incidents of bird behavior, Gwen and Jim G. both sent us articles on a bird which we personally 'missed' but most other birders in BC were lucky enough to see, Jim W. allowed us to reprint one of his monthly birding reports, Margo sent us a lyrical look at winter birding on 'The Isles', Laird notes a northern hawk migration, Sandra alerts us to some new checklists, Adele and Rob both sent us interesting notes on migration, and we offer you a challenge, with prizes.

Some of you may know it is the Andy part of this team that usually writes this column. However, this is our tenth anniversary issue so we felt it was Marilyn's turn to speak up. Most of you have heard her speak, either giving the Newsletter Editors' report at the Annual Meetings, or on the telephone querying you about CBC count dates and contacts, or calling you to follow up on that promised article. We would like to thank all the people who have helped put this newsletter out over the past ten years. This newsletter is really a team effort - members contribute articles, columns, and information; prepare mailing labels; stuff envelopes; and get each of the issues to the mail. In order to continue producing the newsletter we would encourage each of you to consider where you might be able to assist in the process. We would like to step down as editors in order to pursue other interests.

We look forward to seeing many of you at this year's Annual General Conference.

Good birding. Andy and Marilyn

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I write this just after watching the Vancouver Canucks bow out of the NHL playoffs, and I am reminded that it is time for me to bow out of the BCFO Executive. Not by choice, mind you, but by the dictates of our bylaws. My six years on the Board - the maximum under the bylaws - have been productive and very rewarding. I thank my fellow Board members for their hard work and excellent cooperation. And I thank all of you, our members, for getting involved with the functions and activities that we have arranged. Your response, as shown by turnouts at our recent Annual Conference and Extension gatherings, has been truly gratifying to all of us.

A six-year term is plenty long enough. Bylaws are designed to ensure that new faces with new ideas can step forward and take their organization into new "habitats", so to speak. No group wants to be strangled by head-in-the-sand ostriches at the top.

Are we growing? Is public interest in ornithology and bird watching waning, even though we still hear it said that this is the fastest growing form of recreation in North America? Are there fewer people setting out to learn about and enjoy birds now than, say, 10 years ago?

I suspect there are. Maybe that goes with the territory. When governments claim severe financial difficulty (always at the fault of the previous administration, of course) they make cuts. Environmental and outdoor recreations programs are usually the first to feel the knife. More people become financially strapped, resulting in less spare time. Our educational facilities no longer have the finances to offer introductory courses in ornithology to students, both young and old. The result of fewer programs and less leadership inevitably leads to a declining interest in bird conservation.

Whatever the cause and effect, BCFO members should jump on this opportunity to fill the gap. Start the growth trend again. Offer your help - no matter how much or little you think you have to offer. Work with your society, or with local groups, municipalities, schools and churches. Communicate your interest in birds to others, and get them involved. It is a known fact that those who know the environment become jealous guardians of it. It follows, then, that those who know birds become protective of them and of their habitats. We need more people to act as protectors ... before the birds fly away, not to return.

I am confident that you will continue your excellent support under the new Board of Directors, President and editors, starting with the Annual Conference at Williams Lake in June.

Bryan R. Gates, President

Pelagic 2002 - the winners are:

A flock of mail arrived on May 1, 2 and 3. Your interest in Pelagic 2002 out of Port McNeill is more than enthusiastic. So much so, that letters postmarked in the first week of May were almost sufficient to fill the 33 available positions on Naiad Explorer. This trip, off the northern tip of Vancouver Island, is scheduled for the weekend of Sept. 7 to 9, 2002.

As of May 9, 2002 the following 32 members have secured a position on the tour:
Blokker, Peter; Brighton, John; Cowan, Larry; Craig, Glad; Durance, Eva; Estralson, Lloyd; Gates, Bryan; Greenwood, Gwen; Hentze, Nathan; Jensen, Dale; Kinsey, Sandra; Klimko, Ken; Law, Laird; McKeen, Donna; MacKenzie, Hue; MacKenzie, Jo Ann; Mackie, Cheryl; Milligan, Allan; Monte, Guy; Morgan, Ken; Rudland, Rand; Scott, Brian; Sprague, John; Sprague, Lois; Stech, Brian; Summers, Ken; Taylor, Ken; Taylor, Mrs. Ken; Tkachuk, Russ; Toochin, Mike; VanderPol, Hank; Zaremba, Stefan.

If for any reason you must withdraw, you are asked to notify me as soon as possible so that others on a waiting list can be moved into your position. If you do so before August 15, you will receive a full refund. After that date, a \$15 fee will be withheld by BCFO.

I expect some cancellations, so it is not too late to join the waiting list. Send a cheque for \$125.00, payable to Bryan Gates, to 3085 Uplands Road, Victoria, V8R 6B3. If you do not make the final list you will receive a full refund.

Your travel to and from Port McNeill, and your accommodations while there, are your responsibility. A block of rooms has been reserved at the Haida Way Motel in Port McNeill (\$71 single, \$91 double; phone 250-956-3373). An alternative is the Dellwood Motel (250-956-3304). You should book for Friday, May 7 and Saturday, May 8. The 10-hour excursion will depart at 0700h on May 8, weather permitting. Otherwise, we will hold over until 0700h on Sunday, May 9.

For other details see BC Birding V. 12, No. 1 (March 2002) and V. 11, No. 1 (March 2001).

Questions? Email me at: <bgates@pacificcoast.net> or call 250-598-7789.

DIRECTORS' CORNER

The Board of Directors met on 5 May in Langley.

Hank VanderPol, Laurie Rockwell and Sandra Kinsey reported on progress with arrangements for the 2002 Annual Conference to be held 7-9 June in Williams Lake, with the Annual General Meeting on 8 June, and Post-Conference Extension into the Cariboo Country to Puntzi Lake during 10-12 June. Final arrangements were discussed. More members are urged to attend the Conference, although the Extension is already over-subscribed, and a stand-by list has been established.

Possible locations for the 2003 Annual Conference were discussed. Serious consideration will be given to the Rocky Mountain Trench area, centered perhaps in Radium, Cranbrook or Fernie.

There will be a need for three new directors following the June AGM, as Bryan Gates and Russ Tkachuk are retiring from the Board, and Laurie Rockwell is stepping down. We do not yet have a full slate of nominees for the directorships. Bryan's departure will leave Glen Moores (Brentwood Bay) as the only director in southern Vancouver Island; we would like to have one director from the immediate Victoria area. We also need a replacement (or 'replacements') for Marilyn and Andy Buhler, the editors of *BC Birding*, as they want to retire from that task. So far, no one has volunteered to take over, and our members would surely be dismayed if the newsletter should cease for lack of editorial staff. On the subject of *BC Birding*, additional articles are always wanted.

Discussions continue on various ways to re-establish a viable Bird Records Committee for BC. We expect to have information to present at the AGM.

A BCFO display is being prepared for the North American Bluebird Society's Annual General Meeting in Penticton, 13-16 June.

The proposal for a BCFO Annual Award was resurrected, having been first suggested in 1994. Terms of reference were discussed as well as possible recipients. This matter will be pursued further by the Board. A letter from Diana Axtell suggesting periodic recognition of a young naturalist was acknowledged.

Treasurer Glen Moores presented a draft of the "Statement of Revenue and Expenditures for the Year Ended Dec. 31, 2001". A finalized Statement will be presented at the Annual General Meeting.

As of 5 May, memberships stand at 184. Membership Chairperson Russ Tkachuk will prepare a new membership list for distribution with the September issue of *BC Birding*. As this is Russ' last term on the Board, a new Membership Chair will be needed.

BCFO has been invited by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative to place a representative on either the Board of Directors or the Technical Committee of the Canadian Intermountain Joint Venture (CIVJ). There was some discussion of qualified members who might be asked to serve.

The next BCFO Directors' Meeting will take place following the Annual General Meeting, on 8 June, in Williams Lake.

Jo Ann MacKenzie
Director

SOCIETY NEWS

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

compiled by Martin K. McNicholl


- June 7-9 2002 **BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS 12th ANNUAL CONFERENCE**, Williams Lake, B.C.: see registration material in last issue of B.C. Birding.
- June 13-16 2002 **NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY (NABS) 25th ANNIVERSARY** celebration and annual general meeting, Penticton, BC. Hosted by the Southern Interior Bluebird Society. Complete registration and schedule available on the web site: www.nabluebirdsociety.org. Contact: Terry and Greg Tellier. email: t.tellier@shaw.ca, phone (250) 493-4634
Mail contact: NABS 2002, Box 494, Oliver, BC V0H 1T0
- June 21-23 2002 **CANADIAN NATURE FEDERATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**, Ottawa, Ont. Contact (no name indicated): Canadian Nature Federation, phone: 1-800-267-4088.
- Aug. 11-17 2002 **23rd INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS**, Beijing, China. Contact: Mr. Lieu Feng, Assistant Secretary-General of the 23rd Congress, China International Conference Center for Science and Technology, Xueyuan Nan Road, Beijing 100081, China; phone +861062174952.
- Sept. 24-28 2002 **3rd NORTH AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS**, a joint meeting of **AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY, RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION, SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS, SOCIETY OF CARIBBEAN ORNITHOLOGY** and **SECCION MEXICANA DEL CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL PARA LA PRESERVACION DE AVES**, New Orleans, Louisiana. Contacts: Dr. Thomas W. Sherry, Department of Ecology, Evolution and Organic Biology, 310 Dinwiddie Hall, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA 70118; phone (504) 865-5191 or Dr. Kimberly G. Smith, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AK 72701; phone (501) 575-3251.
- Nov. 6-10 2002 **NORTH AMERICAN SEA DUCK CONFERENCE & WORKSHOP**, Victoria, BC. Contact: Dan Eisler, Centre for Wildlife Ecology, Simon Fraser University, 5421 Robertson Road., Delta, BC V4K 3N2.
- Nov. 6-10 2002 **2002 MEETING, THE WATERBIRD SOCIETY**, La Crosse, WI. Contact: Elizabeth A. Schreiber, Seabird Research, Inc., 4109 Komes Court, Alexandria, VA 22306.
- Jan. 21-25 2003 **NINTH NORTH AMERICAN CRANE WORKSHOP**, Sacramento, CA. Contact: Scott G. Hereford, phone (228) 497-6322, extension 28.
- Apr. 30 -
May 3 2003 **COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING**, Flagstaff, AZ. contact: Mark Sogge, phone (928)556-6322, extension 28.
- May 18-25 2003 **VIth WORLD CONFERENCE ON BIRDS OF PREY AND OWLS**, Budapest, Hungary. Contact: WWGBP, Box 52, Towcester NN12 7ZW, England; phone/fax ++44-1604-86 23 31.



SOCIETY NEWS

BC BIRDING NEWS BRIEFS

compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

- Fraser River Estuary I.B.A. -Photographs of the dedication of the Fraser River estuary "IBA" [Important Bird Area] during the fall of 1991 appear in B.C. Nat. 40(1):30, "2002" [actually 2001].
- U.B.C Student Receives Bluebird Grant -One of four research grants of the North American Bluebird Society for 2002 was awarded to Kathryn Aitken of U.B.C. for a project on nest-site limitations, nest-site selection and nest site philopatry in several cavity-nesting bird species in the Cariboo-Chilcotin area of interior B.C. -based on Anonymous. 2002. *Bluebird* 24(2):5.
- B.C.'s Avian Wanderings and Elderly Birds -Several B.C.-banded birds were included in the latest compilation of "Significant encounters" of North America's banded birds (J. B. Dunning, Jr. 2001. *North Amer. Bird Bander* 26:170-178). Wanderers included a Montana-banded Northern Pintail recovered about 1,800 km. northwest at Coombs, B.C., a Harlequin Duck banded at Banff, Alberta in May 1998 and recaptured alive on Hornby Island, B.C. by Fred Cooke that September, as well as two more Harlequins banded in Montana and recaptured on Hornby Island and a Hermit Thrush banded in Alaska in August 1998 that died after striking a North Vancouver building that November. A female Rufous Hummingbird banded by Betty McGinnis at Fanny Bay in May 1992 was at least seven years old when recaptured there in 1998, exceeding the ages of two others recaptured there when five years old and two others when four years old. A female Red-winged Blackbird banded in Washington in 1993 was at least six years old when found dead about 50 km. north in Saanich, B.C.
- Mildred White -Interior naturalist, Mildred White, died suddenly in a Calgary, Alberta hospital on 16 December 2001. A former Regional Director of the Federation of B.C. Naturalists, Ms. White conducted breeding bird surveys, monitored bluebird trails, co-authored a regional bird and plant checklist, and contributed other bird notes from the Rocky Mountains and nearby areas. -based on Anonymous. 2001. *Cranbrook Daily Townsman*, reprinted in B.C. Nat. 40(2):22, 2002. 

Birds of a feathersubmitted by Adele Cohen
(reprinted with permission of Rob Butler)


The spectacular annual spring migration of millions of shorebirds through the Fraser River Delta is once again underway. These birds have flown from as far south as Peru.

Our inter-tidal banks are a critical 'refueling' stop-over enroute to breeding grounds in western Alaska and eastern Siberia.

The Canadian Wildlife Service and the Centre for Wildlife Ecology at Simon Fraser University are working with partners from Point Reyes Bird Observatory in California, the Prince William Sound Science Centre and Copper River Institutes in Alaska and 39 co-operators between Mexico and Alaska on a comprehensive research program to better understand the ecology and conservation needs of Western Sandpipers; one of the major shorebird species on the Pacific Coast. Ninety shorebirds have been fitted with transmitters in Sinaloa, Mexico.

As of April 24, 17 had left Mexico, and one was detected in San Francisco Bay. In the next two weeks, it is expected that many of the birds will pass through the Fraser River delta.

The number of Western Sandpipers has declined over the past decade and the team is trying to find out why. Some good evidence indicates that the birds are migrating faster as a result of an increased risk of being caught by falcons which are more numerous now than a decade ago. In addition, three teams of graduate students are now conducting daily netting, banding, feeding observations and estimating the prey on the mudflats to provide a comprehensive examination of the state of the Fraser River estuary for shorebirds.

April 23, 2002, about 90,000 shorebirds were on the delta. The spectacle can best be viewed on Brunswick Point in west Delta at the high tide in late April. Contact Rob Butler 604-940-4672 

Chronicle of sightings of a White-headed Woodpecker

by Gwen Nicol
P.O. Box 947
Rossland, BC V0G 1Y0

Dates: August 21, 22, 29, & 30; September 18 & 19; October 28; November 2 & 3, 2001.
Number of sightings: 11, a total of approximately 4¼ hours under observation.
Total time spent at the site: 55 hours.
Location: Between 11.5 km and the 12 km marker on Camp McKinney Road, Oliver, BC.
Habitat: Mixed forest - in the immediate vicinity predominantly Ponderosa Pine of varying age.

August 21: I arrived late in the afternoon. The bird appeared at 6:00 pm behind a clearing beside the road at approximately 11.8 km, where a large patch of mullein grows. It suddenly flew across my path to a fir, where it foraged for a few minutes. The light was failing, the bird moving and I was not able to see any field marks - the sex of this bird is unknown. I followed it up a slope but could not find it. I left the area at dark.

August 22: I arrived in the early morning, and located the bird at 11:20 am. almost opposite the 12 km marker. I was alerted to a 'hot spot' of activity by the tapping of a female Hairy Woodpecker with chickadees and nuthatches. It alighted low on a sloping tree trunk about 15 feet away from me. It was sunny and the light was excellent.

The bird was a flat (no sheen) jet black, with a few obvious, dark, irregular streaks on the white crown. The eye looked black as a button on the white face. The spread wings revealed a beautiful, extensive, black lace pattern on the white patch. I thought this resembled an unfolded paper cutout.

The bird foraged on bark, moving in short flights between young Ponderosas. It landed on a mullein in the ditch beside the road, and to my dismay, remained there to the last second before a large truck passed. It worked on a cone in a tall pine tree. During this activity it crossed the road three times. As I watched through binoculars it flew quite low, downslope, away from me towards the clearing and it was only then that I noticed the wing pattern. I temporarily lost sight of it a couple of times. I spotted it on a mullein in the patch and when it flew off I did not pursue it. I had observed it for approximately ½ hour. I left the area.

August 29: I arrived about 11:30 am and stayed at the patch until dark. It flew over once in the mid-afternoon.

August 30: I arrived at 7:00 am. The bird came to the mullein at 7:10 am announcing its approach with a double 'pik' call. The light was poor. I did not look for any field marks. It fed for 15 minutes and when it left I did not pursue. I waited quietly under a tree a few feet from the mullein.

It returned at 11:15 am and tolerated my close presence and the clicking of a disposable camera. The light was excellent. I regret that I did not study the plumage. A large group of birders arrived and it retreated to a nearby tree when I moved. It descended to an isolated mullein close to the patch and continued to forage. When it left I did not pursue. I had observed it for about 20 minutes. It returned to the mullein at 2:45 pm for ten minutes, again, I simply watched it without noting detail. I then left the site. During my drive home I could not recall noticing any streaks on the crown, nor did I hear any comment regarding this from other birders present. Unfortunately my photos are also disposable and of no help in this regard. Perhaps one of the group from Penticton has a close-up of this bird.

September 18: I arrived at 10:30 am and departed at dusk. I had an unconfirmed glimpse of the bird once in the early afternoon as it ghosted low through the trees in the forest behind the mullein. I did not pursue.

September 19: I arrived at 6:30 am. The bird came to the mullein at 2:15 pm. The light was excellent.

The back was black. The side and front of the bird were a medium-dark bluish grey. It had a small piece of fluff of the same colour protruding from beneath the wing at the shoulder. The white head had an overall grey tinge and was unstreaked. IT also had a bizarre, flexible, thin, dark, wire-like feather shaft (?), or pine needle (?) sticking out an inch or so from the back of the nape (like a hat pin!) with what looked like a glob of red-brown resin on the end.

It fed on the mullein for 15 minutes, then moved to a young Ponderosa and foraged on the bark. It left at 3:00 pm and I left.

October 28: I arrived at 11:30 am. At 1:45 pm I heard the bird quietly feeding on a cone at the top of a tall Ponderosa across the road. The light was good.

The body appeared intensely black in the sunshine. The head was white and from below no streaks were visible.

The bird foraged in several young pines about the mullein patch, but did not come down. It left at 2:00 pm. I then left.

November 2: I arrived at 7:00 am. The bird arrived at the mullein at 8:45 in good light.

It was jet black with no grey or streaks on the white head. On one side of the nape, just behind the crown line where the colours meet, there was a small bar of white feathers in the black. The eye was densely black. At close range it seemed to have a suggestion of an eye line behind the eye - not in colour, but in a subtle, linear elevation of the feathers above the level of the eye. The wing stripe showed a round, black dot mid-length, and mostly obscured, also at top and bottom. (In previous sightings the folded wing sometimes revealed conjoined, straight edged, black marks of varying lengths projecting partway across the stripe at mid-length. The configuration was altered or hidden by the bird's movement.) In flight it showed thin, black fingers in the wing patch, with less design than the bird on August 22. I was at close range and found it difficult to see this feature well.

From the mullein it moved to a young Ponderosa and pecked at the edge of a small, knotty bump that was covered in hard sap. I temporarily lost sight of it and then heard the tree-part call given in quick succession from the cattle guard area. I found it foraging low on a tree trunk - the wing spot confirmed it was the same bird. I pursued it while it moved to several tree trunks until 10:15 am when I returned to the mullein to watch for another white-headed, as I now had the wing spot for comparison.

About 12:30 pm I heard 'pik' calls from the cattle guard area, and spotted the bird foraging at the top of a large Ponderosa near the corral. Again, it was in a 'hot spot' with a female Hairy Woodpecker, chickadees, and nuthatches. It was on the move and I did not see any detail. Within ten minutes I had lost it. I left the site at 1:30 pm.

Summary:

1. Of 11 confirmed sightings, seven were definitely of a female. On August 21 the evening light prevented identification. In the other three sightings the distance of the bird requires caution, but I believe they were also female, as I never caught a hint of red.
2. The black colouring varied in intensity depending on the angle of the bird and the light. It looked blackest when viewed squarely from behind, or when in the sunshine.
3. I believe that the bird seen on August 22 was a juvenile, due to its crown streaks, and extensive wing patch pattern. (*The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding*, vol.2, 1983). However, when viewed from behind this bird looked as black as any other seen. I have not found any reference to crown colour other than red, but I note that a photograph in *The Birds of British Columbia*, vol. 2, R. Wayne Campbell et al, shows

dark crown streaks on an adult, with a juvenile that appears to have a dark head. There is also a photograph of a female showing black crown streaks in the *Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds, Western Region*, 1984.

4. If, as I suspect, the bird seen on August 30 did not show streaks on the crown, is it possible for this to be the same bird that was seen eight days previously? I don't know how quickly the plumage can change.
5. I think that the bird seen on September 19 was also an immature because of its blue-grey colouring. (*Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers*, Arthur Cleveland Bent, Deluxe New Edition by William Zimmerman, 1992).
6. The bird seen on November 3 was also probably an immature because of the small, white mark on the nape (Bent) and the noticeable black spot on the wing patch (Master Guide).
7. So, did I see the same bird each time in the process of maturing? It is usual for young females to also show some red on the crown (Bent, and Master Guide), so it seems unlikely to have two immatures without it. All observations were of a single bird. (On two occasions another possible White-headed Woodpecker flew over, but I was unsure of the identity both times.) It is logical to expect more than one in the area and I am baffled that I never saw two together, especially as I sometimes saw it near a female Hairy Woodpecker.
8. In behaviour it seemed like the same bird each time.
9. The bird was usually silent, however, I did hear single, double and triple note calls. I did not hear it drum.
10. The bird foraged very quietly, the most audible sound was a soft tapping when it was on a cone. At times the only indication of its presence was the fall of a piece of dislodged bark.
11. The bird favoured mullein and bark on tree trunks. I saw it less frequently on cones (perhaps a young bird lacks the necessary bill strength, (Bent)). The cones at the site seem in reasonable supply, but are not large. It sometimes landed on trunks a few feet from the ground and worked up and around and occasionally out along a limb to a cone. While in the process of prying it cocked its head to one side to listen for insects in a cute manner. I saw it do this on the mullein also.
12. I do not recall ever seeing it land upside down. (Bent)
13. On October 28, November 2 and 3 it came to the mullein only once due to the obvious deterioration of the stalks, I suppose.
14. I was often astonished and frustrated by its ability to instantly appear and disappear. This confirmed that the black and white colour actually serves as very effective camouflage. "It is the disguise of colour pattern, for the black body seen against a tree trunk becomes one of the black streaks or shadows of the bark and the white head is cut off as a detached white spot without bird-like suggestions" (Bent).
15. It was remarkably tolerant of people, noise, movement, and traffic. Once I blew a whistle twice to attract the attention of other birders and it did not budge from the cone atop a large Ponderosa across the road.

I also saw a female Hairy Woodpecker, male and female Downy Woodpecker and Black-capped Chickadees feed on the mullein.

During my time spent at the site I often had the company of at least one other birder and this doubled the fun of watching this delicate phantom.

My thanks to David Stirling for reference material, and to Doug Brown who originally directed me further up the road.



White-headed Woodpecker, just kept on and on and on!

by Jim Ginns
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The White-headed Woodpecker (WHWO) is rarely seen in Canada and then only in the South Okanagan. Many rare bird sightings are a matter of here-today-gone-tomorrow events. The WHWO in the summer of 2001 was an exception. Most of the following comments were on the Rare Bird Alert (250-491-7738), sponsored by the Tumbleweed Nature Store, Penticton. The reports are in chronological order and have been edited to minimize repetition. Effort has been to capture the enthusiasm and excitement of the spotters.

On August 8th, 2001 one female (The Bird) was seen by Danny Tyson feeding in the Ponderosa pines across the second cattle guard km 11.6, Camp McKinney Road, east of Oliver (The Site).

August 9th, the South Okanagan Naturalists Club's (SONC) Thursday Morning Birders found the woods at The Site ominously quiet. Clumps of large pines looked like suitable habitat. The Browns from Manchester, UK joined the search. About 12:45 pm soft tapping led Joy Brown to The Bird! It flitted about in the tree tops then disappeared in dense foliage. Excitement reigned; one woman was seen leaping in the air, waving her arms overhead and shouting "It's my first!" About 15 minutes later The Bird glided to the base of a pine only 7 meters from some of the group and poked about. It then lit 15 meters up a large pine trunk where it groomed for nearly 15 minutes in one spot. We had a really good look!

Chris Charlesworth, Kelowna, commented: I too now believe that WHWOs exist in Canada. This morning, August 10th, at about 8:30 am as Peter Blokker, Dennis St. John and I stood patiently by the cattleguard, The Bird flew in, perched in a pine for a minute then flew off! It took me 12 years of trying to finally get that bird in BC. Time to break out the champagne, or whatever else I've got, in celebration! And the same day, Laure Neish, Penticton, remarked: High fives to all those other happy birders who saw The Bird today. She really does exist. This bird of mythical proportions was quietly foraging on Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir trunks with a single whack every once in awhile to give away her presence. It only took me two trips to Oliver, two hours of looking/listening and a scraped arm to find this bird. There was quite a group of twitching birders craning for a view while Laure was there.

Not all visits were joy and celebration. Despite an extensive search August 11th The Bird couldn't be relocated. (Phil Gehlen).

August 21 with no sightings for 10 days, Gwen Nicol, Rossland, glimpsed The Bird. Then arriving at 6 am August 22, Gwen waited until 11:20 am to watch The Bird for about 20 minutes feeding on mullein. Patience pays off!

August 24, The Bird was again observed by a flock of birders at the clump of mullein. It was briefly observed about 6:30 am and again at 2:30 pm. Eight other woodpecker species were seen at that location today as well, including four Williamson's Sapsuckers and a male Three-toed Woodpecker.

This morning (August 25) at 6:30 am Chris Charlesworth, John Luce, Mike and Sharron Toochin, Russ Tkachuk, Murray Brown and myself were standing at km 11.9 waiting for The Bird. While we were all talking, we heard the bird call! In a flash we all ran "full tilt" up a small hill to look for the bird. As soon as we were close we saw the bird fly over our heads and over into another patch of Ponderosa's. After another quick sprint we found the female climbing up a Ponderosa. Wow! What a cool looking bird! We had "killer" looks at this bird! For people who are thinking of going to look for this girl, I strongly suggest you do! The best time to look for the bird is early in the morning (6-6:30) when the bird calls. Good luck! (I cannot believe I saw the WHWO!) (Ryan Tomlinson).

August 27th Dolly and I (Phil Gehlen) again drove down to Oliver for the woodpecker. We arrived at the clearing at 9:30 am and The Bird came to the mullein patch at exactly 10:00 am and fed there for 15 minutes before flying to the trunk of a nearby pine where it

remained for a further 55 minutes both preening and feeding from under the bark. Nice bird!

August 28th The Bird was observed for ten minutes, feeding on mullein (Peter Blokker).

August 29th The Bird was seen briefly as it flew past it's usual location (Lesley Robertson; Cecil Dillabough; Joyce Mervyn).

August 30th The Bird was first seen about 7:30 am by Gwen Nichol. About 11:30 am ten birders of the SONC Thursday Morning Birders arrived and within three minutes Gwen was frantically waving us to The Bird foraging on a mullein flowering head.

September 2nd The Bird continues to please birders. It was observed at approx 9:00 am feeding on the Mullein patch. September 3rd, 4th at 6:50 am, 5th at 2:25 pm, and 7th at 8:30 am.

September 8th. Well, I (Dick Cannings) finally got to see the famous McKinney Road WHWO this morning. We (Wendy Marshall, Margaret Holm, Russell Cannings and myself) arrived at the site about 6:30 am to find Andy Bezener there. He looked over at us and said "It's here", then looked back to the mullein patch where there was distinctly nothing. "It was here when you pulled in" he said again. My heart sank when I thought that if we'd only NOT stopped at Tim Horton's we might have seen it. I wandered around, then heard a flock of mixed chickadees and all the nuthatches down the road toward the cattleguard, so went down there and after about five minutes saw the woodpecker sitting as motionless as a black pinecone near the top of a ponderosa. We had decent looks at her over the next half hour as she silently foraged in the upper half of several pines, intermixed with periods of motionless resting. Easy to miss. Once she flew to the top of a big Douglas-fir and gave a short drum.

September 12th, about 1:20 pm. Greg took video of the male and two female WHWOs at The Site. He had been at the cattleguard then walked up past the horse corral and back down toward the mullein patch. As he approached the mullein a woodpecker flew by and then he started filming. It is pretty shaky but very easy to see the birds. The first bird was the male. It left, then he filmed the two females working on the trunks of the trees. By the way a local stopped to see what we were looking for last weekend and told us he had those birds all around his house but never knew what they were before. He lives one km up from The Site. (Terry and Greg Tellier). This was the first report of more than one WHWO at The Site.

September 14th, 18th and 23rd The Bird was seen feeding on mullein.

After two days of a stakeout, on the seventh hour this afternoon (September 25th) I found the female WHWO or should I say she found me. I had been working the area around 11 km steadily when I went back to the car to figure out my next move, I noticed a slight movement out the side window, the female was sitting on a branch less than 15 feet from the car watching me. Over the next 45 minutes she moved between six pine trees starting at ground level working up to around 12 feet then flying to the base of the next tree. She then flew to a mullein patch on the north side of the road, for five minutes, then into the timber. I did not see any others. The WHWO was on the trees immediately beside the pullout. Since I'm not from the area I used www.mapquest.com/ to print a map of Oliver showing Camp McKinney Rd. It's a good source of info for traveling birders. Great lifer to see. Sent this note from a Penticton Internet Caffe so now I feel like a real yuppy. (Herb, 108 Mile House).

October 1st and 6th, the WHWO was again seen between 8:25 and 8:40 am at km 11.9 feeding on pine cones.

October 11th, I was one of the lucky birders who saw the female WHWO and noticed that several of the presumably-local passers-by seemed to be discussing the oddity of someone sitting in a car on the other side of the cattle grid for hours, and some even pointed to the area where the woodpecker was seen. I would love to know who put up that steroidal bird. What a hoot! (or, a more apropos, pee-dink!) (Liis Veelma, Winnipeg, MB).

With no reports since October 12th it began to look like The Bird(s) had left but on October 20th Don Cecile reported: My first stop was the WHWO stop: I had a heart-stopping moment when I saw a Pileated-sized, white-headed Woodpecker in a tree beyond the mullein. (Someone has erected a mammoth-sized WHWO on steroids in a Ponderosa Pine at the now famous site). I looked around for a "real" WHWO and met with no success. I ventured up the road hoping to find three of them tapping on someone's house (as rumour has it) and at km 12.6 a woodpecker flew overhead whose silhouette suggested WHWO. I pulled over and rolled down my window to hear the unmistakable calling of a WHWO. This female was in the top of a Ponderosa Pine. As I approached, with camera in hand, another bird called on the opposite side of the road! I followed the female as she foraged in the tree, on the ground, along a fallen tree, in a small shrub and took a few photos (had to push the film due to poor light) 12-20 feet away! I followed her for 200 m and came out of the woods at the Weyerhaeuser wood harvest sign.

October 28th, the WHWO was observed feeding on the outer limbs of pine trees at 1:45 pm. A second bird thought to be another WHWO, flew across the road at the same location.

November 2nd and 3rd, Gwen Nicol, Rossland, reported good looks at the WHWO at The Site. The final report of the year was on November 9th, when the WHWO was heard at The Site by MT.

It is now early April 2002 and many birders have been to The Site. A few hope to be the first to see the WHWO in '02, others want it for their '02 list, and a few are interested to see if it returns and nests.

Squamish Estuary monthly bird count

... starting at 7 a.m. from the Howe Sound Inn and Brew Pub. All levels of birders are welcome on these half-day counts.

Despite suffering cold gales, rains, and some wind-driven hail, the birds and their 21 observers on the April 14 Squamish Estuary monthly bird count were undaunted by the very un-spring-like conditions. The final tally of 79 species and 2818 individual birds shattered previous April records of 71 and 2326, respectively.

There were all-season record high counts for Pied-billed Grebe, Northern Shoveler, American Coot, Rufous Hummingbird, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Spring high counts were noted for Turkey Vulture, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Fox Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, and House Sparrow. There were April highs for Double-crested Cormorant, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Northwestern Crow, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Song Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird.

There were first April records for Merlin and Townsend's Solitaire. Other 'good birds' included Wood Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Cinnamon Teal, Hooded Merganser, Red-tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Ruffed Grouse, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Common Snipe, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Bushtit, Mountain Bluebird, and Purple Finch. But the 'best bird of the day' honour goes to the Lapland Longspur, a first record for the monthly count and only the second record for the estuary.

Reported around but not on the count were Osprey, Hutton's Vireo, Hermit Thrush, Townsend's Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Black-headed Grosbeak, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Bullock's Oriole, and American Goldfinch. Expected but not seen on the count were Horned Grebe, Red-breasted Sapsucker, and Tree Swallow. Even so, that was some hot birding for a cold spring day!

EDITORS' NOTE: we often receive reports of Jim Wisnia's monthly bird counts. They sound like they are a lot of fun and they are useful for providing data on the avifauna of the Squamish Estuary. Jim gave us permission to reproduce his April report. Every report seems to have either some interesting birds or a new record for species. Consider assisting in one of these surveys if you are in the area. Contact Jim for details: jwisnia@mtn.net

A brain teaser for those quiet moments

For the last couple of years the Times-Colonist newspaper in Victoria has sponsored a book drive to raise charitable funds. Locals donate books, the TC staff sort them into subject areas, and then, for 2-3 days, there is a book selling frenzy. Certain librarians can not pass by bargain books - especially bargain bird books. Although we have never birded in Ontario we found a 1983 book, signed by the author, that decided to migrate to our library. As we perused the book we found a bird list which we thought might make an excellent quiz/brain teaser for our members - and there will be prizes! What you need to do is identify as many as possible of the birds on the list below and **send us your answers by or before August 15th 2002**. Two persons with the most correct answers (as determined by the answer list in our 1983 book) will get book prizes. Should there be a tie for either first or second prize, we will give the prize to the winning entry with the earliest mailing date. You may send your answers by mail, fax or e-mail*. We will provide as prizes the following two books from our own library - 1st: *Birds of the Kitimat Valley* by Dennis Horwood, 1992 and 2nd: *Birds of the World : Songbirds* by John P.S. Mackenzie, 1990.

The author of the 1983 book says that original list of birds was taken from:

Charles Fothergill's notes on the natural history of Eastern Canada, 1816-1837. [edited] by R. Delamere Black, ~1934. We can tell you that bit of information because the original will NOT have the present-day names!

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Black-banded Grebe | 23. Red-breasted Ouzel |
| 2. Ash-coloured Bittern | 24. Tawny Thrush |
| 3. Sculthorp's Bittern | 25. Large Cinereous Warbler |
| 4. Small Violet Tufted Duck | 26. St. Lawrence Pivoine |
| 5. Water-hen | 27. Copper-crested Pivoine |
| 6. Boo-Auk | 28. Golden-crowned Pivoine |
| 7. Pied-billed Duck | 29. Rufous-capped Pivoine |
| 8. Salmon-vented Merganser | 30. Bronzed-backed Pivoine |
| 9. Noisy Plover | 31. Playful Pivoine |
| 10. Cinereous Godwit | 32. Snapping Pivoine |
| 11. Green Spotted Sandpiper of Canada | 33. Hang-nest |
| 12. Cinereous Sandpiper | 34. Speckled Oriole |
| 13. Freckled Owl | 35. Superb Grosbeak |
| 14. Least Freckled Owl | 36. Warbird |
| 15. Large Freckled Owl | 37. Small Crimson Grosbeak |
| 16. Long-winged Goatsucker | 38. Caerulean Grosbeak |
| 17. Aculeated Swallow | 39. Lead-coloured Bunting |
| 18. Rufous-vented Swallow | 40. Ground Sparrow |
| 19. Volatile Woodpecker | 41. Cox-comical |
| 20. Black-throated Woodpecker | 42. Small Bearded Bunting |
| 21. Common Canadian Flycatcher | 43. Black-faced Wren |
| 22. Red-eyed Flycatcher | 44. Warbling Finch |

Reprinted with permission of the 1983 author (revealed with the answers next issue).

Remember, these are all Ontario birds and, to the best of our knowledge, should be fairly common in Ontario to this day.

Send us your answers. Don't worry if you can only figure out a few - send those in anyway. If you do not enter, you certainly have no chance of winning a prize. Enjoy!

* Send to one of the following (please include your postal address):

Andy and Marilyn Buhler
1132 Loenholm Road
Victoria, BC V8Z 2Z6

fax: c/o (250) 952-2180

e-mail: ambuhler@coastnet.com



Christmas Bird Counts (2001)
on Haida Gwaii, The Queen Charlotte Islands

by Margo Hearne
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Masset, BC V0T 1M0

Introduction

Well, we didn't get to Jupiter and beyond but the nights were full of stars. The first lot turned out to be snowflakes drifting through the searchlight on the "Kwuna" on the way to Sandspit and the others were possibly the ones the three kings had followed a couple of thousand years ago. 2001 has kind of a poetic ring, nicely coinciding with our 20th annual Christmas Bird Count on Haida Gwaii and Snowy Owls have a majesty all their own. Two of them, out in the middle of the airport at Sandspit, looking like clumps of snow gathered in a heap. One flew, adrift and silent as any lost white thing in the middle of winter and landed on top of a light post where its form became fixed. Had we not seen it fly we would have thought it part of the post. An auspicious beginning to the counts on Haida Gwaii. As each count ended in darkness, dark birds appeared at three of them; over 200 Black Oystercatchers in Skidegate Inlet, almost 3,000 Pelagic Cormorants off Tow Hill and 44 Surfbirds off Kumdis Bay. At Delkatla, however, seven white swans flew away at the dying of the day.

Masset

It was a dark and gloomy morning. Suddenly a snipe flushed, a song sparrow flitted across the road and we were off. A thousand teal and count them all, hundreds of Mallards, 26 Gadwall and, hello!, two Greater Yellowlegs all of a sudden, prinking along the edge of the Inlet. Where were they all winter and wasn't it great they turned up to be counted? Three Long-billed Dowitchers fed among the teal, and look at that exotic blue and white raptor swooping down out of the heavens to raise every duck in the daylight, grab a talon of grass and vanish into the forest. Peter saw it later darting across Cemetery Road, not clutching grass this time but a squealing teal for a Goshawk's dinner. A bright bird, comely and fair of flight, that can slip through forest as though it were a open glade. No boat crew this year, the weather was against it, but the beach crew found 259 Black Turnstones, over 1,000 Dunlin and 21 marvelous hoppy, skippy, little Snow Buntings in the seaweed. A Snow Goose on the golf course, a tiny Bohemian Waxwing in Howard's hawthorne looking like a miniature plump partridge fluffed up against the chill and barely visible against the grey sky. The afternoon produced a grey drizzle which silenced the land-birds and the bird of the day was a Spotted Sandpiper, first one for the Masset count. The best part was knowing there were 46 other people out there birding and we nearly all saw the Northern Harrier, coursing over Delkatla and putting seven Trumpeter Swans to wing, as white as angels at the dying of the day. Total species for the day 73 + 5 in count week.

Port Clements

If ever I would leave you, it wouldn't be during the Christmas Bird Count in Port Clements. Not even the darkly overcast skies could dim the enthusiasm of a flock of new birders counting American Robins and Dark-eyed Juncos. The only White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows were seen at the same great feeder and a tiny Ruby-crowned Kinglet flittered and danced behind the Post Office for minutes. Four Bohemian Waxwings flew over and landed on a telephone pole for a perfect view. These birds haven't been seen on the islands for a few years, and it was great to see them. Five Sharp-shinned Hawks were an all-time high for Port and our partners in the field were happy to be in the company of woodpeckers and saw all three species. A flock of 44 Surfbirds were remarkable for not only being there but for being identifiable in the dusky afternoon off the south end of Kumdis Island. Five Canvasbacks at Juskatla, four Ring-necked Ducks and one Lesser Scaup gave us a record high of 59 species for the count and the hot chocolate at "Myles from Nowhere" surrounded by poinsettias rounded off the day nicely. Even the Robins were happy.

Skidegate Inlet

Six hundred and eighty-two Mallards, two Snowy Owls, three Anna's Hummingbirds, two Peregrine Falcons and a Dipper for the day. Relentless rain made for damp exposure in the outdoors and the boat crew beat it through the briny, raindrops hitting their eyes like shards of ice as they rode the waves, seeking elusive scoters. They found them and over 300 Western Grebes, who seemed undaunted by the deluge. On land, we all searched for anything, but it was so wet that we became a little disheartened with the proclivity of most birds to stay still during downpours. Of sapsuckers there was only one, although five

Northern Flickers put in an appearance. A tiny Winter Wren was almost mistaken for a leaf as it scratched around at the base of heavy bush among dead leaves and in spite of the rain Varied Thrushes were 'everywhere'. The day ended with over 200 Black Oystercatchers bringing in the night at the Honna Estuary, black shapes in a grey twilight. Total species count overall was 71, which given the weather, was wonderful.

Rose Spit

It was stirring. And it doesn't get any warmer from year to year. There was still a foot of crusted snow on land and we shivered on the edge of the spit as the tide fell, but look at the marvel of a spouting whale just off the can buoy and those marvelous alcids winging across the blue and white ocean. There were also 593 Common Murres and 714 Ancient Murrelets and those were only the ones we could see. It's a big ocean out there and all our inadequate human eyes can see is a narrow band of movement, unlike that Peregrine Falcon over there who can see for miles. If we didn't know the value of Rose Spit for birds twenty years ago when we started these counts, we certainly do now as we continue to fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle of where marine birds go in winter. The islands are a world-class place. Shallow seas, upwellings of nutrients, nearly always a calm place to be found no matter what the weather, no wonder birds stay, sometimes hunkered down waiting it out, but always knowing the storm will end and food is plentiful. We can know the hang-outs of whales and the habits of loons if we just get out there, away from our desks, and shiver in creation, for if the smallest of Sanderlings can do it, surely we can! An all-time high of 355 Pacific Loons, 34 Red-throated Loons, 64 Common Loons and even two fair-weather Western Grebes rode the blue waves in the wind. In the shelter of the trees, four minuscule American Tree Sparrows and two Golden-crowned Sparrows fed on scattered wild seeds and, as we hied it home, what to our wondering eyes should appear but two thousand, seven hundred and fifty-nine Pelagic Cormorants, all peeling in from who knows where and landing off Tow Hill. The floating flock got bigger and bigger as more birds poured in, until daylight disappeared completely and we had to leave before we moved into dreamtime and started counting birds in our sleep. Dinner at "Sandpipers" was delicious. Total species count for the day 42; all of them perfect.



Prince George hawk watching

by Laird Law

(submitted by Sandra Kinsey)

It is now time to start thinking Spring Migration! Geese will start showing up by the middle of March and raptors will follow shortly afterwards. Across North America there are a number of places to watch the semi-annual hawk migration. One well-known place close to BC is Kananaskis in Alberta where over 4000 Golden Eagles can be seen migrating along the Rocky Mountains.

Around Central BC there is very little known about hawk and eagle migrations. In 1998, while returning from birding around Chubb Lake, Sandy and I stopped at the Stone Creek Fire Site, just south of Stoner. In three hours, we had 56 Bald Eagles fly over us going north! Since 1998, each spring I have spent a number of days watching the raptors heading north. Last year I saw almost 500 raptors migrating north over Stone Creek during March and April.

I am planning to spend as much time as possible at Stoner this spring watching the migration. The location is at 2.6 km of the Stone Creek Forest Service Road, where the power lines cross the road. Stoner is on Highway 97 approximately 35 km south of Prince George. Anybody interested in watching raptors is welcome to visit the site, as more eyes the better.

April should be the best month to see the most raptors. The raptors work the thermals along the ridges east of the Fraser River. If last year was a normal year then Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, and Sharp-shinned Hawks should be the most seen birds. There should also be a good number of Golden Eagles, Rough-legged Hawks, and Northern Harriers. Then there's always the chances of the unusual and unexpected!

[Reprinted, with permission, from: Nature's Web, the newsletter of the Prince George Naturalists Club. March or April 2002 issue.]



Attack of the killer Blue Grouse!

by John B. Sprague
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Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2L7

This is to record an attack by a male Blue Grouse (grouse) on a considerably larger male human. The human was not seriously damaged. Chats with birders suggest that direct attacks by male grouse are not common, although females with chicks are boldly defensive. (A female offered me a 10-second defensive display in June 2001). If anyone has knowledge of attack behaviour in male Blue Grouse, I would be interested to hear about it.

The incident occurred during a Saturday walk along an abandoned logging road on the northeast slopes of Mt. Maxwell, Salt Spring Island, about 400 metres elevation. It was mid-day, March 30, 2002. I glimpsed a male grouse in the woods and stopped still to watch (first time I had seen the neck-sacs). The grouse covered its ornaments and slowly meandered down the bank, pecking at stuff. I thought what a silly bird it was to move towards a potential predator. It came onto the trail! It walked closer and circled me a couple of times at three and two metres, with periodic mumbling-clucking: "Uhh-huh-huh-huh-hu-u". It circled closer and I went on one knee to admire its orange eyebrows. It circled at one metre, then attacked frontally hitting my thigh with its breast, striking with its wings, then backed off.

To avoid disturbing the bird further, I went 30 metres down the trail and turned to watch. It wandered downhill, then started walking directly towards me. Clearly it wanted the intruder off its property so I obliged and continued the walk.

Half an hour later I was returning and detoured through the woods to look for the bird. Not finding it, I continued walking, but the bird found me and ran down onto the trail. Similar performance: circling, mumbling, a frontal attack, then a face-off at arms length. I tried to grab it a couple of times in order to educate it about approaching large mammals but it dodged. Clearly I should leave the bird alone, so started walking very fast in the right-hand rut of the trail. The grouse ran alongside in the left-hand rut, for 120 metres! Finally my stamina (and long legs) paid off and the bird lagged and stopped. I went on for 70 metres and sat on a rock to watch it go back. But it seemed to have a strong sense of ownership and resumed walking up the trail purposely. At about 30 metres, it suddenly flew into the woods and a Cooper's Hawk zoomed in right behind it! I'm reasonably sure the grouse escaped in the underbrush.

Before I reached the car, another road-side grouse offered a glorious 5-minute display with hooting. The following two Saturdays I went back to look and measure distances. A couple of grouse were hooting, including one at the attack location. A fruitless search in the woods confirmed that these birds are good ventriloquists.



New Checklists

1. Tumbler Ridge birders have just published a checklist of birds of their area. (Free) contact: Charles Helm. Phone (250) 242-3984 ; fax (250) 242-4076 mail: Box 1690, Tumbler Ridge BC V0C 2W0
2. Quesnel has also just published their first checklist. The **Quesnel Area Checklist of Birds**. Contact the Baker Creek Enhancement Society, Nature Education and Resource Centre, 410 Kinchant Street, Quesnel, BC V2J 7J5. Phone (250) 992-5833. Send \$1 to help cover postage and handling.
3. Prince George Naturalists Club have also just published a new edition of their **Checklist of North-Central B.C. Birds**. (Cost: \$1.00). Contact: Prince George Naturalists Club, P.O. Box 1092, Prince George, BC V2L 4V2 attention Laird Law. Phone/fax (250) 963-8381 or e-mail <aa787@pgfn.bc.ca>



Snow Buntings by the tree-full!

From: Rob Hughes, Vegreville, AB

Last evening, 22 April 2002, I came across at least 40,000 Snow Buntings while out looking for Snow Geese. Along roads east of Vegreville, Alberta, fields were swarming with billowing clouds of this arctic-nesting species. I saw three poplar shelter belts loaded up with the Snow Buntings, 20-30 per branch. What a sight! I had only seen maybe 3,000 at any one time previous to this. And if that isn't enough, a co-worker told me he saw an estimated 75-80,000 Snow Buntings along a road, north of Vegreville, this morning. He observed thick flocks for about a 1/2 mile, on the road, and in the fields. Many other people, where I work, are talking about seeing a lot of this species in the last few days. The weather here in Central Alberta has been much colder than the average. Lakes that would normally be open by now, are still frozen. Possibly the cold and snow has held back the species heading to the far north, and consequently they are building up in numbers and forming huge flocks. Or, the weather has conspired to funnel more Snow Buntings through this region. Any comments?

From: Tony Beck, Ontario

WOW! I too have only seen Snow Buntings in maximum sizes of about 3000 (all my winter observations of Snow Bunting are limited to southern Ontario and Quebec). And that, in itself, was pretty spectacular. But 40,000 ... amazing! I have never heard of large bunting flocks like the ones you describe. Although envious of your sighting, I can only guess why you experienced such a spectacular event. Oddly enough, I couldn't find any specific numbers concerning Snow Bunting flock sizes in any of my references. However, in *Sparrows and Buntings: A Guide to Sparrows and Buntings of North America and the World*, by Byers, Curson and Olsson (Houghton Mifflin 1995), it says of Snow Bunting: "Migration patterns seem to be fairly complex, with populations migrating in a south-easterly direction often crossing the migration routes of other populations migrating in south-westerly directions, and vice versa." Although I really can't say for sure, based on the above information, I would suggest that you might have experienced a convergence of migrating flocks, whose migration was halted due to natural occurrences (weather) causing a fallout-like phenomenon, often observed with other types of migrating songbirds. So ... like a good, responsible birder, did you methodically check every individual for a McKay's Bunting? Cheers, and Happy Bunting-watching.

From: Rob Hughes, Vegreville, AB

Thanks Tony, Interesting ... the migration convergence makes sense to me. The Snow Bunting flocks were mesmerizing to watch. And thanks for the book reference. You know, there probably was a McKay's in those flocks somewhere. But, they were moving really fast. I'll have to wait for a more sedate and smaller flock to catch my first look at a McKay's Bunting. After seeing these huge numbers, I phoned a friend (Fred Whiley) who has long time experience birding in Alberta. He tells me that, in the past, Snow Bunting flocks of 500,000 have shown up at Beaverhills Lake, Tofield, Alberta!

From: Bryan Gates, Victoria, BC

Thanks, Rob. The concept of crossing-over of migratory flocks is intriguing, and may be a contributory factor to genetic exchange between otherwise isolated breeding populations. For species that tend to winter in a single area, even though sub-populations may breed apart, genetic mixing can be expected. But for species that breed apart and have two or more distinct and far-separate wintering ranges, this periodic crossover/meeting may be important to population maintenance. And it may reduce the chances of the two populations evolving into two distinct species. Of course, all of this is based on the assumption that when the two populations do happen to meet and co-mingle in migration, some end up heading off and breeding with the "other side", so to speak. Cheers.

Apparent attacks on adult Great Blue Heron by Bald Eagles

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The purpose of this note is to put on record, three apparent attacks by Bald Eagles (eagles), on adult Great Blue Herons (herons) away from their colonies. It has been considered that "...predation on adult herons is apparently rare" (Forbes, 1987). A poll of the *Heron Working Group* in British Columbia and Washington brought responses from five researchers/experts, all of them indicating that a published note would assist in future evaluations of such activity. We would welcome additional reports from readers, about attacks of this kind on herons.

One incident was at 4 p.m. on March 6, 2002, on the shoreline of Walter Bay at the Saltspring Island Sailing Club, 1.2 km south-east of the village of Ganges. The heron was a mature bird, well known to members of the sailing club and accustomed to them. It often continued fishing from the docks within five or six metres of someone working on a boat. Members of the club believed that this bird had hunted from the docks for about eight years.

As observers (C.P and R.P.*) reached the parking lot of the sailing club on March 6, they noted some dozens of crows and gulls flying above the docks, wheeling and calling. When the observers walked to the foot of the dock, it was clear that the source of excitement was an eagle standing on the mudflats, about half a metre from a heron. The birds were on the mudflats at the outlet of a small creek about 40 metres north-westerly of the docks, at the tideline about 60 metres out from the shore. Blood was apparent on the heron's neck and breast. The eagle had mature plumage. During another minute of faceoff, the eagle made three lunges with its beak, and each time the heron attempted to fend it off with a thrust of its bill. The observers shouted and the eagle flew off.

Personnel of the Island Wildlife Natural Care Centre were called and arrived in about 20 minutes. During this time the heron fell over onto the mud several times, but stood up again. The Centre personnel were able to approach the bird directly and secure it in a cloth wrap. It was an old bird, thin, with indications of poor grooming, and feathers that were brittle and starting to break. It had fresh wounds on the left shoulder that went to the bone and had destroyed some tendons. A wound in the neck went into the oesophagus. There was no hope of recovery, and the heron was euthanized.

Two other apparent eagle attacks were noted earlier at beaches near the tip of Southey Point, 12.5 km north-westerly of Ganges. Sometime in October 2000, at mid-morning, an eagle was seen (by M.H.***) towing and pulling a heron through shallow water, to shore. Emerging, the eagle shook itself of water, then screened the heron with outstretched wings and proceeded to feed on it. In March 2001, an eagle was noted at the tideline in the same protective stance, feeding on a heron. Use of a telescope confirmed that the eagles were mature; the herons were of approximate adult size but their maturity was not ascertained.

There are many reports of eagles attacking young birds in heronries, but the literature does not contain many records of attacks on mature birds in the open and away from a heronry. Forbes (1987) reviewed the topic and concluded that "... our knowledge of predation on herons is slim, consisting primarily of scattered anecdotes". He tabulated

for the decade preceding his paper, in B.C., Washington and Oregon, only two documented (published) cases in which the heron was killed, and four in which the heron survived. One of the unsuccessful attacks was in Ganges Harbour, Salt Spring Island, as was one case which we report. There was also a documented case in Saskatchewan in which both the attacking Golden Eagle and the heron died. Forbes mentioned that there were "several" anecdotal reports of attacks by Bald Eagles. He spent 108 hours observing heron feeding grounds on the shores at Pender Harbour, B.C., and saw eagles attack ducks but not herons.

We thank Drs. Ross Vennesland and Rob Butler for help with the literature.

Reference:

Forbes, L. Scott, 1987. *Predation on adult Great Blue Herons: is it important?* Colonial Waterbirds 10(1):120-122.

Advice to record the eagle kill in print.

Dear experts;

Thanks for all the good stuff on herons, which is being passed on to all the directors of the Waterbird Watch here on Salt Spring, and is of interest to all of us with respect to local colonies. I have a question. There was a first-hand observation of an eagle striking and killing an adult heron on the docks of local sailing club. Do you see this sort of thing every day or is it worth a few lines to record it in B.C. Birding?

Thanks, John

e-Mail Responses:

From: Butler, Rob Date: March 8, 2002

There are several reports of eagles attacking and killing herons but it is still worth noting, especially if you have details such as age of the eagle, how the heron was taken (killed on the spot, chased down, carried off, etc), and if the heron appeared healthy or not, and how frequent this might be (any other anecdotal reports). Cheers, Rob

From: Chutter, Myke Date: March 8, 2002

I haven't seen this occur personally but am aware of several instances where it has been reported. I believe this was part of Ross Vennesland's thesis so he should be able to help you. Cheers, Myke

From: Vennesland, Ross Date: March 9, 2002

Forbes (1987) in Colonial Waterbirds vol. 10:120-122 is the only summary I know of about eagle attacks on adult herons. I'm sure I talked of this in my thesis, but did not observe any direct observations of attacks on adults (just 239 attacks on eggs/nestlings!). I found a dead adult at a colony that was heavily disturbed by eagles (Holden Lake), but could not conclusively link the death to an eagle attack (although that is most likely). It is definitely rare, but does occur and is valuable to note due to the limited number of observations. The Forbes paper is a good read, he notes two attacks in Pender Harbour, summarizes some others (eg Bayer, Oregon), and gives a good discussion about why predation on adults is important even though it is rare. Ross.

From: Stenberg, Kate Date: March 8, 2002

There are a few reports of eagles killing adult herons - but it is rare enough (we think) to warrant documenting. Enough documentation and then maybe we can assess how common it is.

From: Chatwin, Trudy Date: March 10, 2002.

Thanks John. Yes I think it is useful to record such observations. They seem to be happening more frequently, but without a record it is hard to quantify the occurrence of predation. Trudy Chatwin.

AUTHORS IN THIS ISSUE

Jim Ginns

Jim Ginns moved to Penticton in late 1997 after nearly 28 years in the Ottawa area. Several decades ago he served on the Council of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club with the likes of Hue MacKenzie and Roger Foxall. Jim worked as a forest pathologist and mycologist for the federal government and continues a mix of studies on birds, wildflowers and fungi.

Margo Hearne

Margo is an active birder and an enthusiastic supporter of the Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary in Masset, BC. She also writes and enjoys poetry.

Laird Law

Laird is a naturalist and birder living in Prince George, BC. He enjoys pioneer birding, the more off the beaten track the better. Laird is a retired heavy duty mechanic who works part time conducting bird surveys.

Gwen Nicol

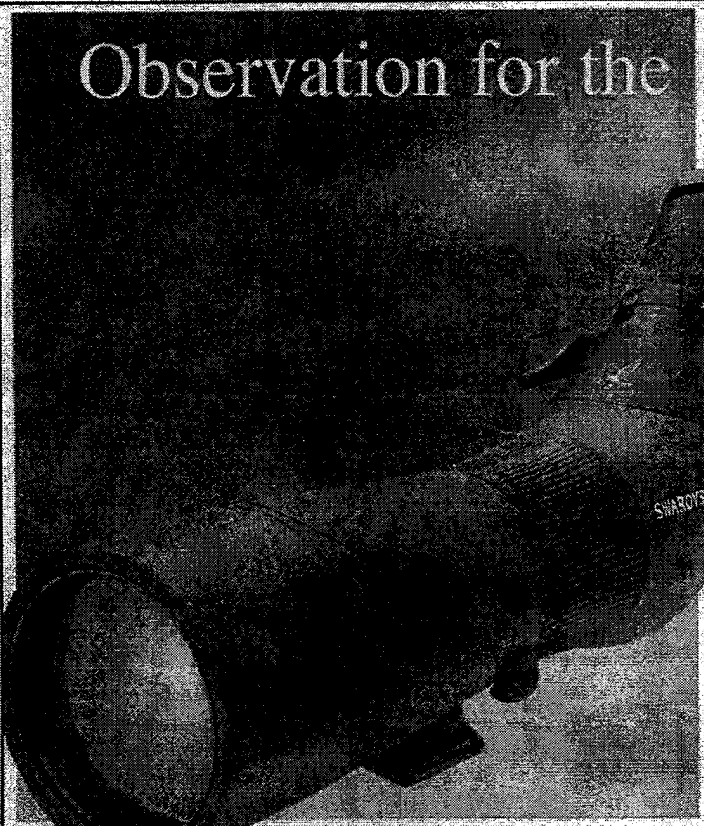
Gwen has lived in Trail/Rossland since 1969 when she came to Canada. She grew up on a sheep and wheat farm in Australia and was always interested in nature. She has been an avid birder for six years.

John B. Sprague

John is a biologist, former professor, government scientist, and consultant.




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