



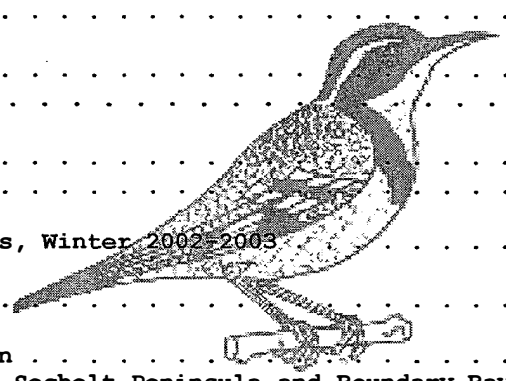
BC BIRDING

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NEWSLETTER OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS
Volume 13 Number 2 June 2003

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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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finding information for our "Site Guide"
series and any articles about birding
experiences, preferably but not necessarily,
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EDITORS' NOTES & NOTIONS

Well, there was our last issue as editors and now you have our VERY LAST issue as editors! Please welcome Phillip Henderson as your new editor by sending lots of articles, information and birdy bits for his September issue.

We only returned yesterday from a great three week trip to Ontario - our first trip there as birders so we tallied about 15 lifers plus we went to Mio, Michigan and, in pouring rain, got some good looks at a Kirtland's Warbler. In good spirits we felt we could compile one more issue before the computer got packed away with all of our other 'stuff' for transport to our new home base in Vernon.

In this issue you will find Jo Ann's report from the president, Sandra's director's report, Martin's compilation of birding events and news, Michael's report on the Yellow-billed Cuckoo sighting in Creston, Andy and Ellen's trip report on SW BC birding (Sechelt / Boundary Bay), Dick and Don's report on BC Winter bird sightings, Rita's report on Osprey monitoring, and Ron's note and photos of some good sightings in Bella Coola.

Please remember that there will be a BCFO-sponsored pelagic trip from Port McNeill departing **7 AM Saturday, September 13, 2003 with departure from Mackay Whale Watching on the waterfront at Port McNeill**. Plan to stay over Saturday night in case weather forces a Sunday morning departure. **Cost:** \$125 per BCFO member, \$100 for student members in high school or younger, and \$150 for non-members (\$150 includes \$25 BCFO membership). **Registration:** Include your name, telephone number, email address and a cheque or money order for the correct amount. Make the cheque payable to Bryan Gates and mail to: **Bryan R. Gates, 3085 Uplands Road, Victoria, B.C. V8R 6B3**
Email: b gates@pacificcoast.net

WELCOME NEW BCFO MEMBERS

William & Elizabeth Abbott ; David Allinson ; Alison Beringer ; Howard Braun ; Suzanne De Balinhard ; Anne Drummond ; Michael Dyson ; Gavin Edmonstone ; Roger Foxall ; Eva Froese ; Mark Gardiner ; Trent Glukler ; Frances Gundry ; Douglas A. Hardy ; Michael Hoebel ; Frank Hovenden ; George Innes ; Martine Lane ; Simon Liao ; Kuang Hang (Flicker) Liu ; Michael McMann ; Ed Pellizzon ; June M. Ryder ; Sheila South ; Joan Synder ; Jennifer Teyes ; Chiu-wen (Hank) Tseng ; Kevin Wang ; Robert Worona

We look forward to seeing many of you at the 13th Annual General Conference in Radium Hot Springs. Andy & Marilyn.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

At last, there is good news about the continued production of the newsletter. I'm sure you all will join with me in welcoming Phillip Henderson (Langley) as our new editor. He has been a BCFO member for 10 years, and has been editor of the Langley Field Naturalists Newsletter. Phil will assume the editorship of **BC BIRDING**, with the September issue. Welcome, Phil!

And so, this really is the very last issue that Andy and Marilyn Buhler, our hard-working editors for 12 years, will do for us. Their effort is truly above and beyond the call of duty, as at the time of writing, they are in the process of moving from Victoria to the Okanagan. We express our appreciation once again. Thank you, good luck and happy retirement, Andy and Marilyn!

I hope that most of you are finding the time to get out and do some field birding. Some of our members participated in the *Baillie Birdathon* for Bird Studies Canada in May, while the *Canadian Breeding Bird Survey* challenges identification skills in June. Some will be alert for birds' nests for the *BC Nest Records Scheme*. The *BC Coastal Waterbird Survey* will take a summer break, but the *Beached Bird Survey* will continue. Dedicated people will continue the work of the *Mackenzie Nature Observatory* and the *Rocky Point Bird Observatory*. The Nelson Naturalists will be active with *Osprey Nest Monitoring* through the summer. These are only a few of the worthwhile activities which involve some of our members as volunteers. Meanwhile, the professional ornithologists among us will be busy with their summer field work. Those planning to attend the Annual Conference in Radium Hot Springs will look forward to observing the birds of that area. Whatever you do, take the time to consciously observe plumage details and behavior of the birds that you see.

This is my last **FROM THE PRESIDENT** message. I will complete my second 2-year term on the Board this June. I am not standing for re-election for a third term. My four years on the Board have been rewarding and challenging, first as Secretary for three years, then Vice President, and finally, President for the past year.

Each year brings the retirement from the Board of one, two, or three directors, so there is an annual need for new people to step forward to maintain our full complement of nine. Being a director does not require special talents, just a willingness to tend to the business of our society to keep it healthy, growing and productive. Perhaps this year, it's your turn!

See you in Radium Hot Springs!

Jo Ann MacKenzie
President

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

The BC Field Ornithologists held a Board meeting in Langley on April 5, 2003. As usual, the item-packed agenda reflected the hard work of all directors during and between meetings.

The big event coming up is the Annual Conference in Radium Hot Springs June 20-22. You will have a chance to bird a species-rich area with old and new friends, learn about projects conducted in the area and elsewhere in BC. Awards will be handed out to two members of the BCFO. The Board has also planned a three-day trip to follow the conference for those who can afford the time to immerse themselves in the area.

The membership will be pleased to hear progress has been made on resurrecting the Rare Bird Committee. The guidelines being drawn up will include standards for digital photographs.

The new Policy and Reference Manual has been completed. It summarizes decisions made by past Boards so future Boards won't have to "re-invent the wheel." Other items discussed were the Bird Studies Canada meeting the following day (April 6) for BC bird watchers, having a representative on the Canadian Intermountain Joint Venture, putting together a library, and recruiting new Board members.

Future events being planned are the September boat trip for seabirds ("Pelagic 2003"), a trip for Rock Ptarmigan, and next year's Annual Conference in a new and exciting location!

Sandra Kinsey, Director

SOCIETY NEWS
UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

- June 20-22 2003** **BCFO 13th ANNUAL CONFERENCE**, Radium Hot Springs, B.C. Contact: Hank VanderPol, 18-3389 Casoro Rd., Kelowna, B.C. V1W 3J5, phone (250) 979-0363 OR Ev Miyasaki, 8587 Sentinel Pl., Sidney, B.C. V8L 4Z8, phone (250) 656-8066.
- July 21-25 2003** **SOCIETY FOR THE CONSERVATION AND STUDY OF CARIBBEAN BIRDS 14th MEETING**, Tobago. Contact: Carolyn Wardle, Box N.3189, Nassau, Bahamas, phone (242) 362-2044.
- July 24-27 2003** **WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS & NEW MEXICO ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY JOINT MEETING**, Western New Mexico University, Silver City, New Mexico. Contact: David Krueper, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103, phone (505) 248-6877.
- July 30-
Aug. 3 2003** **HUMCONFERENCE 2003, 5th BIENNIAL HUMMINGBIRD RESEARCH GROUP CONFERENCE**, Weldon, California. Contact: Donald Mitchell, phone (715) 381-9685.
- Aug. 4-9 2003** **LIMNOLOGY AND WATERBIRDS CONFERENCE 2003**, Sackville, New Brunswick. Contact: Dr. Al Hanson, Wetlands and Waterfowl Ecologist, Canadian Wildlife Service, 17 Waterfowl Lane, Sackville, NB E4L 1G6, phone (506) 364-5061.
- Aug. 6-9 2003** **121st STATED MEETING, AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION**, Champaign-Urbana, IL. Contact: Elaine Wolfe, 202 Presidential Tower, 302 East John St., Champaign, IL 61820; phone (217) 333-2880.
- Aug. 28-31 2003** **WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION 76th ANNUAL MEETING**, Stevensville, Montana. Contact: Stefanie L. Jones, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Nongame Migratory Birds, Box 25486 DFC, Denver, CO 80225; phone (303) 236-8155, extension 253.
- Sept. 2-7 2003** **RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION 2003 ANNUAL MEETING**, Anchorage, Alaska. Contact: Dancy Dewitt, Alaska Bird Observatory, Box 80505, Fairbanks, AK 99708; phone (907) 451-7159.
- Sept. 24-27 2003** **WATERBIRD SOCIETY 2003 MEETING**, Cuiaba, Brazil. Contact information to be announced.
- Fall 2003** **SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGY ANNUAL MEETING** during Whooping Crane migration. Contact: Cheri L. Gratto-Trevor, Canadian Wildlife Service, 115 Perimeter Road, Saskatoon, Sask. S7N 0X4; phone (306) 975-6128.
- Nov. 5-9 2003** **THIRD NORTH AMERICAN DUCK SYMPOSIUM**, Sacramento, California. Contact information to be announced.
- Aug. 16-24 2004** **122nd STATED MEETING OF AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION & SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS ANNUAL MEETING**, Quebec, Que. Contact details not yet announced.

BC BIRDING NEWS BRIEFS

compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

Wild Bird Trust of British Columbia Awards -New Zealand-born wildlife artist Lex Alfred Hedley was given the President's Award 2002 of the Wild Bird Trust of British Columbia at their 30 October 2002 annual meeting (Anonymous. 2003. *Wingspan* winter/spring 2003:4th unnumbered p.). Although the award announcement does not indicate the basis on which the award was given, members of both WBT and the Vancouver Natural History Society know that Lex has been generous in donating art work for revenue-generating and wildlife education purposes in B.C. and as illustrations in both *Discovery* and *Wingspan*. WBT's Conservation and Education Award 2002 was presented to Margaret E. and J. E. Victor Goodwill, apparently for their extensive compilation of B.C. bird records (Anonymous. 2003. *Wingspan* winter/spring 2003: 4th unnumbered p., 2nd item). Former BCFO director R. Richard Howie of Kamloops was presented with WBT's "Critic of the Year Award 2002" for his contribution to the discovery of Black-necked Stilts nesting in B.C. for the first time (Anonymous. 2003. *Wingspan* winter/spring 2003: 5th unnumbered p.).

Outstanding Honours to Outstanding Naturalists -A highlight of the February 2003 Vancouver Naturalist History Society Birding Section meeting was seeing medals dangling from both Al and Jude Grass. George Clulow announced that these were well-deserved Commemorative Medals for the Golden Jubilee of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II that had been bestowed on Al and Jude on 1 February 2003 (see also photograph in *Wingspan* winter/spring 2003:13th unnumbered p.). According to D. Hanna (*Vancouver Nat.* 5(1):6, 2003), Al received the medal for communicating his many nature observations through nature walks, numerous publications and photography. Jude was recognized for leadership positions in Burke Mountain Naturalists, the Federation of B.C. Naturalists and the Vancouver Natural History Society, for her founding editorship of *The Wandering Tattler* and long-time editorship of the *B.C. Naturalist* and for coordinating the lower mainland raptor count and Ladner Christmas Bird Count (Hanna *ibid*). Four other VNHS members (Bill Merilees, the late Rene Savenye, Daphne Solecki and Terry Taylor) also received the medals. All have contributed substantially to various aspects of natural history appreciation and conservation in B.C. (Hanna *ibid*). Other recipients include R. Wayne Campbell (author and co-author of numerous articles, books, notes and papers on B.C. birds, most notably senior author of the four-volume "Birds of British Columbia," 1990-2001) (Anonymous. 2003. *Ornithol. Newsletter* 153:7), Anne Murray (current Past President of the Federation of B.C. Naturalists), Doreen Olson (founding chair of the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance), Sylvia Pincott (best known as the pioneer and chief promoter of Naturescape), Henk and Johanna Saaltink (driving forces of several bird counts, conservation projects and environmental efforts in the Abbotsford area), David Stirling (co-founder of the precursor of the Federation of B.C. Naturalists, prominent nature tour leader and author of numerous ornithological publications), and Dick Stace-Smith (co-editor of a landmark publication on species at risk in B.C. and prominent figure in several conservation issues) (J. McCall. 2003. *B.C. Nat.* 41(2):14-17).

British Columbia Bird Sightings Winter 2002-2003

by Donald G. Cecile
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It was very mild for the first half of the period for the whole region, and then progressively colder for the northern parts during the latter half as Arctic air gradually worked its way in from the northeast. There were few coastal storms as most were redirected northward into Alaskan waters. As expected, the mild start resulted in new records of birds lingering more northerly than usual, especially for water birds since many larger lakes remained open until mid-December, and for raptors since snowpacks were minimal right across the region until the first snowstorm the 3rd week of Jan. This was a winter without any winter finch incursions and there was no sign of a southward movement of owls. **Abbreviations and Symbols:** P.G. (Prince George), PGNC (P.G. Naturalists Club); Q.C.I. (Queen Charlotte Islands); +, field notes submitted; m. obs., many observers; ph, photographed.

LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

A Yellow-billed Loon was on Skaha L. at Penticton on 15-16 Dec (RJC) and another was on Osoyoos L. 23 Feb (CC, RJC, RC). Pacific Loons remained late with 2 at Nicola L. 8 Dec (WW), 1 in Lake Country until 29 Dec (CC et. al.) and another on Okanagan L., Kelowna 23 Feb (CC). For the 3rd year in a row, an ad. Pied-billed Grebe was along the Crooked R., 100 km north of P.G. , 12 Jan (PGNC). An Eared Grebe was on Nicola L. 11 Jan (WW). Open water permitted waterfowl to remain later than usual (Table 1). A Great Egret was 60 km west of Terrace 13 Jan (VG) and remained for two weeks. A **Bewick's Swan** was at the e. end of Nicomen I. 12 Jan (JV et. al.).

Table 1. Late waterfowl records for winter 2002-2003.

Species	No.	Date	Location	Observer
Tundra Swan	3	4 Jan	Stuart Lake	LL
Greater White-fronted Goose	1	21 Jan	Tofino	AD
	2	23 Feb	Tofino	AD
	1-2	7 Feb - 27 Feb	Kelowna	LR et. al.
Snow Goose	1	6-11 Jan	Kelowna	BC et. al.
American Wigeon	3	14 Dec	McBride	ES
Mallard	16	4 Jan	Dawson Creek	MP
Blue-winged Teal	1	6 Dec	Osoyoos	DB
Northern Pintail	1	14 Dec	McBride	ES
Lesser Scaup	1	4 Jan	Fort St. James	JB, JAV
Ruddy Duck	3	11 Jan	Nicola L.	WW
Harlequin Duck	1	28 Dec	Smithers	RO et. al.
White-w. Scoter	1	14 Dec	Kelowna	CC et. al.

RAPTORS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

Red-tailed Hawks lingered late in the n-cen. interior with the most notable being 2 at the P.G. airport 15 Dec (PGNC) appearing on the local CBC for the first time since 1989. Rough-legged Hawks not only arrived late, they stayed north longer than usual as evidenced by the record 11 on the P.G. CBC 15 Dec (PGNC) and 5 seen on the Fort St. James CBC 4 Jan (m. obs.). An American Kestrel was very late at McBride 3&15 Dec (ES). There were few reports of Gyrfalcon with one between Dease Lake and Watson Lake 12 Dec (JB) and another returned to Kelowna for its third consecutive winter between 4 Dec - 19 Jan (CC). A Virginia Rail furnished a 2nd winter record for the Williams Lake area 13 Jan (PR, AR). Sandhill Cranes were well out of place in the Kootenays with one near Nakusp from late Nov to mid-Dec (OH) and another at Slocan Park 22 Dec (GH). A Marbled Godwit was exceptionally late 16 Dec (BE) at Queen Charlotte, the first winter record for the Q.C.I.. Two Dunlin were at Williams Lake 4 Dec (KA) for a first winter record, one was at the north end of Osoyoos L. until 28 Dec (DB, RJC, et al.) and Vernon had a single at Head-of-the-lake 13 Feb to end of period (BC et. al.). The late fall Red Phalarope mini-invasion of the south

coast continued into Dec: at least 25 were off the Ogden Pt. Breakwater, Victoria 20 Dec (m.obs.); one was at the base of the Tsawwassen Jetty 15 Dec (FB photo). Tofino had its share of phalaropes as well: 8 on 15 Dec; 5 on 17 Dec; 8 on 28 Dec; and a single 2-5 Jan (AD, GB); 30 at a fish farm at Sulphur Pass in early Jan with a few remaining to 29 Jan (JuB). A Wandering Tattler, very rare in winter anywhere in the region was in Victoria throughout the period.

GULLS THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS

A single Mew Gull was at Nelson 25 Dec - 1 Jan (EM, RWr). Iceland Gulls continue to be reported with increasing frequency: an ad. was at the landfill in Delta 22 Dec - 12 Jan (RTo, ph.) and a basic I there 22 Feb (JJ, RTo); a basic II was at Lost Lagoon, Vancouver 26 Dec (TG+). The Region's 6th and 7th records of Lesser Black-backed Gull included 1 (possibly basic I) in Vernon 8 Dec through 9 Feb (DGC+, ph. m.obs); and an adult in Delta 8 Dec (RTo, MMe, et. al.) and again on 31 Jan (RTo, JF). An ad. Slaty-backed Gull was in Delta 5 Dec (RTo+), this continues to be the most reliable location in the region for finding this rare gull. A Cassin's Auklet in the Fraser R. below the Port Mann Bridge in Surrey was a huge surprise 15 Jan (RB, ph.). A juv. Barn Owl was captured in Lumby 19 Dec (CM). The only Northern Hawk Owl reported came from the McGregor Range near P.G. 23 Jan (CMG). An Anna's Hummingbird survived most of the winter in Smithers at an artificially-warmed feeder until 7 Feb (GG, ph.) and another flew over an observer in downtown P.G. 3 Jan (JB). An extremely early Rufous Hummingbird was along the Juan de Fuca Trail near Botanical Beach 8 Feb (MGS, CSh).

WOODPECKERS THROUGH FINCHES

Rarely encountered during winter in the Kootenays, a Lewis's Woodpecker was in Salmo 12 Jan (DH). An imm. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in Surrey 29 Dec (RF, JF+) was Vancouver's 8th record and just a few blocks from the last sighting. American Crows were very late in Dawson Creek where 69 remained 4 Jan (MP). Violet-green Swallows arrived in the lower mainland 2 Feb (RT) well ahead of schedule, but amazingly behind Barn Swallows! Even Cliff Swallows were 40 days ahead of schedule with singles at Iona 29 Jan (RTo); and Burnaby L. 25 Feb (DP) and yet Tree Swallows did not arrive until 23 Feb at Reifel (JI). For the second year in a row, Barn Swallows staged a northward migration in late winter rather than waiting for mid-April as is usual. There were 264 Barn Swallows reported, of at least 102 different individuals, between 22 Dec and 26 Feb with the vast majority of these birds seen from the lower mainland after mid-Jan. What is different from last winter is not only the astounding number of birds (20-30 were at Reifel Refuge, m.ob.) involved but also that Cliff Swallows were included in the northward push. Three Barn Swallows furnished first winter records for the interior: 2 at Osoyoos, 22 Jan (DB); 1 at Green Lake, 70 Mile House, 11-15 Feb (DR, ph).

A Rock Wren was at Vernon 15-16 Dec (GSD et. al.); another was at the French Creek jetty from Feb 9 through the end of the period (GLM, m.ob.). Another high count of dippers came from the Lillooet CBC where 149 were tallied (m.obs.). Very rare in winter in the Okanagan, a Yellow-rumped Warbler was in downtown Kelowna 9-11 Jan (CC). An ad. male **Hooded Warbler**, furnished the region's 3rd record, when discovered on the Duncan CBC 28 Dec (MMG, RS) and remained in the area until 31 Dec (DM, DS). A male **Black-throated Blue Warbler** was near Cranbrook 11 Dec (RG). A Lincoln's Sparrow was near Kelowna 2 Jan (CC, CS) and provided one of few winter records for the Okanagan. All four *Zonotrichia* sparrows were found this winter in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region with a Golden-crowned Sparrow at Green L. 19 Dec (DR). A White-throated Sparrow was a rare find near Progress 21 Dec, 11 & 25 Jan (MP). There were at least 11 Harris's Sparrows reported this winter with the most noteworthy being singles at Delta 24 Jan-27 Feb (RTo et. al.) and Iona I. 15 Dec (RW et. al.). Casual in winter in the c. interior, a Western Meadowlark was at Mackenzie 15 Dec and still there at the end of Jan (Lambies); another hunkered up in a barn in the Kitseguecla Valley n. of Smithers until the barn cat found it 14 Dec (MON, JON); apparently this last bird was present last winter as well. Kelowna's **Great-tailed Grackle** continued to survive at its favourite shopping mall throughout the winter (m.ob.). Two Pine Grosbeaks were a real find near Tofino 29 Dec (GB).

CONTRIBUTORS (subregional editors in bold-face):

Artie Ahier, Kris Andrews, Sam Barwick, Jur Becker, Ed Beynon, **Jack Bowling** (Prince George, weather summary), Francois Bourgeot, George Bradd, Doug Brown, Rob Butler, Lucille Campbell, Peter Candido, **Richard J. Cannings** (S. Okanagan), Russell Cannings, **Chris Charlesworth** (Kelowna), Lisa Christensen, Mary Collins, Aziza Cooper, Bill Cutfield, **Gary S. Davidson** (Kootenays), **Adrian Dorst** (Tofino-Ucluelet), Claude Dulac, Libby Dulac, Brian Eccles, Jamie Fenneman, Marcia Flumerfelt, Val George, Trent Glukler, George Goymer, Carlo Giovannella, Ruth Goodwin, Ollie Halldorson, **Peter Hamel** (Q.C.I.), Glenn Harper, Dorothy Hearne, Steve Howard, John Ireland, Jukka Jantunen, Bill Kinkaid, Laird Law, Adrian Leather, Chris Marchant, Derrick Marven, Adrian Mason, Murray McDonald, Carolyn McGhee, Mike McGrenere, Martin K. McNichol, Mitch Meredith, Elaine Moore, **Guy L. Monty** (c. Vancouver I.), Bob Murkett, Jill O'Neill, Mike O'Neill, Katie Ostrom, Richard Overstall, Dan Petersen, **Mark Phinney** (Peace River), Darlene Raymond, Anna Roberts, **Phil Ranson** (Cariboo), Anne Redfearn, Wolf Riedl, Lesley Robertson, Rick Schortinghuis, Aron Senkpiel, Chris Shepard, Michael G. Shepard, Josie Sias, Brian Slater, Elsie Stanley, David Stirling, **Rick Toochin** (Vancouver), Miriam Turner, Linda Van Damme, JoAnn Vinnedge, John Vooy, Wayne Weber, Rob Worona, Rick Wright.

AUTHORS IN THIS ISSUE**Michael McMann**

Raised in Oregon where I flew Kestrels and a Red-tailed Hawk in falconry at fourteen years of age. Received Canadian citizenship in 1975 and led two expeditions to the Arctic for Gyrfalcons and two survey/capture expeditions to the B.C. Coast for Peale's Peregrines, the latter sanctioned and monitored by B.C. Fish and Wildlife Birds and Endangered Species Department. Have participated in Peter Sherrington's Rocky Mountain Golden Eagle Surveys. Compiled a two year raptor nesting survey for the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area and produced a photo display of the Osprey nest sights for their interpretive centre. Been a member of the Nelson Naturalists for seven years and on the executive for five years. I recently left Shaw Cable where I was a video producer for 25 years. I initiated a small owl / kestrel nest box trail on property owned by the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program and continue to monitor it with other naturalists.

Andy Stepniewski

A recent recruit to BCFO from near Yakima Washington, Andy, a self-professed 'avid naturalist', was actually born and educated in Canada. After graduation from UBC he was the Parks Naturalist for some years at Garibaldi and Mount Robson Parks.

Rita Wege

Rita, a bookkeeper, and the Nelson Naturalists' Treasurer and Past Co-Chairperson, has over 26 years of birding experience. She has birded around the world and enjoys spending the breeding season looking for bird nests. Recently, Rita took on the role of Membership Chair for the BC Federation of Ornithologists. She also volunteered with her husband Larry at a bird banding station this fall at Vaseux Lake and looks forward to more volunteer work of this nature. Both she and Larry conduct Owl and Loon Surveys for Bird Studies Canada. Rita is the co-ordinator for the Nelson Christmas Bird Count.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo in Castlegar

by Michael McMann
S-12, C-49, RR 1
South Slokan, BC VOG 2G0

On October 18 Janice Arndt, an advanced birder with the Nelson Naturalists who at one time wrote a column on birds for the Nelson News, came across a rare bird during a walk around Castlegar's Waldie Trail. She thought she recognized this species from her travels in Ontario. Though once common in B.C., she knew that it was no longer found west of the Rockies. She went through the discipline of making a quick sketch of the bird and noted the colors of various body parts. Returning to her car she thumbed excitedly through her bird field guide. The black eye, yellow orbital ring, rufous wing patch, olive back, white breast and belly, black and white tail, and distinctive yellow bill could be only one species. But the Yellow-billed Cuckoo was supposed to be on it's way to South America at this time of year. This omnivorous species from the eastern U.S. migrates to warmer climates where the insects and fruit are still available during the winter. She tried to contact Ed Beynon, another experienced local birder, to witness her sighting lest it fly away before anyone else saw it. Ed was not at home at the time so she decided to post her findings on the West Kootenay Bird e-mail site knowing there would be skeptics if no one else saw the bird. She did not have to worry. The cuckoo stayed for fifteen days and during that time an unprecedented number of birders from the U.S. and Canada visited Castlegar just to see it.

Though the Yellow-billed Cuckoo was a resident species in B.C. prior to the 1920's, human settlement meant the clearing of large tracts of deciduous forests, key habitat for the cuckoo. Cornell University's Ornithological Laboratory believes that final extirpation from the western U.S. was complete by the 1950's except for remnant populations in southern California, Arizona, and New Mexico. It has only been seen three times in B.C. since it's extirpation. Gary Davidson, author of the West Kootenay Bird Check List, cites two records: June, 1992 and July, 1994 both from Kelowna and L. Van Damme, author of the Creston Valley Bird Check List, cites a record from Duck Lake in October of 1999.

From Oct. 18 to Nov. 1 when it finally disappeared, Ed Beynon, Roy King and Michael McMann took turns keeping track of the bird for security and scientific reasons as well as just a keen interest. It seemed to like the feeding and roosting situation in the cottonwoods between the sewage lagoons and the Columbia River on the Waldie Island Trail. It foraged by picking off caterpillars and other insects it found under the cottonwood leaves and then would sit quietly amongst the branches almost invisible until it's next feeding cycle. Once a group of naturalists were treated to it coming out in the open and feeding on the ground for an extended period but it seemed to prefer the cover provided by the black cottonwood branches and leaves 2-7 m. high most of the time.

Theories and speculations as to how and why this individual bird arrived in Castlegar and stayed during a period of time when the temperatures dropped to -11°C were interesting and varied. One naturalist speculated that this individual had defective migratory orientation due to genetic abnormalities. Others cited cases where severe weather storms threw birds off course during migration. The weather in Castlegar during this period was unusually dry and warm giving the global warming theorists some fodder. Yet another interesting theory was that some species seem to have 'scouts' - individuals that, through chance or intention, are occasionally found in the Kootenays as though they are exploring for new nesting territory. They cite the unusual but periodic sightings of Purple Martins and Cattle Egrets as evidence of this.

Whatever happened to bring this little Yellow-billed Cuckoo to Castlegar will probably remain a mystery but one thing is certain, it found the Waldie Trail area attractive enough to stay for fifteen days during a time when it should have been heading for South America. It now has to make a long migration late in the season when temperatures will be plummeting all along the way. Its chances of surviving the winter are not good. I still like to think that the memory of its Waldie Trail stopover will stay with it and that we may yet see the flash of its long graceful black and white tail next year... perhaps even the flash of two tails as our adventurer brings a mate with it and B.C. will once again hear the unique call of a species it lost many years ago.

**Southwestern British Columbia:
Sechelt Peninsula and Boundary Bay
9-10 November 2002**

by Andy Stepniewski
291 Windy Point Drive
Wapato WA 98951

Kathy and Kraig Kemper, Ellen and myself birded southwestern British Columbia, enjoying typical November weather. Saturday was overcast and fairly calm. Sunday brought blustery conditions with rain and showers.

SECHELT PENINSULA

We visited several areas on the Sechelt Peninsula. Our main objective was Rock Sandpiper, so we targeted Mission Point, the place for rockpipers on the southwestern British Columbia mainland. On arriving there, we noted the tide was very high, with nary a rockpiper present. Looking offshore, we noted a granite islet and speculated this might be where the rockpipers roost. Sure enough, on inspection with a scope, we could make out ant-sized dots scurrying over the rocks, but could not identify these specks. So, we set off exploring up the peninsula. In Porpoise Bay at the head of Sechelt inlet, we enjoyed viewing a large flotilla of Barrow's Goldeneyes and Buffleheads, and both Surf and White-winged Scoters. The male Barrow's seemed to be in full courtship mode, showing off to their ladylove with ritualistic, spastic, head jerking motions. I hadn't realized these ducks began courtship so early.

While at the nearby Sechelt Marsh on the outskirts of Sechelt, we looked into the sky over the dump and noticed a group of about 25 Common Ravens mobbing a Short-eared Owl. The owl flapped wildly and frantically tried to evade these sinister mobsters. We saw ravens pluck at least three tail feathers from the owl. By and by, a Bald Eagle joined in the fray and came in for the kill with an impressive stoop. The owl escaped on this first attack. Then the whole fracas disappeared behind a hill. We wished to believe the owl escaped unharmed, but as ravens drifted back into view in ones and twos, we feared the worst. We asked ourselves out loud why the owl hadn't escaped into the trees. We left the area quite shaken and in awe, having witnessed nature in the raw.

We had hot soup and fresh bread at a fine little bakery and café in Halfmoon Bay farther up the Sechelt peninsula. Though late fall, we braved the brisk temperatures and ate outside. Beside the café was a tiny creek (I could have easily have jumped it) with spawning Chum Salmon. It appeared these fish were trying to spawn in large gravel in this rivulet, a complete surprise to me.

Fortified and warmed, we set out on a trail in nearby Smugglers Cove Provincial Park, another of British Columbia's myriad of splendid parks. The trail traversed fine coniferous forest, with calling Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Brown Creeper, and Golden-crowned Kinglets, and then a swampy area, traversed by boardwalk. At the end of the trail were views from a headland, with scattered Arbutus, overlooking Welcome Passage. On the rocky shores were Surfbirds and Black Turnstones, our signal to head back to Mission Point. Of interest, alcids were nowhere to be seen, as was to be the case elsewhere on this trip.

Back at Mission Point, we noted the shingle beach rapidly becoming exposed and Black Turnstones and Surfbirds congregating. But where were the promised Rock Sandpipers? I tried to turn a dun-colored wader into our target bird, but, on closer inspection, it turned out to be a streaky Dunlin. After 15 more minutes of careful scrutiny, we noted what we thought to be Rock Sandpipers in flight, but these birds disappeared east of Mission point. Finally, Ellen called out "there's something different." We thrilled at viewing a winter-plumaged **Rock Sandpiper** on the shingle beach, in company with Black Turnstones and Surfbirds. Of the three species of rockpipers present on he beach, it exhibited the most active feeding behavior, scurrying about to and fro, in stark contrast to the methodical probing by the other two.

WHITE ROCK AND BOUNDARY BAY AREAS

Ellen and I still 'needed' Yellow-billed Loon for our 2002 B.C. year list, so we targeted a few sites that have proved at least a reasonable bet for this rare species. We started birding at first light on Sunday morning at the White Rock pier. Here we enjoyed fine and close views of a variety of marine birds, including Red-throated and Common Loons, Horned, Red-necked, and Western Grebes, Canada Goose, American Wigeon, many Surf and White-winged Scoters, one Black Scoter, long-tailed Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, one lone Ruddy Duck, and, of course, many Glaucous-winged Gulls.

Next, we spent an hour at Blackie Spit at Crescent Beach; another protected inland marine waterway that has had its share of Yellow-bills. I carefully scanned and rechecked the waters off the spit, noting at least 25 Common Loons, and three times that many Red-necked Grebes (this is indeed a good area for this species), and good numbers of Horned Grebes and more scoters. In the shorebird department, we tallied Greater Yellowlegs, Sanderling, Western Sandpiper, and Dunlin. Interesting landbirds included two Horned Larks calling overhead. The bushy growth behind the spit had Cedar Waxwing and Fox Sparrow.

Boundary Bay was next on our agenda. We checked brushy areas adjoining fields for Northern Shrike, another 'needed' bird for our list, but with no luck. The most memorable part of this part of our day was walking east from 72nd Street on the dike. Though the tide was very high, Dunlin by the thousands were still seeking refuge at the waters edge, rather than roost inland as some of the other shorebirds do. They were very nervous and seemed constantly on the wing, perhaps to foil the ever present Merlin and Peregrine Falcons. It was a pretty exciting show, one which few birders tire of watching. First of fall Trumpeter Swans (about ten birds) and one Rough-legged Hawk were also seen.

We paid a short visit to the Tsawwassen jetty, a site that had proved a good place for loons in fall and just might yield our sought-after treasure today. However, it proved poor for deepwater birds in general, and was a rather uneventful detour, perhaps due to the extremely high tide. In fact, most of the 'Mitigation Lagoon' was under water. We persisted even though rain had begun in earnest. The blustery weather did test our fortitude. Gulls were roosting on the highest berms, mostly Mew and California's, but a few Thayer's added some spice. I was surprised that the many hundreds of Bonaparte's Gulls, present earlier in fall, were gone. I was also miffed that the swarm of Black Turnstones seemed to have become very scarce as compared to fall.

One of our final stops was along 33A Avenue near Brunswick Point. We were going to bird the 'sparrow patch' along the edge of the dike, but quickly retreated on account of the driving rain. Returning, we noted Rick Toochin and Mitch Meredith, Vancouver birders *extraordinaire*, who were studying Black-bellied Plovers in the muddy field. We stopped and had reasonable (as reasonable as can be had with a sleeping bird in a muddy farmfield in driving rain) view of a Red Knot. On closer inspection, I picked out another knot, identifiable even at a distance by its slate-gray upperparts, size, and, eventually, when it awakened, by its bill.

Threading our way east on farm roads, we stopped along 28th Avenue near its intersection with 64th Street, after Kraig noticed Black-bellied Plovers in the muddy fields. We stopped and viewed through our quite foggy windows these very close birds. Kraig noticed a smaller and uniformly patterned individual. A golden plover! But which one? We leapt out to scope these birds. I struggled for a few moments to get an adequate side view to ascertain structural features important for identification, especially relative length of its primary projection. By and by, the bird came very close. For a millisecond, I had adequate views of it from the side through the scope at very close range (less than 50 metres), and determined this bird had very short primary projections, so perhaps safe to call a **Pacific Golden Plover**. Other features lending support to this call was its tiny size (it seemed to be about 75% of a black-bellied), delicate head shape (akin to a Mourning Dove), and the fact this was well into November, a time when most American Golden Plovers have departed. Unfortunately, children nearby then flushed all the plovers. The birds settled far out into the field where further study was hopeless.

We ended the weekend with 91 species, a respectable total (we thought) for November and beating my pre-trip projection by six!

Osprey Monitoring in the West Kootenays

by Rita Wege
718 Stanley Street
Nelson, BC V1L 1N5

In 1997, four members of the Nelson Naturalists were approached by local bird expert Linda Van Damme to reactivate Osprey nest monitoring that had been started over 20 years ago by Madge and Jack Hollington of the West Kootenay Naturalists. The group from the Nelson Naturalists, nicknamed 'The Hathaway Sisters' (after Jane Hathaway of the Beverly Hillbillies), consisted of Elaine Moore, Emilee Fanjoy, Rita Wege and Robin Rohrmoser. Robin has since moved to Victoria and Rita's husband, Larry Prosser, has taken her place. We are all keen birders and we come from varied backgrounds.



Ospreys on Nest

OSPREY

Ospreys are often seen flying, hovering or perched in trees beside watercourses. They subsist almost entirely on fish, which they capture by spectacular dives from the air. Plunging feet first, the bird rises heavily from the water, carrying the fish head-forward in its talons. They are the only raptor whose front talons can turn backward. Ospreys are easily recognized by their distinctive markings: dark brown above, white below, with a white head and a prominent dark eye stripe. Females have darker streaking around their neck, resembling a necklace, and are usually larger than males. The juvenile plumage is edged with pale buff above. The adults have yellow eyes and the young have red/orange eyes. In flight, their long narrow wings are bent back at the wrist, with dark carpal

patches conspicuous; the wings are slightly arched in soaring. They are often spotted after hearing their characteristic cry as they glide overhead.

After arriving back in their Kootenay breeding area mid April, Ospreys immediately start building or 'renovating' their nests. Eggs are laid between late April and the third week of June, and are incubated 39 to 43 days. Young hatch from mid June to mid July. Most Ospreys lay a three egg-clutch but fledge only two young, on average. Our numbers indicate an average of 1.7 fledglings per nest.

Ospreys have adapted well to living in close proximity to humans and will nest readily and very successfully on artificial nest structures. Our numbers indicate that 87% of our nests are on power poles, pilings, dam structures, bridges, microwave towers, and channel marker buoys. The rest are on broken tops of live and dead trees. Their large twiggy nests can be located directly above water (on pilings) or on treetops well over a kilometer from water. Nests that are used year after year grow large and can measure 1.5 meters wide and half a meter deep or more.

Ospreys migrate in the fall; the adults leave a week or more before the young, and can sometimes be seen until the middle of October. Most local birds migrate to Central America; the young do not return to British Columbia until they are 18-20 months of age. Telemetry data collected by the Canadian Wildlife Service show that an Osprey nesting at the Bonnington Dam over-wintered in Mexico and then returned to the same nest site the following spring. The return flight from Mexico took only ten days!



The Osprey Team

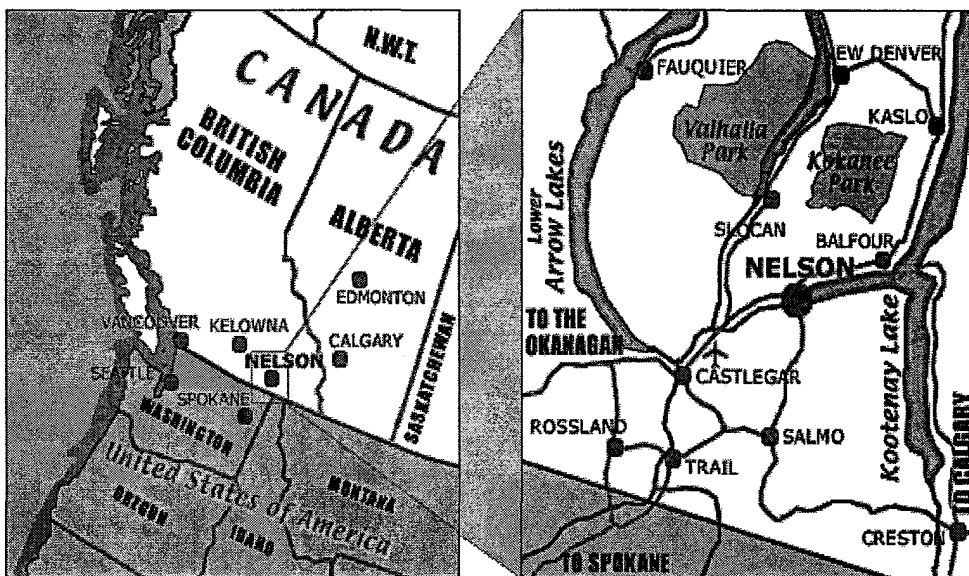
THE STUDY

The purpose of the Osprey survey was to study the population and breeding success of this migratory species. Our study area covers the river corridors between Balfour to Waneta, BC. Starting at the West Arm of Kootenay Lake (at Balfour), the corridor follows the Kootenay River to the confluence with the Columbia River in Castlegar and down the Columbia River to Waneta (south of Trail) at the Canada/US border.

As the area is very large, 120 km long, we decided to divide it into two sections and divide our group into two teams. It

was quickly discovered that even though the southern section of the study area, from Nelson to Trail, was a greater distance, the number of nests in the northern stretch, between Nelson and Balfour, was higher. Each team drove its route, exploring side roads to find viewing advantages for each nest.

Information from local people provided valuable knowledge about the location and history of some nests. In April and May over 110 potential nest locations were checked for activity. The nests were monitored once a month from late April to beginning of September, from a distance using binoculars and spotting scopes and were not disturbed in any way. At the end of the nesting season, nest record cards were filled out for each nest with breeding activity, and submitted to the BC Nest Record Scheme in Victoria. Data has, so far, been collected from 1997 to 2002.



Osprey Survey Area

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of potential nest sites*	49	71	72	76	62	63
Number of active nests**	28	56	35	36	28	21
Number of productive nests***	19	53	26	33	22	10
Number of Osprey juveniles	32	96	43	53	42	15
Average number of Osprey juveniles per productive nest	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.9	1.5

* potential nest sites - nests with nesting material present

** active nests - nests with signs of incubation, copulation or nest building

***productive nests - nests which have fledged young

CONCLUSIONS

- Breeding Activity - The results of this season's monitoring indicate 48% of the active nests produced young. Sixteen percent of the potential nests were productive. The average number of juveniles per productive nest was 1.5. This is the lowest survival rate in our six years of monitoring.
- Nest Structure - Our survey this season indicated 100% of Osprey nests that were productive were on man-made structures.
- Canada Geese Usage - This season, only one nest that was used by Canada Geese and subsequently also used by Osprey, who in turn successfully fledged young.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Anyone who has traveled across the 'orange' bridge in Nelson may have spotted the antics of Abergail's nest. In the spring 2001, in preparation for repainting the bridge, the Ministry of Transportation moved the nest from top of the bridge to a nesting pole nearby where the young were raised successfully. The following spring, the Ospreys rebuilt their nest on the top of the bridge. These nest-moving events were even documented in the local Nelson paper.
- Canada Geese nesting in Osprey nests can have a negative impact because Ospreys have to wait longer to occupy the nests. Research has shown that the survival of Osprey juveniles drops when breeding starts later. New nests are often built in response to occupation of the previous year's nest by Canada Geese. Wet weather, predation by Bald Eagles and lack of fish can also result in a lower survival rate of young.
- This spring we had a surprise visitor in one of our Osprey nests. This nest, located near the top of a gas pipeline tower, had a Great Blue Heron sitting in it. Upon later monitoring in May, the nest was occupied by an Osprey.
- According to *The Birds of British Columbia* (Vol.2 1990), the centre of abundance appears to be in the vicinity of Creston and Nelson where approximately 140 pairs nest, making this area one of the highest concentrations of Ospreys in the world.
- On the August 2002 monitoring trip, nest-building activity was continuing at four nests along the West Arm of Kootenay Lake. Ospreys are industrious feathered folk, always keeping busy.

ANECDOTAL

Ospreys are the perfect birds to monitor. Every spring, like clock work, they sit beside their nests, waiting for us to come and count them. They build their nests in easy-to-observe places and while incubating their eggs, one adult is always on the nest and the other is often near by. Once the young have hatched, they seldom stay still - wiggling, flapping, and moving about the nest, making it easy for us to observe and count them. This is good news when we have 20-40 nests to monitor and long distances to travel on survey days. Each July it is with much anticipation that we check each active nest to see if any young are present. Every August, it is with much delight that we watch the young mature and sometimes witness a juvenile's first flight, after much wing flapping, of course!

The Ospreys have become our extended family, and each nest has a name. The naming of the nests is a constant source of entertainment. What name is chosen depends on what team you are on. Rita and Larry faithfully follow the alphabet and use family names only. Emilee and Elaine use a variety of names since their original system soon became disorganized. Now they use personal references and nest locations.

WRAP UP

This project has been a labour of love. Not only did it allow us to collect data and contribute to the breeding information of this wonderful bird but it also allowed us to form a close friendship with each other. Getting together to 'talk Osprey' often involves sharing a meal and catching up on personal matters. We enjoy the challenge of putting together proposals for funding and writing up our results. Through this work, we have gained valuable experience and knowledge and met other like-minded people who share our passion. Friends regularly tell us about Osprey sightings and nest-building activity and are eager to share their own excitement with us.

This monitoring project has been more to us than monthly field days and nest record cards. As we begin our seventh season of watching and recording, we have decided to take account of our accomplishments. We started out as four inexperienced Osprey watchers but now feel confident in our observations. We have all found delight watching and encouraging 'our' Ospreys as they defend and build their nests, as the Kootenay weather challenges their resolve and as the young demand to be fed. The thrill of returning favourites, new nests and re-activation of old nests keeps us coming back to witness ever new discoveries.

Over the past years, our group has helped spread the word about our Kootenay Ospreys. As part of our original funding agreement we contracted to publish an information pamphlet. Compiling and editing a simple and concise information pamphlet presenting our findings was a challenge. We believe we accomplished this and more. Rita presented our work at the Living Landscape conference, in Fort Steele Heritage Town, October 1999. Our pamphlet and detailed information about our monitoring can be found on the BC Living Landscape web page at <http://www.livingbasin.com/cbasin/osprey/index.html>.

There are other records of our work such as an article entitled "The trials and travels of Osprey," *Birders Notebook*, by Janice Arndt, July 6, 1999, in the Nelson Daily News. We have also given updates on our Osprey monitoring to the Nelson Naturalists and in FBCN's magazine BC Naturalists. We obtained funding to help defer our vehicle costs, first with the BC Living Landscape Project (1999-2000) and then through the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund (2001-2002) and annual reports were submitted. Currently we have no funding for 2003.

The most important aspect of our monitoring is the submission of nest record cards to the BC Nest Record Scheme in Victoria. This information is captured and recorded to aid in the understanding of the Osprey population throughout BC.

In the fall of 2001, the executive members of the Nelson Naturalists nominated the Osprey Monitoring team for the FBCN Knowing Nature Award. We were thrilled to win this award and honoured that our work has been acknowledged publicly.

STUDY TEAM

We have all participated in Christmas Bird Counts, Nelson Waterfowl Counts and Nelson Winter Bird Counts. Each of us is an avid collector of bird sightings data and an enthusiastic participant in the BC Nest Record Scheme.

Elaine Moore, who is an office worker, has been birding for close to 14 years, ever since she became enchanted by Violet-green Swallows holding conferences on her porch railing in the early mornings. She is a Nelson Naturalists' Director, past Co-chairperson and past Bulletin Co-ordinator and has assisted with setting up two FBCN Regional Meetings in Nelson. Since 2000, Elaine has co-ordinated the Winter Bird Count for the Nelson Naturalists. She continues to spend many an hour walking in the outdoors (whatever the weather!), alone or with friends and strangers, enjoying birds and their antics.

Emilee Fanjoy, a trained Forestry Research Technician, is presently with the Ministry of Forests and has worked in the outdoors for 37 years. She has been a member of the Nelson Naturalists for over five years and is presently on the executive as a Member-at-Large. Emilee has over ten years of birding experience and loves nothing better than to be outdoors adventuring around: birding, hiking or skiing. Her job is soon to be transferred to Kamloops and she is looking at ways to make work trips tie in with monitoring Ospreys in the Nelson area.

Larry Prosser, a computer technician for the Nelson school board, is a relative newcomer to birding with three years of experience. Despite being new to birding, Larry has jumped with both feet into all the local bird projects and is working on increasing his life list. Recently, he volunteered at the Vaseux Lake bird banding station for a week. He has discovered an interest and passion for bird photography and many of his photos can now be found on the web. Larry has been a member of our team since 2000 and is our computer expert. He will readily admit that the reason he got into birdwatching was that he married a birder!

Rita Wege, a bookkeeper, and the Nelson Naturalists' Treasurer and Past Co-Chairperson, has over 26 years of birding experience. She has birded around the world and enjoys spending the breeding season looking for bird nests. Recently, Rita took on the role of Membership Chair for the BC Federation of Ornithologists. She also volunteered with her husband Larry at a bird banding station this fall at Vaseux Lake and looks forward to more volunteer work of this nature. Both she and Larry conduct Owl and Loon Surveys for Bird Studies Canada. Rita is the co-ordinator for the Nelson Christmas Bird Count.

EDITORS' NOTE: An abridged version of this report appeared in *FBCN News* 41(2):Spring 2003.

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

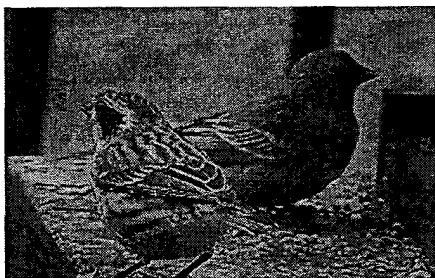
Dear Andy and Marilyn,

Enclosed are a clutch of prints from this almost forgotten neck of the woods. Prints were made from an 8 mm video camera.

The prints show:

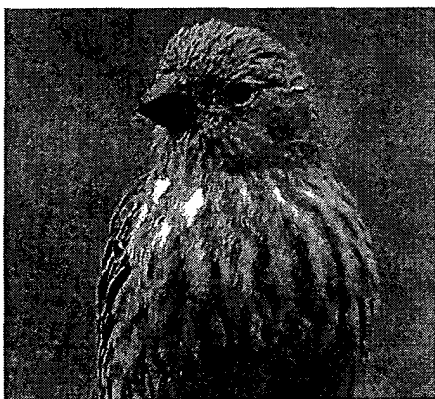
- Female House Finch: May 7-8, 2003, Bella Coola, at my feeder, with Purple Finches. The only other records for Bella Coola are in Hagensborg, 11 April 1985 and Bella Coola, 17 July 1978 [*The Birds of British Columbia*, Volume IV].
- Clay-colored Sparrow: May 1-4, 2003, Bella Coola, "Foraging under a Bella Coola feeder at approximately 4 pm PST each of the four days seen. I presume it spent the rest of the time in adjoining grass fields. *The Birds of British Columbia* states '... on the Coast very rare spring and autumn vagrant. There appear to be no coastal records north of Vancouver'.

EDITORS' NOTE: Ron Mayo lives in the Bella Coola Valley. BCFO members may remember several 'Reports from Ron' which we published starting back in mid-1995. Black and white copies of Ron's submitted prints are shown below. The color prints will be available for viewing at the 2003 BCFO AGM in Radium. Thanks for sending them to us Ron.



Captions from photos:

Female House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) in rear with female Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*). May 7-8, 2003. Bella Coola.



Female House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*). May 7-8, 2003. Bella Coola.



Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*). May 1-4. Bella Coola.

