

BC BIRDING

Newsletter of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists

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Ruffed Grouse and Osprey near Creston

Jo Ann McKenzie



In This Issue

Swallow Box or Sparrow Trap?.....	1
BCFO Officers and Directors; Membership Information.....	2
President's Report	3
Internet Sources / Editor's Notes and Notions.....	4
Journal and newsletter back issues / BCFO research grants / New Members / Help Wanted	5
Swallows cont. / Pioneer Birdmen of Comox	6
BC Bird Atlas	7
Creston AGM Photos	8-9
Upcoming Meetings and Events	11
BC Birding News Briefs	12
Okanagan Big Day Challenge 2008/ Bicycle Birdathon 2008.....	13
Black-billed Magpie predated a California Quail? / Authors in this Issue / Changhua Wild Bird Society	15
Advertisement.....	16

Swallow Box or Sparrow Trap?

by **Bill Merilees** (September 14th, 2007)

Efforts to thwart House Sparrows from using nest boxes intended for Violet-green or Tree Swallows have taken on a number of forms. In my 1989 book *Attracting Back Yard Wildlife* I suggested two: creating a tunnel-like entrance and changing the shape of the hole from circular to oval. Using an oval entrance 4 cm wide and 2.5 cm high proved very successful in our family garden in Vancouver. The sparrows were frustrated and the swallows happily raised their broods where they had been unable to do so in previous years.

This practice was continued in Nanaimo even though House Sparrows were never observed on our property. Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches used the boxes more often than swallows, and this continues.

This spring (April 4th, 2007) upon returning from a field trip, the 'swallow box' in our front yard, previously being used by chickadees, had a different bird hanging dead from its entrance. The chickadees were

please see Swallow, page 6

BCFO Officers and Directors

(ACTING) PRESIDENT

Kevin Bell
1302 Sunnyside Drive, North Vancouver, BC V7R 1B1
604-980-9085

PAST PRESIDENT

Jim Ginns
1970 Sutherland Road, Penticton, BC V2A 8T8
250-492-9610 / ginnsj@shaw.ca

VICE PRESIDENT

Kevin Bell
1302 Sunnyside Drive, North Vancouver, BC V7R 1B1
604-980-9085

TREASURER

Andrew Stewart
3932 Telegraph Bay Road, Victoria, BC V8N 4H7
250-477-1328 / andy.stewart@shaw.ca

RECORDING SECRETARY

Laure Neish
186 Dewdney Cr., Penticton, BC V2A 7Z6
250-490-3635 / natureniche@shaw.ca

DIRECTORS

Wayne Diakow

9840 Waller Court, Richmond, BC V7E 5S9
604-275-2753 / wdiakow@shaw.ca

JUDE GRASS

17375 27A Avenue
Surrey, BC V3S 0E9
604-538-8774 / judegrass@shaw.ca

TONY GREENFIELD

P.O. Box 319, Sechelt, BC V0N 3A0
604-885-5539 / greenfieldtony@hotmail.com

LES GYUG

3130 Ensign Way, Westbank, BC V4T 1T9
250-769-5907 / Les_gyug@shaw.ca

ANDREW STEWART

3932 Telegraph Bay Road, Victoria, BC V8N 4H7
250-477-1328 / andy.stewart@shaw.ca

WAYNE WEBER

351-6712 Baker Road, Delta, BC V4E 2V3
604-597-7201 / contopus@telus.net

MEMBERSHIP (TEMPORARY: REPLACEMENT NEEDED)

Rita Wege
2684 Davidson Road, Castlegar, BC V1N 4P9
250-359-7234 / rwege@telus.net

ARCHIVIST

Kevin Bell
1302 Sunnyside Drive, North Vancouver, BC V7R 1B1
604-980-9085

LIBRARIAN

Andy Buhler
#7 - 1700 Deleenheer Rd, Vernon, BC V1T 9S9
250 260-7823 / brdrs@shaw.ca

NEWSLETTER EDITOR (TEMPORARY: REPLACEMENT NEEDED)

Phil Henderson / editor needed
P.O. Box 615, Fort Langley, BC V1M 2R9
604-888-1571 / strix@uniserve.com

JOURNAL EDITOR

vacant: editor needed

NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION

Ted Goshulak
9578 - 212 B St., Langley, BC V1M 1N4
604-888-0408 / tgosh@twu.ca

LIAISON, CHANGHWA WILD BIRD SOCIETY

Jo Ann MacKenzie
15341-21 Avenue, Surrey, BC V4A 6A8
604-538-1676 / j.a.mackenzie@telus.net

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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.

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

Since November, 2003, BCFO has maintained an official partnership with the Changhwa Wild Bird Society, Changhwa, Taiwan.

Membership Dues

Please send membership requests, or requests for further information, to

Membership
British Columbia Field Ornithologists
P.O. Box 8059, Victoria, BC V8W 3R7

Membership Dues:

Individual memberships\$30.00
Library subscriptions.....\$30.00
Junior memberships (age under 18).....\$20.00
U.S. and foreign memberships.....\$30.00 (US\$)

Memberships are for the calendar year.

Newsletter Submissions

Send material for publication in any format to the editor. Submissions may include bird finding information for our "Site Guide" series and any articles about birding experiences, preferably but not necessarily in British Columbia. A brief biographical sketch (5--100 words) should accompany the article if the editor does not have a recent version or you wish to change it.

Please send newsletter submissions to

Phil Henderson (Editor, BC Birding)
Box 615, Fort Langley, BC V1M 2R9
604-888-1571 / strix@uniserve.com

Deadline for the receipt of material for publication is the 15th of the month preceding the March, June, September, and December issues.

Advertising

Advertising rates are available upon request.

BCFO Website

<http://www.bcfo.ca>



President's Report

by *Jim Ginns (Past President)*

At our 2007 AGM in Lillooet, Neil Dawe gave a presentation on the conflict between ECONOMIC GROWTH and BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION. He encouraged BCFO to adopt a position statement based upon the concept of a STEADY STATE ECONOMY. After discussion a motion stating that BCFO supported the idea of a STEADY STATE ECONOMY was passed. Subsequently, BCFO issued a press release that resulted in Neil being interviewed on Vancouver public radio. What's the point? BCFO took a stand on an important issue and we got publicity.

We also got some publicity when at the time of the Christmas Bird Counts, the CBC radio morning show in Kelowna called first to confirm that I was the President of BCFO and second would I do an interview on the effects of CLIMATE CHANGE on birds. As the interview was scheduled for 8 am I thought WOW, prime time and a big audience. The day before the interview the time of the interview was moved to 6:30 am. The big moment arrived and I was surprised to hear them mis-introducing me as BCs Chief Birder! A few minutes later I was hitting my stride only to be cut short to make way for a phone-in game!

The directors met immediately after the AGM, by conference call on Oct 16, at Manning Park on Feb 16 and by conference call on March 26. In addition, a number of items were dealt with by email (nearly 150 emails have been written just by me since the 2007 AGM).

Some of the highlights are:

- 1) You awarded two grants of \$500 each to :
TYLER INNES to support his field work on nesting of Sandhill

Cranes on northern Vancouver Island, and

VASEUX LAKE BIRD OBSERVATORY for a computer to make data entry from banding study more efficient.

- 2) You should in 2009 be able to receive BC BIRDING on your computer screen. The search is on for a person to see it gets loaded on the web page and sends the email to members that it is available. Several members have made helpful suggestions on the implementation, esp. Ron Dinsdale.
- 3) The MIGRATORY BIRD ACT is being revised and Kevin has worked with BC Nature in supporting their position against weakening the current law.
- 4) The BC BIRD CHECKLIST committee with reps from VNHS, Biodiversity Centre and BCFO, continues to function and Tony is your rep. They are planning for the next version and Tony hopes it will evolve into a BC Rare Birds Committee.
- 5) THE CANADIAN INTERMOUNTAIN JOINT VENTURE is a bird habitat acquisition, enhancement and stewardship program that includes the interior of British Columbia. BCFO is represented on their board. You should be reading more of their activities in future issues of BC Birding.
- 6) The BCFO logo is an outline map of BC with a Steller's Jay in the centre. It is being revised to include our name, British Columbia Field Ornithologists.

- 7) You are represented on the BC BREEDING BIRD ATLAS steering committee by Kevin. And you have contributed \$1,000 to the development of the procedures manual for the coordinators of the Atlas.

Since May 2007 there have been some changes in BCFO's organization:

- A) The library was transferred to the new librarian Andy Buhler in Vernon.
- B) The archives were transferred to the acting archivist Kevin Bell in North Vancouver.
- C) The Production Editor of British Columbia Birds is now Neil Dawe.

And some upcoming changes will be in the positions of:

- A) Membership coordinator
- B) Editor British Columbia Birds
- C) Editor BC Birding
- D) Electronic newsletter manager.

Finally, thanks to all the directors, the editors, all the staff for the journal and newsletter, the representatives to various organizations, and the BCFO coordinators for membership, the AGM, the extension. The hours and efforts of all these people are greatly appreciated!

I believe the organization is in very good shape. Its finances are sound. Membership is stable. The journal and newsletter are quality products. And our participation in BC wide projects is increasing.



INTERNET SOURCES

BCFO

<http://www.bcfo.ca>

Alaska Bird Observatory

<http://www.alaskabird.org/>

Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies

<http://www.wildlifebc.org>

Bird Studies Canada / Long Point Bird Observatory

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/bscmain.html>

Birding in British Columbia

General interest information including bulletin board, checklists, rare bird alerts, book reviews, etc.

<http://www.birding.bc.ca/>

BIRDNET

Site of the Ornithological Council.

<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/>

Bird Source

Audubon's and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's interactive bird information site, featuring "eBird"

<http://www.birdsource.com/>

British Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas

www.birdatlas.bc.ca

British Columbia Conservation Data Centre

Information on plants, animals and ecosystems at risk in British Columbia.

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/cdc/>

eBird Canada

Online interactive program for storing, sharing, sorting and assembling bird sightings.

<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/>

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/birds/>

Point Reyes Bird Observatory

<http://www.prbo.org/cms/index.php>

Rocky Point Bird Observatory

<http://www.islandnet.com/~rpbo/index.html>

The A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds, Seventh Edition

<http://www.aou.org/checklist/index.php3>

SORA: Searchable Ornithological Research Archive

Search and retrieve online publications from The Auk (1884-1999), The Condor (1899-2000), Journal of Field Ornithology (1930-1999), North American Bird Bander (1976-2000), Pacific Coast Avifauna (1900-1974), Studies in Avian Biology (1978-1999), Wilson Bulletin (1889-1999). All articles are available as DjVu's and PDF's.

<http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/>

Editor's Notes and Notions

by *Phil Henderson*

I was hoping that this would be my last issue of *BC Birding*. If no one steps forward after this issue I might produce a September issue and, reluctantly, a December issue. After that I will be as scarce as scarcity.

I have enjoyed editing *BC Birding*, meeting people with many different levels and facets of interest in birds and reading and presenting contributions. For those who might have an inkling to take on the role of editor I would suggest that you go for it. It is a lot of work, takes quite a bit of time (probably 20-40 hours an issue) but it is rewarding. It is an opportunity to create something of your own design while fulfilling the main objective of presenting the views and experiences of others and keeping the membership informed. John Sprague, last editor of *BC Birds* has produced a very useful document on standard english use intended to help authors of that journal but which will also serve as an excellent guide for authors and editors of *BC Birding*.

My main reason for resigning from this post is that recently I have not had the time that I would like to commit to the newsletter. I find it an enjoyable task and very rewarding when the issue is finally done although there is often (for me, at least) that sudden, sinking feeling when I realize I made some grievous grammatical error, omitted a portion of an article, such as the contributor's name, forgot to change something from the template for a previous issue, or forgot about a particular article altogether. I also wish to spend more time on other pursuits, professional, personal and familial.

I owe Martin McNicholl a world of thanks for suggesting to Ian Robertson that I might edit the newsletter. Ian Robertson applied his ample powers of persuasion and I became

editor. Andy and Marylin Buhler can not be thanked enough for initial consultation on the role and their support once I decide to accept it. Also instrumental in my decision was a brief but important discussion with Gary Davidson who had been involved more intimately than I with the BCFO as chair of the Rare Birds Committee.

I thank all contributors to the newsletter and those who provided feedback. Ted Goshulak and his wife Jenny are key to its production and success in getting the issues out to you. There has been talk of sending the editions electronically and that, I'm sure, will happen soon. Some hard copies will still have to be mailed. Rita Wege has also played a huge role in the newsletter production as she compiles and keeps current the details of all BCFO members. Rita is looking to move on (see *Help Wanted* on the following page) so please step forward and give that role a try. All of these positions are voluntary; those involved give freely of their time and they can't do that forever. Remember, too, that each position presents the opportunity to learn something new, meet new people and contribute your own valued skills, opinions and ideas to a group that requires those dynamics.

Happy summer birding.



BACK ISSUES OF BCFO NEWSLETTERS AND JOURNALS AVAILABLE

If you are missing past issues of BC Birding or British Columbia Birds you can purchase most volumes by contacting the people listed below. Back issues of the journal British Columbia Birds can be acquired for \$5.00/ea or the BC Birding newsletter for \$2.00/ea (prices include postage) from the following people.

For journals contact:

Neil K. Dawe
438 Temple Street
Parksville, BC
V9P 1A3
nkdawe@shaw.ca

For newsletters contact:

Ted Goshulak
9578 - 212B Street
Langley, B.C.
V1M 1N4
tgosh@twu.ca



All journal back issues are currently available, except for Volume 8 of British Columbia Birds which is out of print. Please pre-pay your order by cheque or money order made out to BC Field Ornithologists.

Journal Articles On-line All feature articles and notes published in Volumes 1 – 13 of British Columbia Birds are available from our website www.bcfo.ca Articles can be down-loaded individually as PDF files using Adobe Reader, version 5 or greater.

Help Wanted

BCFO is searching for someone to maintain membership records. The job entails keeping membership records up-to-date, preparing and printing mailing labels for both the newsletter and journal, and writing a brief report for the AGM. The present membership coordinator Rita Wege will be glad to answer and questions. Give her a call at 250-359-7234 or contact Jim Ginns (ginnsj@shaw.ca or 250 492-9610).

BCFO RESEARCH GRANTS

BCFO encourages submissions of proposals for financial assistance for bird surveys and other ornithological research. It also wishes to foster greater connection between applicants and the society. Potential applicants are reminded that

1. Requests for funding must be for planned, rather than completed, projects.
2. Under normal circumstances, applicants should be, or be willing to become, members of BCFO.
3. Projects and their results are to be reported in BCFO's journal, *BC Birds*.
4. In order for BCFO directors to give a timely response to project proposals, deadlines for submission are January 1 and July 1.
5. All reasonable requests up to a \$1000 limit and within the financial strength of the organization will be considered, with any larger requests requiring approval at the AGM.
6. Applicants should obtain a copy of the grant policy and the application guidelines from a member of the executive before any submission.

NEW BCFO MEMBERS SINCE LAST ISSUE

Holley Rubinski
Kaslo, B.C.

Paul Schorn
Vernon, B.C.

Marlene Johnston
Lardeau, B.C.

Peter McIver
Castlegar, B.C.

Fred Bushell
Rossland, B.C.

Reto Riesen
Prince Rupert, B.C.



Swallow cont. from page 1



Bill Merillees

gone and when the box was brought down the corpse was identified as a female House Sparrow (see photo). It appeared that this bird had attempted to enter the box and somehow got its lower mandible jammed into one side of the oval hole and its nape wedged against the other. Locked in this position it struggled to get free, but to no avail.

We have yet to see a live House Sparrow on our property!



THE PIONEER BIRDMEN OF COMOX



In the small village of Comox on Vancouver Island lived four of B.C.'s prominent birdmen of the early to mid 20th century. Each of these men played a significant role in furthering our knowledge of the province's rich avifauna. Their contributions included specimen collections now housed in museums and universities, illustrations, magazine and journal articles and observation and banding records.

Each man was an interesting "character" in his own right. Though they all knew each other they did not always see "eye to eye" on bird and conservation matters. To learn more about Allan Brooks, Hamilton Mack Laing, Ronald Stewart and Theed Pearse, read *The Pioneer Birdmen of Comox* by Elizabeth Brooks. This illustrated booklet is available from the Comox Valley Naturalists Society for \$5.00. To obtain your copy, email CVNS Past President, Krista Kaptein kapteink@shaw.ca





Judy Kleger

BIRD ATLAS

As a partner in the BC Breeding Bird Atlas, BCFO members were quick to join the effort to map BC's breeding birds. Following on the heels of the pioneering work of Birds of British Columbia, the British Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas is our province's latest and most extensive bird monitoring project. The first field season is now in full swing, with over 500 registered participants "atlassing" right across the province. By early May, breeding evidence has been recorded for more than 140 species. Anna's Hummingbird was the earliest breeder reported in Victoria in late January.

The Atlas is open for participation at a variety of different levels, tailored to birding skills. Participants can simply record when and where a bird was breeding. Many BCFO members might want to do more such as request a 10km square to atlas yourself. It requires spending a minimum of 20 person-hours birding over the course

of one breeding season. That's four full mornings for a single observer, but just one full morning if you're a team of four. There is no limit on the number of squares you can atlas in; indeed you are encouraged to enter casual breeding observations from anywhere. The high skill levels of many BCFO members suggests some will want to graduate to point counts (15 per 10 km-square), which will be used to develop indices of abundance to complement the distribution information generated by general atlassing. All the resources you need to get started and enter data, how to contact a regional coordinator, plus tips on atlassing for specific species or species groups, a bird of the month feature, links to related sites and more are available at the dedicated Atlas website: www.birdatlas.bc.ca. We will be looking for ways to help individuals with good birding skills bird some of the remote squares in BC.

You are encouraged to use the web to enter your data. It doesn't take more than a few minutes to get the hang of how the web tools work, using an intuitive and straightforward series of tables and drop down menus. You get your own personal profile, have the tools at your fingertips to find out what species have been recorded where, plus you can view Atlas squares and regions using Google Earth. And if the web is not for you, fear not, trusty traditional methods are equally acceptable. Simply complete the scannable data forms, which you can request from your regional coordinator or the Atlas Coordination office, along with an atlassing manual and pin badge. Watch for the first bi-annual newsletter planned for Fall 2008.

If you have any questions on any aspect of the Atlas, call the toll-free hotline at 1-877-592-8527.



AGM 2008 PHOTOGRAPHS

(ALL PHOTOS BY JO ANN MACKENZIE)



Registration.
L to R: Mary and Wayne
Diakow, Jo Ann MacKenzie



Banquet.
L to R: Hue and Jo Ann
MacKenzie, Dr. Robert
Butler, banquet speaker
(BC Breeding Bird Atlas)



Field trip.
Reclamation Road





Field trip.
Reclamation Road, leader
Marc-Andre Boucher (3rd
from right)



Field trip.
Duck Lake, leader Peter
McIver (right)



Field trip.
Duck Lake, Creston
Wildlife Management Area.



Upcoming Meetings & Events

compiled by Martin K. McNicholl and Wayne C. Weber

The following meetings and other events are those that take place in B.C. and immediately adjacent areas or that potentially include information on birds that occur in B.C. Information on additional meetings are listed in the bimonthly Ornithological Newsletter and, for readers with inter-net access, on BIRDNET at www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/BIRDMEET.html.

- July 27-August 3 & August 3-10 2008 NATURE VANCOUVER SUMMER CAMP 2008, Smithers, B.C. Contact: Elly Brok, Camp Registrar, 5315 Wales St., Vancouver, B.C. V5R 3M7; e-mail: ebrok@uniserve.com.
- August 4-8 2008 126th STATED MEETING OF THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, COOPER ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY 78TH ANNUAL MEETING & SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS 86TH ANNUAL MEETING, Portland, Oregon. Contact [no individual named]: PDX 2008, Suite 680, 5400 Bosque Blvd., Waco, TX 76710-4446. Computer web information: <http://www.pdxbirds08.org/>.
- August 15-19 2008 CONSERVATION & ECOLOGY OF GRASSLAND VERTEBRATES CONFERENCE. Norman, Oklahoma. Contact: Dan L. Reinking, Sutton Avian Res. Cent., Univ. of Oklahoma, Box 2007, Bartlesville, OK 74005; phone (918) 336-778; e-mail: dreinking@ou.edu OR Michael A. Patten, Oklahoma Biol. Surv., Univ. Oklahoma, 111 E. Chesapeake St., Norman, OK 73019; phone (405) 325-5061; e-mail: mpatten@ou.edu.
- August 30-September 6 2008 AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION REGIONAL CONFERENCE, Vancouver and Victoria, B.C. Contact: Brenda Gibb, American Birding Association, 200-4945 North 30th Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80919; phone (800) 850-2473, extension 230. computer website: <http://www.americanbirding.org/mtgs/2008/snowbird/info.html>.
- September 5-7 2008 WESTERN BIRD BANDING ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING, Boise, Idaho. Contact details not yet announced. Computer web information: URL:<http://www.westernbirdbanding.org/next-meetings.html>.
- September 11-16 2008 ELEVENTH INTERNATIONAL GROUSE SYMPOSIUM, Whitehorse, Yukon. Contact: Shelagh Bucknell, Centre for Applied Conservation Research, Forestry Faculty, U. B.C., Vancouver; phone (604) 940-4642; e-mail: Shelagh.Bucknell@ec.gc.ca.
- September 23-27 2008 ELEVENTH NORTH AMERICAN CRANE WORKSHOP, Wisconsin Dells. Contact: Jane Austin [no address given], phone (701) 253-5510; e-mail: jane_austin@usgs.gov.
- September 24-28 2008 RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Missoula, Montana. Contact: Kate Davis, Raptors of the Rockies, Box 250, Florence, MT 59833; phone (406) 829-6436; e-mail: raptors@montana.com.
- November 5-8 2008 THIRTY-SECOND ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WATERBIRD SOCIETY, South Padre Island, TX. Contact details not yet published.
- November 10-14 2008 THIRD NORTH AMERICAN SEA DUCK CONFERENCE, Quebec, Que. Contact: Michel Robert [address not yet published]; phone (418) 649-8071; e-mail: michel.robert@ec-gc.ca.
- September 29-October 4 2009 RAPTOR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE, Pitlochry, Scotland. Contact: Ruth Tingay [address and phone number not yet published], e-mail: dimlylit100@hotmail.com.
- August 22-28 2010 25TH INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS, Campos do Jordao, Brazil. Contact: Prof. Dr. Cristina Yumi Miyaki [no address announced]. e-mail: ioc2010@ib.usp.br.

Thanks to Peter Blokker and Jim Ginns for contributing to this issue of this compilation.



B.C. Birding News Briefs

Compiled by Martin K. McNicholl

Owl Champion- Although Dr. C. Stuart Houston has always lived in Saskatchewan, many of the birds that he bands are recovered in B.C., giving B.C. relevance to his being awarded the 2008 Champion of Owls award. Stuart has long been known as the bander of more Great Horned Owls than all other North American banders combined. He is Saskatchewan's leading ornithologist and a prominent historian, participating in both fields as an "amateur," as he is professionally a medical doctor and distinguished medical researcher/radiologist. –based partly on e-mail from David H. Johnson, Director for Global Owl Project, Center for Biological Diversity to raptor conservation list serve group, forward by Jude Grass.

Will Grouse Be Lightened Again? –A recent note from James F. Bendell (personal communication 20 March 2008) indicates that recent research on the poorly known Sitkan Blue Grouse or Sitkan race of Sooty Grouse has shown that the cervical apteria ("air sacs") of males are pink, not the purplish of typical Dusky Grouse or yellow of typical Sooty. The white fringes around the apteria are also wider than in other races. His former student and long-term research partner, Fred C. Zwickel, feels that too few data are available on individuals in the border areas between "Dusky" and "Sooty" Grouse to support their recent split definitively. Zwickel has also pointed out that specimens sampled for the molecular data that supported the recent split were not from areas where Dusky meet Sooty (Minutes of the 1,019th Meeting of the Brodie Club held on 18 March 2008). Stay tuned for further developments!

Solecki Awarded Again –Daphne Solecki, a long-time contributor to many natural history endeavors, including as President of both the Vancouver Natural History Society (Nature Vancouver) and the Federation of B.C. Naturalists (Nature B.C.) has been a well-deserved recipient of several awards. The most recent is one of the first Arbor Vitae Awards present by B.C. Environment Minister Barry Penner to individuals who make a difference in one or more aspects of environmental protection and stewardship..." Daphne's efforts in creating the Young Naturalists' Club of B.C. were cited specifically as among her long-lasting contributions, one that will help retain bird habitat for years to come. –based primarily on Anonymous. 2008. *B.C. Nature* 46(1):6.

B.C.F.O. Honours David Stirling –A highlight of the banquet during the 24 May 2008 B.C.F.O. annual meeting was the announcement by Dr. Wayne C. Weber that David Stirling had been selected by the selection committee (Richard J. "Dick" Cannings, Martin K. McNicholl and Wayne C. Weber) to receive the second B.C.F.O. Award for Ornithology, a selection that was approved by the B.C.F.O. board. Al Grass nominated David for the award. David's contributions to ornithology will be summarized in a future issue of *B.C. Birding*.

Thanks to Jude Grass for contributing to this issue of this column.



Okanagan Big Day Challenge 2008

by *Dick Cannings*

The 23rd Annual Okanagan Big Day Challenge was held on Sunday, May 18, 2008. Five teams took part in the first all-green Challenge, in which full-day teams were restricted to biking, walking or sitting. Only two bicycle teams took up the all-day green challenge this year, in part due to the absence of several perennial team leaders from the province this time. The weather was near perfect, though a bit warm for some, with a high of 31°C in the south Okanagan. A total of 174 species were tallied by all 5 teams, somewhat below the long-term average when 600+km days were put in by car-based teams.

The Flammulated Owl trophy for highest species total overall went to the “SACR-o-iliacs”—Eva Durance, Bob McKay, Laurie Rockwell and Glenda Ross—with 132 species. That team found its name when 4 Sandhill Cranes (code SACR) flew overhead during their 85-km cycle down the

McKinney Road and through the south Okanagan. They had to put up with the Sour Grapes Award for worst miss of the day, though, by getting skunked with no Bald Eagles. The Kootenay Kup for second place went to “Chafing For Chickadees” (Dick Cannings, Francis Iredale, Ruth Joy, and Tanya Luszcz) who cycled 117 km from north Naramata to Oliver and back to White Lake and counted 128 species. Their highlight was a singing White-throated Sparrow at Chute Lake.

The top Little Big Day award went to Peter Blokker and Adam Moss, who cycled from Silver Star out to Otter Lake, finding 98 species in 8 hours. They also saw the best bird of the day—a Cattle Egret. “Wilson’s Flycatchers”, a team made up of Gwynneth Wilson, Judy Latta, Pam Laing and Elke Fischer, did a Little Big Day by car but restricted themselves to within the boundaries of the city of Kelowna. They drove

only 100 kilometres and netted 96 species, including a Caspian Tern. The third Little Big Day team was the “Octopishers”—George Clulow, Carlo Giovanella, Robert Lyske and Avery Bartels—who walked down the Shuttleworth Creek and Irrigation Creek Roads to Vaseux Lake. Their 19-km march got them 90 species, including a Williamson’s Sapsucker.

[Editor’s Note: Details of the “Chafing for Chickadees” team’s adventures follow.]

Bicycle Birdathon 2008

by *Dick Cannings*

We lept out of the truck at 4:20 a.m. The subalpine air at Chute Lake was unusually balmy—in fact I was sweating under many layers of clothes, prepared for the normal blast of cold alpine wind. I certainly wouldn’t need gloves this morning, even when biking at 1220 metres elevation! I had come back to Chute Lake to start my birdathon again this year, but many things were different. We were only two days earlier—May 18 instead of May 20—but the long, cold spring had delayed many migrants so I wondered which ones we might miss along the way. The weather had suddenly turned hot a couple of days ago, and a lot of the early migrants that had been

stuck in the valley for a week or more had vanished. And the dawn chorus at Chute Lake was drowned out by the booming music and loud screams of partiers in the cabin next to our parking lot. It would be a different day for sure.

I was joined this year by three other intrepid birder-cyclists—Francis Iredale, Ruth Joy and Tanya Luszcz. I not only had a new team, but a new bike as well. My old bike had literally fallen apart on last year’s birdathon, so I was hoping this new model would serve me well. I had a moment’s concern when the front wheel turned stiffly at the start, but a few quick

adjustments had it spinning more or less as it should. We saddled up and were off to the north end of the lake to get away from the music and into the birdsong.

The first song of the morning, as usual, came from an American Robin nearby. A pair of Barn Swallows chattered under the Chute Creek bridge and a Winter Wren burred along the shore. White-crowned Sparrows sang from the shrubby hillsides, burned in the Okanagan Mountain fire of 2003, while Lincoln’s Sparrows sang from the sedges lower down. A Ruffed Grouse drummed in the thickets. It was hard to keep up with the additions



to the list as the northeast sky brightened. At the north end of the lake I was happy to hear a Northern Waterthrush singing, and surprised by the loud “gronk” of a Great Blue Heron. Even more surprising was the classic song of a White-throated Sparrow coming from the woods. We were hundreds of kilometres south of the normal breeding range of this bird, and they are even rare as migrants—I’d have to come back here in June to see if this one had set up a territory.

A Sora called from the marsh, then we spotted a pair of loons floating by on the lake’s glassy surface; species 19 and 20 for the day and it was only 4:40. We returned to the south end of the lake and bid a silent goodbye to the revelers in the cabin as we started south on the Kettle Valley Railroad trail at 5:20 a.m. We had 33 species and were more or less on track to equal or better last year’s effort. We added species regularly as we rattled down the trail—Townsend’s and MacGillivray’s Warblers, Warbling and Cassin’s Vireos, Dusky and Hammond’s Flycatchers. An early Swainson’s Thrush called from the firs—maybe the late migrants had caught up after all. We surprised an elk in the middle of the trail—certainly the mammal of the day.

At 6:10 a.m. a motorcyclist came around the corner and flipped up his visor to talk. He insisted on helping us with directions, even though there was only one trail and only one direction to go. We politely thanked him for helping us, then coasted off, chuckling. I was beginning to worry about a few misses as we left the subalpine forests behind—no Olive-sided Flycatcher, no Gray Jay, no woodpeckers at all. We reached the magnificent ponderosa pines of Rock Ovens Park at 6:20 a.m. and were happy to see a pair of Gray Jays come in to my pygmy-owl imitation—this is about as low as you can expect these birds in spring. The

pinus brought another wave of species for the list—Townsend’s Solitaire, Cassin’s Finch, Spotted Towhee, Pygmy Nuthatch. We took the shortcut down Robinson Creek to avoid the Big Tunnel and about 4 extra kilometres of trail, then headed north on the middle track of the big S-bend the railway makes above Naramata. A Rock Wren sang from the first open bluff we came to, then Tanya spotted a Northern Harrier sailing north above the benches far below us.

At the Little Tunnel the White-throated Swifts chattered by and the Canyon Wren sang loudly. The wren had been silent when I cycled by here two days previously. There had been rattlesnakes at the trailside den two days ago, too, but they were gone this morning, undoubtedly lured away by the hot weather. Francis picked out the “quick, three beers!” of an Olive-sided Flycatcher far below us in the pines—a real bonus in these low elevation forests and one less bird missed. We reached my home along Arawana Creek at 0820, only a few minutes behind last year’s schedule and right on target for species. After a quick breakfast, we checked the neighbour’s Calliope Hummingbird nest, but the bird was off foraging somewhere. This was the first “sure” bird to evade us and perhaps a sign of things to come.

We cycled south along Naramata Road, ticking off common neighbourhood species such as California Quail, Black-billed Magpie, Steller’s Jay and Clark’s Nutcracker. We rejoined the KVR and pedaled into Penticton, scoping a couple of late Western Grebes off the beach and a gull that was too distant to identify for sure, but was likely a Ring-billed on probabilities. The kingfishers that had been so conspicuous at the marina in recent days were disappointingly absent, and the Okanagan Lake beach was completely empty—no gulls

or ducks anywhere. We went down the Okanagan River to the highway, then turned back into town to get the family of Great Horned Owls at Kings Park—a 15-minute diversion, but we weren’t likely to see any others along our route. Cycling back to the river, we detoured into the woods there to look for the Yellow-breasted Chat that traditionally nests in the roses below the West Bench. Its loud whistles rang out on cue—at least some birds were cooperating.

Still on schedule and target, we pedaled south along the river. Then things began to go awry—although our bikes were sound, the wheels started to come off our plans. This route had only one or two good duck spots on it, and when you’re doing a bicycle birdathon you don’t often have a Plan B available if a spot doesn’t produce. Our best hope for ducks was the river oxbow just east of the Penticton airport; and last year it had been like a field guide page of ducks, with one or two of everything we needed. This year it was almost empty—a couple of pairs of Blue-winged Teal and two male Lesser Scaup were all we had to add. An immature Bald Eagle perched right above the water might have been the reason for the lack of waterfowl; if so we added one eagle and lost about a half-dozen species of ducks there.

We soon reached Skaha Lake and rode down the sunny, sandy trail along its west side, reaching Okanagan Falls by 1 p.m. We dropped in at the grocery store for the traditional purchase of food and drugs (both my knees were complaining loudly) and assessed our position. We were still on track in terms of time, but were suddenly down 12 species from last year, and only a spectacular group of birds at Vaseux Lake could help us. We stopped in at the campground at the falls, hoping to get four quick species, but there were only two



there—Barrow's Goldeneyes and the immature male Harlequin Duck that had overwintered there. To our surprise a female Harlequin swam up to his rock and joined him. But there were no kingfishers and the American Dippers weren't at their nest, despite having been highly visible yesterday at the same time. We sat on the roadside and waited, but eventually gave up and continued down the river dykes to Vaseux Lake. Here was our last chance for a waterfowl bonanza, but only Redheads sat in the marsh while a pair of Green-winged Teal flew by upriver. At the end of the dyke we looked out at an apparently empty lake.

Disheartened by the lack of birds and the heat of the day, we retraced the 5.5 kilometres back to Okanagan Falls, hoping to catch the dipper at its nest or a kingfisher on the wire. They weren't there, though Ruth pointed out a Western Kingbird perched nearby. After another round of liquid purchases, we headed south again, this time on the highway. At Vaseux Lake we hiked out on the boardwalk to the blind, where a pair of visiting birders told us there was absolutely nothing to see. We scanned the lake anyways in the shimmering afternoon sun, and were relieved to spot the Tundra Swan that had been there all week, as well as a pair of Ring-necked Ducks and a male Ruddy Duck. A Virginia Rail quacked in the marsh and we left the blind with renewed hope. Tanya boldly predicted the Lewis's Woodpeckers—a species I had missed last year—would be at the McIntyre Creek Road intersection, and there they were. A male Gadwall floated offshore. Things were looking up, though we were still 7 ducks and a handful of late migrants down.

The north breeze blew us south to the massive face of McIntyre Bluff, where we sat down on the roadside to look for the resident Peregrine Falcons. None showed, but Ruth pointed out

a Golden Eagle disappearing behind the north ridge. At the Okanagan River bridge, Tanya spotted a female Wood Duck that was soon joined by her mate, but the pair of Merlins that had been so noisy here a week ago were either absent or very, very quiet. We turned on to River Road to search for Gray Catbirds, but found instead a displaying male Black-chinned Hummingbird.

At 6 p.m. we were still 15 species behind last year's pace and the hill climb was about to start. Secret Hill is only 700 metres long, but climbs at a 12% grade the whole way. I gave up quickly and pushed my bike up most of the way, but my compadres pedaled all the way to the top. We rested there, listening in vain for the local Lark Sparrows. Our spirits lifted a bit when a pair of Red Crossbills flew over, one of our earlier misses in the high forests. But still no pygmy-owl answered my incessant whistles. We turned north onto the White Lake Road and drifted through Willowbrook, where Ruth's sharp ears picked up a Savannah Sparrow in a hayfield, then 3 Lark Sparrows flew in front of us.

We started the long, gradual climb to the White Lake basin, pausing only to whistle for pygmy-owls. The last rays of evening sun were on the salt lake when we got there. We watched with curiosity as three men walked out onto the salt mud and drew a huge letter "W" in the white crystals. They began a second letter, but then gave up and walked back, the whole event seeming somewhat surreal. We stashed the bikes behind some sagebrush and hopped the fence to begin our Grasshopper Sparrow search. A pair of Gray Partridge exploded from the grass and rocketed off, cackling—certainly a welcome surprise. We saw 5 more Gray Partridge—a real bonanza—but the Grasshopper Sparrows failed to sing, so we got back

on the bikes and kept climbing north, checking off Mountain Bluebird and Brewer's Sparrows at the north end of the basin.

We got to Three Gates Farm—our end point—at 8:45 p.m. After a quick pit stop, I went back outside to whistle for pygmy-owl for the millionth time that day and was relieved to hear an answer come back almost immediately. Our host there, Doreen Olson, provided cool glasses of water as we waited for dark—we were hoping to get Western Screech-Owl and Common Poorwill there. At 9:30 we went back outside just as a convoy of vehicles pulled up to the farm gate—it was Chris Charlesworth leading a Meadowlark Festival owling tour. My plans for whistling up screech-owl were shelved as Chris played the owls' song into the night. No screech-owls answered, but soon a family of Great Horned Owls began hooting and screeching and putting on quite a show. We walked up the road to get away from the cacophony and soon heard the liquid song of a Poorwill from the hillside above us, calling at the full moon. We decided that was a good point to end on, so called it a night at 9:50 p.m. Our species total was 128, ten less than last year, but it had been a fabulous day—and I must admit I felt a lot less tired this time, even though Chute Lake was 117 kilometres behind us.

Postscript: Along the way, Ruth came up with the name "Chafing for Chickadees" for our team. We took second place in the Okanagan Big Day Challenge behind the SACR-o-iliacs (Eva Durance, Bob McKay, Laurie Rockwell and Glenda Ross) who found 132 species. Like all teams in the Challenge, we were raising money for bird conservation as well through the Baillie Birdathon—our team alone gathered more than \$2,500 in pledges.



Black-billed Magpie predated a California Quail?

contributed by **Andy Buhler** for **Jim** and **Christine Peacock**, Vernon, BC

Last week I visited with our townhouse neighbours Christine and Jim Peacock, a couple who are quite interested in the birds in their back yard. Christine stated she went to look out her bedroom window that

“overlooks a creekside habitat when a magpie flew into the underbrush in front of me. As I watched, his [magpie] head went down behind a couple of logs and it looked like he was pecking at something. I could see his body as he jumped and bopped up and down as he struggled to get whatever it was. I then heard a quail call and it was not the usual warning type call the male quail makes. I looked around and could not see any quail although they often come to the bird feeder. I continued to watch the magpie and no sooner did his head reappear when I saw him pulling feathers out of what I thought was a small bird. He continued pulling out feathers until he broke through the skin and you could see the red flesh as he began to eat it. I reached over for my small binoculars to take a closer look and it was then that I actually saw the magpie had killed a female quail. I proceeded to take a few pictures and my husband went down later on to confirm it was indeed a female quail.”

Apparently the magpie left the carcass several times to get a drink from a nearby puddle then resumed eating. The Peacocks have several pictures showing the Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* eating from the headless California Quail *Callipepla californica*. Although I had thought that a quail would be too large a prey item for a magpie to kill, the pictures did show the magpie eating the quail. It

is possible that the quail might have been killed by something else but its body was quite fresh and the male quail in the area was noisily distressed. I wondered whether the quail might have been hunkered down to nest in the shrubbery when the magpie attacked it. Magpies have nested in that area and frequently harass other birds at our feeders. We both have had California Quail regularly in the same

area. One pair routinely wanders past our feeder now that nesting season is upon them.

I did a search on OWL and SORA and in my library resources but could not locate any articles suggesting magpies take such large prey items. I present this observation on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Peacocks in case it might be a first.

Authors in this Issue

Dick Cannings

Dick Cannings was born and raised in the Okanagan Valley in a family keenly interested in natural history. He works half-time for Bird Studies Canada and also serves as the chair of the Birds subcommittee for COSEWIC - the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. He has written several books on the natural history of British Columbia, including *British Columbia: A Natural History*, *The BC Roadside Naturalist*, and *An Enchantment of Birds*.

Bill Merilees

Bill Merilees has had a life long fascination with natural history. He joined the Vancouver Natural History Society in 1953 and is now a past President and Honorary Life Member. He was a field biologist with the Australian Antarctic Research program stationed at Macquarie Island for 13 months in charge of their Royal Penguin, Wandering Albatross and Southern Elephant Seal life history studies. Once a B.C. R.P.Bio with BC Parks, now retired. Much of his current time is spent studying B.C.'s micro marine molluscs, recording flowering phenology and backyard wildlife gardening. In his 'spare time' he has authored or co-authored five books.

Jim and Christine Peacock

The Peacocks have recently become interested in both birds and photography. They watch the feeders in the back of the complex with regularity and have been documenting a number of the birds that have come through this spring. Christine and Jim have linked up with two other couples in Vernon who have been birding for many years. This has allowed them to improve their reporting of sightings and their identification skills.

Changhua Wild Bird Society

To: BC Field Ornithologists

Dear BCFO Members;

Our two societies have been partners since November 2003. Some of our members visited your meeting in Tumbler Ridge in 2004. Now, it is our turn to invite you. The biggest event of our year is the Bagua Mountain Bird Fair, marking the return of the Grey-faced Buzzard-Eagle as it migrates over Taiwan on its way to Japan and beyond to nest. The CHWBS members invite BCFO members to visit us on 21 March, 2009 to see the spectacle of so many raptors in our skies. This would be a small part of a birding tour in Taiwan; you would see many more Taiwan birds on our beautiful island. The International Taiwan Birding Association can give more information.

We look forward to welcoming you to our Bird Fair and the birds of Taiwan.

Liao Tsu-ciang, President,
Changhua Wild Bird Society

Wenmin Wang, Secretary,
Changhua Wild Bird Society

May 5, 2008

理事長 廖自強



Birding In Taiwan

Collared Bush Robin, Formosan Whistling-Thrush, Steere's Liocichla, Taiwan Barwing, White-eared Sibia, Taiwan Yuhina, Yellow Tit, Flamecrest, Formosan Magpie, White-whiskered Laughingthrush, Swinhoe's and Mikado Pheasants are 12 of Taiwan's 15 generally recognized endemics. (Some authors recognize up to 29.) There are over 60 endemic sub-species such as *Black-browed [Taiwan] Barbet* and *[Taiwan] Hwamei*. Other birds include *Malayan Night-Heron*, *Pheasant-tailed Jacana* and *Collared Finchbill*. *Fairy Pitta* is present only during the breeding season. In spring, visit Lanyu Island with 6 bird specialties of its own, including an endemic subspecies of *Ryukyu Scops-Owl*. The globally threatened *Black-faced Spoonbill* winters in the Tsengwen Estuary.

Want to see one of the rarest birds in the world? *Chinese Crested Tern*, *Thalasseus bernsteini* nests in very small numbers in the tern reserve in the Matsu Archipelago.

NEXT TRIPS:

2008: Nov. 4–16: Endemics, Black-faced Spoonbill

2009: March 19–April 1: SPECIAL TOUR FOR BCFO MEMBERS at reduced price. Visit the home area of BCFO's partner society in Changhua, Taiwan. Endemics, Lanyu Island; 14 days, FROM VANCOUVER, INCLUDING AIR, \$4590 (sharing), \$5090 (single). Ask for itinerary.

July 18–19: Matsu; Chinese Crested Tern;
July 20–25: Extension; endemics

Nov. 10–22: Endemics, Black-faced Spoonbill

PRICE: 13 days: From Taipei, Taiwan: \$4000 (sharing); \$4500 (single)

July, 8 days: Contact us for details and price

EARLY BOOKING DISCOUNT for regularly scheduled tours: Register at least 60 days before tour start date; get 5% off tour price.

GROUP SIZE: 1–10, with 2 leaders, *Simon Liao* and *Jo Ann MacKenzie*
Private tours can be arranged.

CONTACT:

INTERNATIONAL TAIWAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION
The Taiwan Specialists
ITBA is exclusive agent for Birding in Taiwan

Jo Ann MacKenzie, 15341 – 21
Avenue, Surrey, BC, V4A 6A8, Canada
j.a.mackenzie@telus.net tel: 604-538-1676

Simon Liao, in Taiwan
birdingintaiwan@yahoo.com.tw



www.birdingintaiwan.org

