

Marshnotes®



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
SUMMER 2013**

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Managers of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary Since 1963

- dedicated to the conservation and study of migratory waterfowl-

Marshnotes:

Editor: Kathleen Fry

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Submissions, articles, photographs and letters for publication may be sent to the above email address marked for attention of Marshnotes Editor. Please include your telephone number and the Editor will contact you.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

October 15th, 2013

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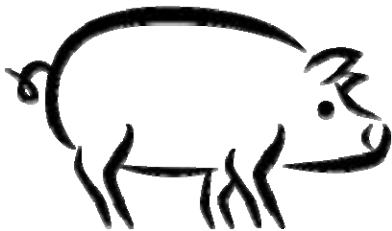
Admission:	Members:	Free
	Non-Members:	Adults: \$5 Children (2-14 yrs) and Seniors (60yrs +): \$3
	School Groups:	Special discounts; Pre-booking required.

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25th Annual PIG & CORN ROAST

at the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary

Saturday, September 7th 2013



Tickets are now on sale at the
Sanctuary Office.

Adults: \$20 each
Kids 7-12 yrs: \$10 each
Kids under 7 yrs: FREE

To order, call 604 946 6980.
(please pick up your tickets before
the event).

*Happy Hour starts at 5 pm. Dinner Call between 5:30-6:00 pm.
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and help support the Sanctuary.*

About Our Covers

FrontCover: Pectoral Sandpiper© Jim Martin

Back Cover: Gadwall© Michelle Lamberson

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Manager's Report Apr-Jun 2013

The spring season was a busy one, with visitor numbers only slightly down from the past two years for this period (a total of 18,714 in 2013, versus the 20, 076 and 19,476 of 2012 and 2011). After the lovely weather in March, April was quite soggy and so was most of May, but June made up for it with some nice summer days. Since the beginning of July we have had weeks of hot dry weather and are well into the dusty season in the parking lot and wildflower season along the trails.

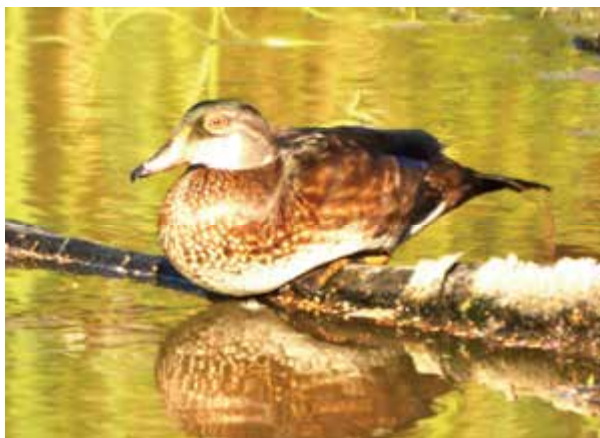
The regular bird surveys carried out every two weeks are proving very helpful in documenting the overall changes in numbers over the seasons. In early April, despite the soggy weather, visitors had good views of shorebirds such as Dunlin, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and Western Sandpipers, and the mid-April count showed over 3,000 migrant shorebirds, dropping down to just a few hundred by late April and even lower for most of May and June. July is when we see the return of many of these species.

The counts (and aging of broods) also showed we had 20 clutches of Canada Geese this year, hatching from late April until well into mid-June. One nest was very oddly located, with three eggs laid in a bare scrape underneath a bench out in the center of the trail system. Between people sitting on the bench and predators stealing the eggs, the geese had to give up.

Every year, we are also joined by additional flocks of non-breeding geese during their annual moult. The count May 25th showed nearly 300 geese just in our pond and trail system., all flightless and walking as they waited for the regrowth of their primary feathers. As all the geese regain their feathers and can fly off they tend to accumulate in offshore flocks of thousands of birds by fall.. Right now, many of our local goose families seem to wait for the parking lot to clear at the end of the day for a daily "celebration of flight". They spread across the far end of the parking lot and then practice flapping and short test flights down the length of the dusty gravel, with some of them getting airborne, and others screeching to a halt to avoid crashing into the fences by the Gift Shop.

The other waterfowl, most notably Mallard, Wood Duck and Gadwall seem to have relatively few broods this year, but there may have been a significant number of nests predated by racoons and mink. Rain and hatches of mosquitoes from ponded areas such as the picnic area low spot also resulted in high numbers

of swallows showing up on counts. On April 13th, for example, we had nearly 350 Tree Swallows in flight over the marshes, muddy areas and wet meadows of the Sanctuary.



Young Male Wood Duck

Photo: Kathleen Fry

In addition to all the helpful visitor reports of birds using nest boxes and waterfowl broods, there were several specific songbird nesting records this year. For example, a Bushtit nest was started in late March along East Dyke, and parent birds were seen feeding young on April 26th. A Brown Creeper was seen going in and out of a hole in one of the East dyke snags April 30th with food in its mouth and a Red-breasted Nuthatch was also bringing food to young in a nearby snag. Visitors were charmed in late May to see fledged Black-capped Chickadee young following their parents to beg for food. In mid-June, a Spotted Towhee nest with newly-hatched young was found along the driveway. This kind of information enhances our knowledge of probable nest sites and nest initiation dates.

The spring report would not be complete without a report on the 2013 Sandhill Crane nesting saga. I think we missed part of the story, as although the pair was on their nest island off and on from April 5th onwards, we didn't think they were incubating until the 10th, when the male was behaving very oddly on the trail and an eggshell was discovered later in the same area. Gulls had been stealing eggs from nearby Canada Goose nests, but we don't really know what happened at the crane nest that day. The male startled visitors by lying down on the path in front of them. I call this his "decoy" manoeuvre, and he seems to do it when there is some perceived danger to the nest or a

need to distract viewers.



Sandhill Crane “decoy”. Photo: Kathleen Fry

By the 13th of April, both birds were taking turns incubating the second egg. The male then entered into a month-long daily routine of watching over the female on the nest at night, taking a turn to incubate and nap in the morning, then stalking and chasing our gang of four younger non-breeding cranes for an hour or two. He then took an afternoon turn at the nest while the female went off for a break. The cranes incubated through a hailstorm April 21st and many a miserable wet day until May 12th, when a small hole in the egg could be seen. On May 14th, the chick was fully hatched and actively exploring the island, and the family made their first swim over to the trails on the 16th. As soon as this swim happens, we close certain sections of the trail to stop visitors from getting too close, but the cranes cooperated by bringing the young chick or “colt” right over for photos in front of the barrier.

On May 20th, we had over 1,000 visitors, and the chick was in full view for most of the day but seemed a bit tired. The next day, on the 21st, it died. An autopsy showed it had died of an infected yolk sac and a bit of pleurisy (lung infection). We don't really know the exact factors that led to this, but young birds can get infections through the eggshell even before they hatch, and if there are other stresses, they are weakened. All in all, it was disappointing to have the chick die, as last year's young also did not live past two weeks. After they lost the chick, our crane pair spent a few days off by themselves, and were seen doing a few courtship dances, so we had a brief hope that they would make an attempt to start another nest. Towards the end of May, though, a flock of 5 additional cranes visited for a couple of weeks, and our pair seemed to be distracted by these birds and no

further nesting activity was observed.

Apart from the hosting of visitors and ensuring the well-being of our birds, there were many small repairs and clean-up projects this spring. A few of the aging benches have now been replaced, and a team of volunteers from the KPMG accounting firm came out to help clean up the picnic area and tower. There are a few new signs around the parking lot and just recently, roadway gates were replaced.

Every year, we also look for specific problem plant species and either remove them, reduce the hazards to visitors or reduce their capacity to spread. Giant Hogweed is removed whenever we find it. This plant produces chemicals that make human skin very photosensitive, and can cause rashes and blistering. Its cousin, the native Cow Parsnip, is much smaller but can cause the same kind of photo reaction to a lesser degree. To be on the safe side, we tend to remove or trim it if it is hanging over trails or growing where people will be brushing up against it. We also remove some infestations of two non-native wetland species that produce abundant seeds and tend to colonize any vacant muddy areas. Yellow flag iris produces large seed pods full of brownish corn kernel-shaped seeds that float and colonize new areas. As the plant itself is very bulky and difficult to remove without undue disruption in spring nesting season, we try to at least remove seed pods. Similarly, Purple Loosestrife can produce thousands of tiny seeds to disperse everywhere, so we try to clip off trailside blooms.

Visitors may also notice that we have planted some more native shrubs in the inner trails of the northeast corner. They are a mix of species that have survived well in other parts of the Sanctuary, and our intent is to create a little more diversity of cover and food.

Last but not least, we have had many reports of wildlife other than birds this season, the summary on the next page provides a bit of a review. Enjoy the rest of the summer and early fall!

Text: Kathleen Fry, R. P. Bio
Sanctuary Manager

Wildlife Reports

Summertime in the Sanctuary is a time to see lots of wildlife other than birds. The following are just some of the wildlife observations noted April to June.

River Otter

A large otter was seen April 1st loping across West Field from the seaward dyke. In early April, they were seen from the Ewen Slough blind, and crossing the trail over by the inlet control at South-west Marsh.

Beaver

Beaver are rarely active during visitor hours. These past two months, though, they have sometimes been spotted cruising across Fuller Slough (May 25th), or waddling across the road at the culvert by the washroom first thing in the morning. One was found dead April 16th in the center trails.

Eastern Grey Squirrel (some light humour)

These come in both black and grey and are common along the trail. On May 28th though, the phrase “Bad Squirrel” was being expressed by the entrance as various crimes were discovered. One had tried to chew its way into the wooden box of seed by the Gift Shop, another one had chewed big holes in all the apple juice packs in the recycling boxes, and THEN one stole Dave’s lunch from the workshop!

Mink

Mink are small cat-sized members of the weasel family and have dark blackish-brown shiny fur. They are a common predator here, seen swimming, climbing trees and investigating duck nest boxes or loping out in the open along our trails. They catch many snakes and small rodents, and at this time of the year, we get many reports of them killing and taking away ducks and geese. On May 27th and early June, though, there were some interesting views of mink carrying their half-grown young (much like cats carry their kittens) along East dyke and over by the tower. Presumably they were relocating to new homes (underground burrows), but we don’t really know why. In early July again they have been seen every day, sometimes with half-grown young or older young seeming to hunt together.

Coyote

Coyotes are generally secretive and are rarely seen along our trails during the daytime, but there have been several sightings since the beginning of July. As with all animals with teeth, please do not approach them and let them go their own way, but report any sightings to the Sanctuary Office.



Coyote

Photo: Alan Moat

Muskrat

On June 8th, a Muskrat was seen foraging along Fuller Slough, and throughout June they were seen frequently in the ponds near the trail just to the south of the portable toilet.

Raccoons

From about June 9th onwards, there have been several sightings of Raccoon families climbing down from the cherry trees near the entrance, and there are many scats along the driveway full of cherry pits that are probably due to raccoons.

Red-eared Slider Turtles

Most turtles seen loafing on logs from March onwards are the Red-Eared Slider, with as many as 11 seen April 1st on logs in Fuller Slough. Three sliders were observed digging nest holes and laying eggs (May 14th, May 25th, and June 21st) and another specimen was doing a tour of the parking lot for unknown reasons June 22nd.

Painted Turtles

The native Painted Turtle has a flatter shell profile, is lacking the red “ear stripe” of the Slider, and has an underside that is quite colourful. There have been two sightings this spring (April 26th and July 1st), both in Fuller Slough.

Text: Kathleen Fry, R. P. Bio
Sanctuary Manager

Bird Highlights

April, May and June 2013 bird sightings were compiled from reports from visitors, members and volunteers. We thank you all for your contributions towards the weekly species lists. We invite visitors to record their sightings in our “Bird Sightings Log book” which is located on the side deck of the Gift Shop. If you would like to check what has been reported recently please refer to the “Weekly Bird List” on the front window of the Gift Shop. More unusual sightings for the week are underlined in red.



Brown-headed Cowbird

Photo: Kathleen Fry

The total count for species reported in April was 97. The numerous waterfowl at the feeding area by Robertson Slough have now moved out as they have return to nesting areas elsewhere. You can expect them back by the end of September. April is the time to see the northward migration of shorebirds as they head to their nesting grounds. An increase in the variety of Warblers is also obvious. The Snow Geese have left by the third week of April heading to Wrangel Island, Russia. April is when nesting is prevalent at the Sanctuary, with mention of 35 to 40 nesting species in past editions of Marshnotes.

March 31 – April 6

On April 4th the first spring Barn Swallow was seen at the Sanctuary. April 5th we had our first report of a Brown-headed Cowbird at a feeder near Fuller Slough. The females don't have much in the way of distinctive coloration. They are an overall drab brown. The males have the dull brown head but have a dark glossy body and have an almost watery sounding call. An interesting fact about the Brown-headed Cowbird is that the female lays her eggs in other birds' nests and let them raise her young. April 5th our first American Goldfinch was spotted. The single White-throated Sparrow and small numbers of Red Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks are still in our area. April 6th a Hermit Thrush was seen.

April 7 – April 13

The last sighting at the Sanctuary of the Black-crowned Night-Herons was April 3rd. On April 7th at the southwest corner of the Sanctuary a female Mountain Bluebird was seen on the Sunday morning bird walk. This is a rare sighting at the Sanctuary. The last record of a Mountain Bluebird was back in April 2004. The first Warblers to return in the spring are the Yellow-rumped Warbler and now this week the Common Yellowthroat. April 12th a male Merlin was perched in a tree at the Sanctuary front gate. Other highlights were 1 male Eurasian Wigeon, 8 Ring-necked Ducks, 2 male and 1 female Canvasback, 19 Greater Yellowlegs and 1 Northern Rough-winged Swallow. There were 78 species this week and the Sandhill Cranes began incubating an egg.

April 14 – April 20

The first spring return record at the Sanctuary of a Cedar Waxwing was on April 14th. On the 15th we saw the last small flock of 5 Trumpeter Swans flying northward over the Sanctuary. Offshore we are now seeing large numbers of Dunlin and Black-bellied Plovers. The last sighting of the popular Northern Saw Whet Owl was mid April. We won't be seeing them back in our area until October.

April 21 – April 27

The first goslings that we noticed at the Sanctuary were found on April 22nd. We had a few first spring sightings for this year of Caspian Tern, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Cliff Swallow and Wilson's Warbler all in this week.

May at the Sanctuary is a good time to view ducklings and goslings and young families of Chickadees, Robins, Wood Ducks and Marsh Wrens. Barn Swallows are now constructing their nests made of mud and grass under overhangs of buildings. At this time you will notice the numbers and varieties of waterfowl have dropped even further as most nest elsewhere. Species count for this month totaled 108.

April 28 – May 4

A single Turkey Vulture was spotted on the 28th. At this time of year the Turkey Vultures should have nest sites usually built in cliffs with protected crevices and caves. They breed in 2 distinct areas; Okanagan Valley and from Quadra Island south along islands and shores of Strait of Georgia. It is interesting to know that not many birds of prey use their sense of smell to locate prey but the Turkey Vulture does. It is attracted to the smell of *mercaptan*, which is a gas produced from the beginnings of decay.

April 30th was the first spring report of a Hammonds Flycatcher. May 1st the first hatch of 8 Wood Ducks were noticed. May 2nd the first Blue-winged Teal was sighted on the Southwest Marsh. These ducks have one of the longer migrations for waterfowl. They winter as far as the Caribbean south to Peru and into northeast Brazil. Now they are heading to the northern prairies and central North America to breed. Eighty species were recorded this month and a few other highlights for the week were Yellow-headed Blackbird, Hermit Thrush, Varied Thrush and House Wren.

May 5 – May 11

May is a good month to spot a variety of shorebirds. They will be stopping by on their migration from South America where most have wintered and now continuing to Alaska and the Arctic where they will nest. May 5th the first Wilson's Phalaropes showed up. In this week 10 different sandpiper species were seen. May 6th had the first spring sighting of a Pacific-slope Flycatcher. The Rufous Hummingbirds are very busy at the 5 feeders we have for them. Occasionally a young male Anna's Hummingbird is spotted as well. May 11th a White-throated Sparrow was seen again. Other unusual sightings for this week were of an injured Snow Goose who didn't make the migration, a late sighting of a Dark-eyed Junco who has normally left by May 1st and on May 5th a Black-throated Gray Warbler was seen.

May 12 – May 18

At the Sanctuary we are now down to one or two birds of each of American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, and

Northern Pintail. As of May 15th a single American Coot still remains. By the 1st of May the Coots have left our area to head to lakes in the interior of BC to raise their young. A single Spotted Sandpiper was seen on the 13th. In previous years we have had them nest here but nothing found this year. Flycatchers, warblers and shorebirds are still present.

May 19 – May 25

On the 19th an Osprey was seen flying up Robertson Slough. On May 22nd, 25 to 30 Pectoral Sandpipers were seen feeding in the West Field, 4 Black Swifts flew over the driveway and 1 male Bullock's Oriole was seen along the outer grassy dyke behind the tower. On May 25th both Semipalmated Plover and Semipalmated Sandpiper were found. Semipalmated means having toes joined part way with a web. Purple Martin, American Bittern, Greater White-fronted Geese and Black-headed Grosbeaks were some of the other highlights from the weekly list.



Bullock's Oriole (male)

Photo: Alan Moat

May 26 – June 1

Species count for this week has dropped to 67. The Bullock's Oriole is still being reported from the Northwest dyke out behind the tower. One of our members reported seeing a female with nesting material in her beak heading into a small dense bush on the inside of the dyke out behind the tower. Their

nests are much like that of a bushtit, and use woven plant material lined with feathers and fine grass. Bullock's Orioles are uncommon at the sanctuary and not seen every year. Our checklist has this bird as a previous nester at the Sanctuary but when I went back in records for 19 years I couldn't locate a past record.

June is definitely one of the quieter months at the Sanctuary. Songbirds are busy tending to their young families. Some birds such as House Finch, Black-capped Chickadee, Bushtit, Downy Woodpecker, European Starling and American Robin could be starting their second family. Total number of species observed for June was 84.

June 2- June 8

A single Spotted Sandpiper was found on the 2nd. June 5th 2 Great Horned Owlets and 1 adult bird were seen perching on a branch of a tree on the left bank of Fuller Slough. Another single sighting of a Dark-eyed Junco was seen scratching for seed along the east dyke. It could be the same bird from back on May 5th. Five species of Swallows were found this week. The famed swallow of Capistrano, the Cliff Swallow, was spotted this week. Recognized by its whitish forehead, square tipped tail, pale belly and breast with a buff colored rump.

June 9 – June 15

This month you will probable notice the amount of discarded geese and duck feathers along trails. All adult birds molt their feathers at least once a year. Flight feathers do get old and roughed up so birds will shed these in order to grow new stronger feathers which they will need to have in time for their migration in the fall. Growing in new feathers takes quite a bit of energy away from the bird so many birds molt after breeding which is a less stressful time for them. When male ducks go through a molt their appearance is not the same as when you see them at their peak in the spring. They are now in "eclipse plumage"; the dull mottled plumage briefly worn by males of most waterfowl. This week we found the first Gadwall brood which only had one. Other special birds found this week were Western Wood Pewee, Eastern Kingbird, Barn Owl, Turkey Vulture and Wilson's Phalarope.

June 16 – Jun 22

Our second hatch of Gadwall was found this week with nine young. Gadwalls tend to be later nesters than the Mallards. Gadwall numbers have been extremely high this week. Our regular bird survey recorded approximately 200 Gadwall resting in the Southwest Marsh first thing in the morning on the

22nd. Quite a few Cedar Waxwings are now found throughout the Sanctuary especially feeding at the cherry trees along with other birds. The Eastern Kingbird was seen again on June 19th. The 2 juvenile Great Horned Owls and one adult bird are now being seen practically every day throughout the trails. Listen for Crows or Robins scolding or mobbing a tree. They could be on to where the owls are perched.

June 23 – June 29

On the tall dead tree behind the Gift Shop, which we refer to as the Peregrine perch, an Osprey was seen on June 27th. Our weekly list is now down to 64 species and will remain low as we move into July which is the quietest month at the Sanctuary for species variety.

References

Terence Lindsey and R.G. Turner Jr., 2011

The Practical Birdwatcher's Handbook

Reader's Digest, 1990

Book of North American Birds

Roger Tory Peterson, 1987

Western Birds

P. R. Ehrlich, D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye, 1988

The Birder's Handbook: a Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds

Text: Varri Raffan,
Gift Shop Manager

Varri's "Match the Birdie"

These clues hint at the names of different birds.

How many can you name?

(Example: A delicious cookie = Oriole)

(answers on page 11)

1. A Sticky Roll of Paper
2. A Holiday Feast
3. Turned in Toes
4. Thieving
5. His Emminence
6. Peace
7. Down the Hatch
8. Sad on a Monday Morning
9. Sarcastic
10. Nine Lives
11. Marathoner
12. How Silly Can You Get?
13. Beach Musician
14. A Timber Sculptor
15. Rolled in a Las Vegas Game

Why be a Member?

As a Member, you receive the following benefits:

FREE admission to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary 365 days a year.

Quarterly issue of the BCWS publication "Marshnotes".

A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop.

Membership in one of British Columbia's most respected conservation organizations.

With your support the British Columbia Waterfowl Society is able to:

Staff, maintain and expand facilities at the Sanctuary for the benefit of its visitors and members; provide interpretive and education programs, including guided tours for organized groups of all ages; contribute towards important scientific research on waterfowl to determine their life cycle needs for survival; and provide support for like-minded organizations who are working on waterfowl-related projects.

Enclosed is my cheque or VISA/Mastercard number for:

SINGLE Membership: **\$25**

FAMILY Membership: **\$50**

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Submissions Invited for the 2014 Calendar

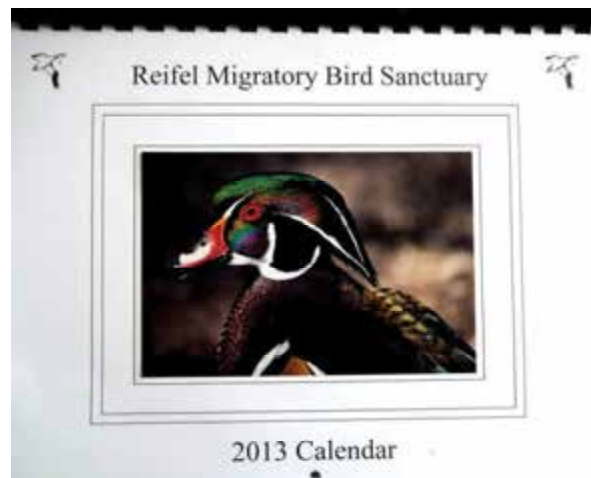
2014 will be the 11th year the British Columbia Waterfowl Society has produced a Sanctuary calendar with images submitted by our membership. Once again we ask for submission of Sanctuary photos for consideration for the 2014 calendar.

Please leave your images at the Gift Shop. We ask for only up to five of your favourite images, submitted as either 4 x 6 or 5 x 7 photos or a jpeg disc along with your name and contact information.

Each year the calendars popularity grows and we now sell approximately 150 calendars between September and year end.

We look forward to your photos and thank you for your submissions.

Deadline: August 15, 2013



The Volunteer Corner

Special Thanks To:

- ◆ Our regular Sunday birding team of Mary Taitt and Brian Self, as well as Jim Martin, and Karl Pollak for helping host visitors on busy weekends and keeping track of the Sandhill Cranes during nesting season.
- ◆ Bill Topping for helping in the Museum Sunday mornings all summer.
- ◆ Eric Rossici, Eileen Axford, and Justin Malkonin, for bagging seed and filling bird feeders.
- ◆ Our spring newsletter mailout team of Jim and Jean Marsh, Eric Rossici, Eileen Axford, Laura Jordison, new volunteer Jean Gartner, and Jim Martin.
- ◆ Bob Harris and Betty Husband for providing extra copies of old archives during the preparation of the 50th year review in the Spring 2013 Marshnotes.
- ◆ Su Langlois and Vera Maceluch for helping with the regular Sanctuary bird surveys all this year, as well as Mary Taitt.
- ◆ The volunteers from KPMG who came out June 11th to help clean up of the picnic area and tower.
- ◆ As always, the team of Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick for the beautiful flower gardens around the Museum and washrooms.
- ◆ New volunteers Tom Benmore, Murray Clark, Chris Martin and Bruce Reid for helping with blackberry pruning and painting work parties.

Volunteers Wanted For:

- ◆ Regular Sanctuary Bird Counts, held first thing every other Saturday morning. There is room for just a few more keen birders willing to start at 8 am and take on a trail section. Contact Kathleen (direct line 604 946-6985) to discuss.
- ◆ Hosting visitors along trails on busy weekends or helping with upcoming events. If you enjoy talking to people and sharing your knowledge about birds and the Sanctuary, the upcoming late summer and fall season brings lots of family groups and new visitors who have lots of questions and appreciate the assistance.

All interested volunteers, please leave your name and contact information at the Office.

Thanks very much, everyone!



KPMG volunteers helping on clean-up projects.



Answers to the Bird Quiz Page 9

1. Flycatcher
2. Turkey
3. Pigeon
4. Robin
5. Cardinal
6. Dove
7. Swallow
8. Bluebird
9. Mockingbird
10. Catbird
11. Roadrunner
12. Cuckoo
13. Sandpiper
14. Woodpecker
15. Bird of Paradise

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