

Marshnotes®



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
WINTER 2014**

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

April 15th, 2014

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Sanctuary Manager: Kathleen Fry
Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan
Reception: Laura Jordison
Biologist: Scott Walmsley
Maintenance: David McClue

Hours of Operation: 9:00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. every day. The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible.

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

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Top Birds of the Sanctuary in the Year 2013

Monthly highlights:

**2013 Bird of the Year:
Mountain Bluebird**

**Total Species Observed In
The Sanctuary in 2013:
170**

Text: Varri Raffan,
Gift Shop Manager

January Common Redpoll	February Snowy Owl	March White-throated Sparrow	April Mountain Bluebird
May Red Crossbill	June Fox Sparrow	July Green Heron	August Sora
September Northern Waterthrush	October Chestnut-backed Chickadee	November American Tree Sparrow	December Red-naped Sapsucker

About Our Covers:

Front Cover: Snow Goose On The Wing
© Jim Martin

Back Cover: Wood Ducks, Snow and Ice
© Ken Young

A Note From The Editor:

The most useful photos to submit for Marshnotes are those featuring something in the three months covered by that edition. Photos of January, February and March scenes and birds, for example, would be useful in this next edition. To avoid overloading my email, the best procedure would be to send thumbnails or reduced images or links to posted images. I will then contact you for higher resolution images. See page 2 for my email and upcoming deadlines.

Kathleen Fry

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Manager's Report

Happy New Year, everyone!

The year 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of the Sanctuary and was a very busy year, with over 77,000 visitors, up 10% over last year. Although some of this increase in visitors can be attributed to beautiful clear weather in March, the last three months of 2013 also had a total of 19,800 people, with many days of packed parking lots and trails full of people.

With all these extra crowds, of course we have needed to address a few things. New signs along Robertson Road were installed in cooperation with Environment Canada to more clearly identify the Sanctuary driveway entrance for lost drivers going into the Alaksen National Wildlife Area by mistake. Note that the Sanctuary driveway itself is too narrow to allow parking on both sides of the road, and there are some new NO PARKING signs up to clarify this.

October was our busiest month of the season, with lots of birds for visitors to enjoy. By early October, we start to see the arrival of thousands of Mallards, Northern Pintail and American Wigeon, and sometimes Cackling Geese, and White-fronted Geese along with the usual large flocks of Canada Geese and our Sanctuary logo, the Lesser Snow Goose.

It can be very interesting to follow through with any research bands or neck collars you might observe on birds in the big fall migratory flocks. In the summer, for example, our population of Mallards is at a low of only 500 birds, and it swells to over 15,000 birds in the fall. Band returns help identify where all those other birds were for the rest of the year. One of our regular visitors, Ian McGregor, reports any research bands and collars he sees to the North American Bird-banding Office. The BBO sends back information about the birds reported, and Ian has been kind enough to share results with us. From this, we know that two neck-collared Cackling Geese seen this fall from East Dyke were banded near the towns of Scappoose, Oregon and Newtok, Alaska. The Sanctuary is obviously along the migration route between their wintering and breeding areas. Many of the Mallard bands reported show links to Alaska and nesting areas near Brooks, Alberta.

The fall gatherings of Sandhill Cranes is also of considerable interest. Their numbers increased throughout September and by October 5th, we had 43

cranes roosting daily near the tower, including four pairs with a total of 5 young, our resident pair, the four subadults which have been present here all summer, and a mix of other adults and subadults. One Sandhill Crane that visits every fall has worn a colour band, battery pack and satellite transmitter since 2009 and winters in Sacramento. We use the presence or absence of "SAT Bird" as we call her, to mark the departure of the flocks heading south, and this fall she was last seen October 21st and numbers quickly dropped down to our usual clan of ten wintering cranes after that date.

On October 25th, another crane was dropped off by the Wildlife Rescue Association in an unsuccessful attempt to let it catch up with the migrant flocks. It is still here and is noticeably darker, and is originally from the South Okanagan. The other 10 cranes have not yet totally accepted this bird into their flock.

The Lesser Snow Geese arriving here in the fall migrate 5,000 km from nesting grounds on Wrangel Island, Russia, and seek out carbohydrate-rich foods such as roots, and rhizomes of marsh plants, or remnant farm crops and grasses as soon as they arrive here. When they feed in thousands in farm fields around the Sanctuary, they put on quite a show for visitors. This year was no exception. Two large fields of potatoes were left mostly unharvested until well into October in the adjacent Alaksen NWA. The Snow Geese discovered this unharvested treasure very quickly upon their arrival in Delta, and they spent most of October in full view of visitors, digging up potatoes in the field by the picnic tables, then in fields viewable from East Dyke. For weeks, we listened to the endless hum of geese digging up potatoes, the sudden hush as a Bald Eagle went over the fields, and the din of thousands of geese lifting off and swirling around, dropping small bombs (faeces) all over the picnic tables. We were surprised one day, though, to see a harvester out in one of the fields giving one last try for the same potatoes so prized by the geese.

In November and December, the geese were more dispersed in Delta and Richmond. In Richmond and at the Vancouver International Airport, the Snow Geese are not welcome. Last year, the media covered Richmond's attempts to scare geese off school playing fields and parks using teams of volunteers and their dogs. This fall, there has been some interesting recent coverage of the immature Bald Eagle named Hercules, who has been trained by airport staff to specifically remove Snow Geese from where they pose hazards to airplanes. Anyone who has watched a Bald Eagle fly over Snow Geese around the Sanctuary will likely think, as I do, that the YVR Airport

Authority may be on to a good natural deterrent.

There are several thousand Snow Geese still present in the Delta area, but the majority of the 70,000 or so birds are just south of the Canada/ USA border in January and February and will return to spend March and April here before migrating north to the Arctic.

This a good time of year to watch the diving ducks. Although it is winter it seems to be a period of courtship and pair bonding for many of these birds. If you did not happen to observe male Hooded Mergansers showing off for females by pumping up their heads, popping up and down and making growly noises, you can see a few videos of them plus some of Snow Geese digging up potatoes on our website page at www.reifelbirdsantuary.com/videos.

Greater and Lesser Scaups are both here now, but can be difficult to distinguish and it is even harder if they are females and posed like in the photo below. I have identified this bird as a Greater Scaup because of the low rounded profile of the head, the wider bill, the kind of “jowly” affect, and the eye location higher on the head than it would be on a Lesser Scaup. The white face patch is large, but that is not always a clear ID indicator.

In fall and winter months, the Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons and Cooper’s Hawks all seem to take turns using the dead snags around House Pond as perches, then cruising around lifting up birds everywhere. Black-crowned Night-Herons were a bit late arriving this fall but are now regularly roosting in the gully

opposite the Warming Hut, and we are on a daily lookout for owls. In early December, we had as many as 3 Northern Saw-whet Owls present in one day here, but we could not find a single one for the Ladner Christmas bird count. As of late December, a pair of Great Horned Owls has been regularly roosting together in trees along East Dyke, possibly making plans for nesting in early January.

The cold spell in December froze 95% of our ponds, and 100% of our visitors, making the Warming Hut a very popular spot. The cold weather made for some spectacular photos of ducks, glassy surfaces and frost. The very wet heavy snowfall that followed it just before Christmas, though, caused power outages and the loss of many large branches off of our Douglas Fir trees.

It seemed like we spent most of the last part of 2013 trying to catch up with the beavers as they chewed a path of destruction down the driveway, along the inner trails and over to the Auger Cairn area, setting up a new lodge there and storing a pile of trees and branches in the nearby waterway.

Early spring maintenance will include making sure any broken limb hazards are reduced, trails are tidied up after the rainy season and all of the visitor viewing areas and nest boxes are in good working order.

Happy birding in 2014, and don’t forget to mark your calendar for the AGM in April (see page 7).



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

Greater Scaup

Photo: Ken Young

Ladner Christmas Bird Count 2013

The Ladner BC/Washington Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday December 22, with 140 species seen on count day. Highlights included Pacific Golden Plover, Red-naped Sapsucker, Mountain Bluebird, Harris' Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow. These are species that are rare and not seen every year. The 140 species seen will make the Ladner CBC the # 2 Count in BC and in Canada, while Victoria, which registered 144 species on their Count on December 14th will be the #1 count. In 2012, Ladner was #1 and Victoria was #2 in Canada.

The Ladner CBC recorded a 6 owl species day (Barn Owl, Great Horned Owl, Snowy Owl, Barred Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl), with the Northern Saw-whet Owl seen within count period. The Point Roberts Team did an excellent job of recording the Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, Marbled Murrelets and Ancient Murrelets, which are sometimes hard to get on count day. The count also recorded high numbers (53) of wintering Anna's Hummingbirds again this year. If anyone would like a copy of the final tally of species, by area, please contact me.

The Westham Island Team, which covers the George Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, the Alaksen National Wildlife Area and the rest of the island did a great job of recording birds with a total 89 species. Thanks are due to Mary Taitt, Area F Team Leader, for coordinating the 19 birders in the field.

Other interesting records for the day included lower numbers of Bald Eagles. A total of 888 were seen on

count day whereas last year the total was 1311 Bald Eagles. Weather may have been responsible for the lower numbers seen. At the Vancouver Landfill, the team recorded 605 Bald Eagles and over 37,079 Glaucous-winged Gulls, plus one rare Glaucous Gull.

The weather was cloudy and foggy with a few showers, and despite the snow-covered ground, the count was quite successful. Some birders reported that counting white swans or snow geese standing in a snowy field surrounded by fog did make counting birds somewhat more difficult. A total of 100 birders participated out in the field and monitoring backyard feeders and everyone had a great day of birding.

There was great coverage again this year from the Delta Optimist (thanks to Sandor Gyarmati) both before and after the count, and the Richmond News which promoted the count on north side of the Fraser River. The Vancouver Sun also ran a post-count story by Larry Pynn, although the article was written before some of the count details had been submitted by a couple of areas.

Special thanks to the BC Waterfowl Society for use of the lecture hall for the post count tally and dinner, and for the assistance of Kathleen and Varri with logistics. A donation was made from the Ladner CBC to the BCWS for use of the building.

Text: Jude Grass
Ladner BC/Washington CBC Coordinator
judegrass@shaw.ca



Long-eared Owl

Photo: Scott Walmsley

Editor's note:

A Long-eared Owl was seen in the Alaksen National Wildlife Area (next door to the Sanctuary) on count day. This species has also been seen in the Sanctuary briefly early in January 2014 and is a good bird to start our species list for the new year!

Kathleen Fry

Notice to all Members

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

The Bylaws of the Society provide for the election of six (6) Directors by the Society membership in addition to the appointment of six (6) Directors from Stakeholder groups. The six elected Directors each serve a two year term, with three to be elected at each Annual General Meeting.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

will be held at

7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 16th, 2014

in the Lecture Hall at

The George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary

5191 Robertson Road, Ladner British Columbia

The Board of Directors would like to take this opportunity to advise the membership that three incumbent Directors

F. Wayne Diakow
James M. Morrison
Gerald S. Oyen

will be seeking re-election for a further term.

If you wish to nominate a candidate for election as a Director at the Annual General Meeting, please complete the nomination form which, in addition to the candidate's written consent, must include a written nomination by two Society members in good standing.

Nomination forms are available at the Sanctuary.
No member may nominate more than one candidate in any one year.
A family membership constitutes one vote at the meeting.

Please deliver the completed nomination form, by mail, fax or in person by

4:00 p.m. Sunday, March 16th, 2014

to

The Secretary, British Columbia Waterfowl Society,
5191 Robertson Road, Delta,
British Columbia V4K 3N2

Fax: 604 946 6982

If there are any further nominations received by the deadline, a list of all candidates will be posted at the Sanctuary.

Bird Highlights

October, November and December bird sightings were compiled from reports from visitors, members and volunteers. We thank you all for your contributions. There is a small correction for the Summer 2013 edition of Marshnotes. The species count for September 2013 was 114, not 144. Oops!

With the arrival of Lesser Snow Geese and other fall migrants in October, our species list for the month ended with 99 which is 4 more than last October.

September 29 – October 5

The last sighting of a Hammond's Flycatcher at the Sanctuary was on September 29th. These Flycatchers head south to spend their winter in the warmer weather of Northern Mexico, Nicaragua and Honduras. On October 1st two Band-tailed Pigeons were reported. On the 4th a flock of 22 Greater White-fronted Geese were spotted feeding with a flock of Canada Geese in the potato fields off the East Dyke. October 5th there were 43 Sandhill Cranes.

October 6 – October 12

A Black-crowned Night-Heron was finally seen on the 6th, perched in the trees that overhang the west bank of Fuller Slough. Normally this species starts returning to the Sanctuary in September for the winter. Over 100 Killdeer were observed. On the 9th over 200 Cackling Geese were seen feeding in the potato fields alongside the Greater White-fronted Geese and Canada Geese. This flock of Cackling Geese hung around for the whole week. The Cackling Goose became a separate species from the Canada Goose in 2004. On the 11th a Pileated Woodpecker was spotted as it flew over the Sanctuary. A total of 74 species was seen this week.

October 13 – October 19

This week we had a late visit from a Pectoral Sandpiper on its way to South America for the winter and had the first fall sighting at the Sanctuary of 3 Greater Scaup. On the 19th a Barred Owl was spotted in the northeast corner of the Sanctuary. The other good spot to see them is along the Center Dyke from the wooden viewing platform to the tower, especially near the bird blind that looks into West Field.

October 20 – October 26

A single Chestnut-backed Chickadee was seen at the north end of the east dyke. The Chestnut-backed Chickadee is not often seen at the Sanctuary but on the Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island you can find



Western Meadowlark

Photo: Jim Martin

them easier than you can find the Black-capped Chickadees. The last report of this species at the Sanctuary was November 2005. Two Western Meadowlarks were seen along the seaward dyke on the 23rd. Western Meadowlarks will likely be with us until approximately the end of December.

October 27 – November 2

The following birds were a few of the notables from this week of 73 species: American Bittern, Rough-legged Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, American Pipit, Northern Shrike and White-throated Sparrow.

A total of 98 species were seen in November. This is a good month to see Lesser Snow Geese, Trumpeter Swans and various birds of prey that are in our area for the winter.

November 3 – November 9

This week we spotted the first 7 Trumpeter Swans which are now returning from Alaska, Northern British Columbia and Yukon to spend the winter with us in the Fraser Delta and up the Fraser Valley and on Vancouver Island. They will be in our area until about the middle of March. You can spot them feeding mainly in potato fields. The Pileated Woodpecker is still being seen this week. We have never really seen a lot of them at the Sanctuary in past years, but in the last 3 years one or two birds have been with us in the late fall and over winter. Other highlights for this week include 3 Northern Shrike and an American Tree Sparrow, both observed along the outer seaward

dyke. Along the same seaward dyke but closer to the tower a Swamp Sparrow was observed long enough to get a photo. These birds are very elusive as they spend most of their time in tall cattails and grasses of the marsh.



Swamp Sparrow

Photo: John Gordon

November 10 – November 16

The American Tree Sparrow is still being seen along the outer dyke. These sparrows are not seen every year at the Sanctuary as they prefer to winter in central and southern United States. They have a rusty cap and a distinctive dark spot on the chest. I am not sure why they have “Tree” in their name as they apparently like low thickets and hedges and even build their nests on mossy hummocks or tufts of grass.

American Tree Sparrow

Photo: Jim Martin



On the 16th a male Canvasback and a male Eurasian Wigeon were both spotted on the house pond. We

now have 2 adult Black-crowned Night-Herons in their usual winter roost. Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker and Northern Flickers are all being seen regularly along East Dyke. The total number of species seen this week was 76.

November 17 – November 23

The first fall report of a Common Merganser and Northern Goshawk were both in this week. Out on the foreshore, a Red-throated Loon and Surf Scoter were spotted from the tower. A flock of 11 Western Meadowlarks were seen again this week. On the 17th the 3rd Black-crowned Night-Heron showed up and then on the 23rd the 4th one turned up. Three Northern Saw-Whet Owls were reported mostly along East Dyke. There have been hundreds of American Robins throughout the Sanctuary and surrounding areas. Some of these Robins could have migrated into our area from the cooler interior. In the winter they rely heavily on the fruits of Holly, Hawthorne, and Pacific Crab Apple. We have the American Robin here all year.

November 24 – November 30

November 24th a Wilson’s Warbler was spotted at what one of our members refer to the “Owl Corner” (where East Dyke and North Dyke meet). Freezing temperatures this week kept me busy switching out frozen hummingbird feeders with fresh ones for the Anna’s Hummingbirds at the house front window. As soon as I put out the fresh one there were 3 females and 1 male immediately on it. With a lot of the ponds and sloughs frozen the waterfowl moved out to open water. Under the Warming Hut the water was still open and became a very popular spot for a variety of waterfowl, Great Blue Herons and the Belted Kingfisher. The Chestnut-backed Chickadee was seen again this week. Following are a list of other birds of note for this week: American Bittern, Northern Goshawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Wilson’s Snipe, American Pipit, Brewer’s Blackbird, Lincoln’s Sparrow and Greater Yellowlegs.

December ended with a total of 88 species and is one of the best months to view a variety of birds of prey.

December 8 – December 15

On the 8th a Hairy Woodpecker, 2 Great Horned Owls and a Pileated Woodpecker were all observed along the East Dyke. On the 11th a Belted Kingfisher was perched on the corner of the Warming Hut roof and fishing down below it, as this area was one of the only open water ways at the Sanctuary. Both the female and male Eurasian Wigeon were found among hundreds of other waterfowl feeding in the potato

field off the East Dyke. If you take some time to scan the flock you will come up with a few different species. It is hard to find Cedar Waxwings at this time of year but 4 were spotted this week. Usually at this time of year you could find the larger Bohemian Waxwing mixed in with them.

December 16th - December 21

The list of species for this week ended at 64, down by 9 from last week. A few species would have moved out due to the frozen ponds and 9 inches of snow that fell over the 20th and 21st. The single Chestnut-backed Chickadee was seen again this week. Highlights for this week include 5 Black-crowned Night-Herons, a Red-breasted Merganser and a Red-naped Sapsucker, an unusual record for the Sanctuary but it is listed on our checklist. I went back into 17 years of records and couldn't find a sighting report for this sapsucker, so the last sighting must have been in the Sanctuary's early years.



Red-naped Sapsucker Photo: Scott Walmsley

December 22 – December 28

Seven species of sparrows were observed this week, one of them being the Lincoln's Sparrow, an uncommon sparrow at the Sanctuary. Every year we get a handful of these secretive sparrows. They have rusty crown stripes, narrow white eye rings, whitish under parts with buff colored band across chest marked with fine streaks. Some of the other highlights for this week were the Rough-legged Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker and Northern Shrike.

Text: Varri Raffan
Gift Shop Manager

Remember the Rules

Those who are long-term members can skip this next part. We had new members sign up over the holidays, so I felt it would be timely to review some rules and a few points of concern at this time of year.

Stay On The Trails and Leave Things Alone.

Visitor rules are designed so that some basic needs of the birds are always met. We have some days when over 900 visitors are present, so the birds need space to escape from people into habitats that are not all trampled. Please stay on our well-defined paths of gravel or mowed grass and leave off-trail areas alone. Even a minor step or two off trail results in either vegetation damage or people too close to nesting, roosting or otherwise off-limits birds such as owls.

No Feeding Bread. Our bags of duck food contain whole wheat seeds and a few smaller seeds and cracked corn. Visitors can bring their own supply of this kind of thing, but not the following items: Bread or any other processed foods with yeast, sugar, salt or additives; Sesame seeds, rice, or rolled oats or any bird "formula" mixes which might have chemical additives.

No Chasing, Catching, Petting, or Otherwise Damaging the Birds. Every winter when the Mallards are friendly and abundant, dozens of foot and wing injuries result from misadventures with visitors. The Sandhill Cranes are also big birds with sharp beaks and should be treated with respect and given lots of space. No touching or grabbing!

No Dogs. People are not allowed to bring domestic or exotic animals into a migratory bird sanctuary, so it doesn't matter if a dog is in a carrying bag, it still needs to be left in the car. The "no dogs" rule also applies to cats, exotic pets, or even a budgie in a cage.

No Bikes. The place is designed to provide for peaceful pedestrian walking trails for everyone. Sometimes parents ask whether small toddler bikes or tricycles are allowed in lieu of a stroller, but the answer is no for those as well.

Thanks, folks.

Kathleen Fry
Sanctuary Manager

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 and new volunteer David Bruce for helping host visitors.
- ◆ Bill Topping for helping keep the Museum accessible to the public every Sunday morning.
- ◆ Justin Malkonin, Eric Rossici, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed and filling bird feeders.
- ◆ Our fall newsletter mailout team of Jim Marsh, Jean Gartner, Eileen Axford, Laura Jordison, and Jim Martin.
- ◆ Su Langlois, Vera Maceluch and Otto Reinhart for helping with the Sanctuary bird surveys.
- ◆ The team of Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick for the flower gardens around the Museum and washrooms.
- ◆ The Pets “N Us store in Ladner for donating a kennel for transporting injured birds.

- ◆ The small team of volunteer staff from the

Canucks who helped wire trees and prune vegetation for their “Live to Give” day November 7th.

- ◆ Sarah Kelly and Aryl Petrunia who donated their birthday money to the Sanctuary! Also special thanks to Chung’s Fish & Chips Restaurant for the donated proceeds of their Christmas Lights campaign.

Volunteers Wanted This Winter and Spring:

- ◆ Hosting visitors along trails on busy weekends. If you enjoy talking to people and sharing your knowledge about birds and the Sanctuary, call Kathleen (direct line 604 946-6985) or leave your name and contact information at the Sanctuary Gift Shop.

Thanks very much, everyone!

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**

LIFE Membership: **\$500**

Donation (tax deductible)

VISA Mastercard

VISA or Mastercard # _____

Expiry Date: _____

Name: (Mr. Mrs. Miss Ms.) _____

Address: _____

Postal Code _____

Please mail to **British Columbia Waterfowl Society**
5191 Robertson Road, Delta BC V4K 3N2

Telephone: 604 946 6980 Fax: 604 946 6982
Website: www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com

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