

# Marshnotes<sup>®</sup>



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY  
FALL 2010**

# BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Managers of The George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary since 1963

*~ dedicated to the study and conservation of migratory waterfowl ~*

## Marshnotes:

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Produced at Minerva House

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## DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES January 20th 2011

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Sanctuary Manager: Kathleen Fry  
Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan  
Reception: Laura Jordison  
Habitat Maintenance: Claire de la Salle  
Grounds Maintenance: Larry Kane

Hours of operation:	Sanctuary Gate:	9.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. (all year round)
	Gift Shop:	9.00 a.m. - Noon 1.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.
Admission:	Members:	Free
	Non-members:	Adults: \$5.00 Children (2-14 years) and Seniors (60+): \$2.50
School group tours:	Adults: \$2.50	Children (2-14 years) and Seniors (60+): \$1.50

The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible

School group tours by arrangement

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# About Our Covers

**Front Cover: Lesser Snow Geese on Fuller Slough**

© Jim Martin

**Back Cover: Lesser Snow Geese © Jim Martin**

Blue morph stage is clearly seen in the landing Snow Goose



**Sanctuary Calendar 2011**  
available at the Gift Shop  
**\$17.95**

#### Contributing Photographers

Carol Coleman  
Kathleen Fry  
Debra Herst  
Michelle Lamberson  
Lauren Nicholl  
Jim Martin  
Eric Rossicci  
Frank Townsley

**Front Cover Calendar 2011 Image: Cinnamon Teal © Carol Coleman**

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# Sanctuary Nest Box Program



*Above: Box 47  
Three well-feathered Tree Swallow  
young in box, June 27th 2009.*



*Right: Box 44  
Double nest, use by Black-capped  
Chickadee witnessed by mossy nest at bottom of nest box and subsequent use  
by Tree Swallow (feathered nest), June 27th, 2009.*



*Above: Box 84  
Box used by House Sparrow  
with three young in box, June 27th 2009.*

The George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary is an 850 acre site that provides critical habitat for many species of breeding birds. In order to optimize breeding opportunities a Nest Box Program has been initiated by the Sanctuary. The program components include inventory, maintenance, monitoring, construction, and science.

If you are interested in helping with this exciting citizen science program please feel free to contact the Sanctuary Gift Shop at 604 946 6980.

**Inventory** In the spring of 2010 a comprehensive inventory of bird boxes in the Sanctuary was completed. It was found that there are four Barn Owl boxes, 196 song bird boxes, and 40 Wood Duck boxes on site.

**Maintenance** Over the winter months ongoing maintenance is planned to fix boxes that are in disrepair and remove boxes that are derelict.

**Construction** Starting in winter-spring 2009, a substantial number of new boxes were constructed and installed by volunteers. About 37 small boxes with 1 ½ inch circular holes (for tree swallows and other species) were built and erected. A year later, in early 2010, nine large boxes with 4 inch by 5 inch entrance holes (for Wood Ducks) and a few additional small boxes were installed. Once the current collection of nest boxes has been maintained and labeled, monitoring data will be used to determine if more boxes are required and if so, in what location.

**Monitoring** Over the last couple of months volunteers from the Sanctuary, members of the Delta Naturalists, and summer students from the Canadian Wildlife Service have worked together to clean out nest boxes and determine species use and hatching success in both the song bird boxes and Wood Duck boxes.

**Science** Ongoing citizen science is taking place to determine what shape and size of holes in tree swallow boxes will restrict the use of non-native House Sparrows and promote use by Tree Swallows. Volunteers are networking with others to determine the optimum design of bird boxes that promote breeding success. Trials will be undertaken in 2011 of box designs that will promote Tree Swallow nesting success.

**Acknowledgements** Support for the bird box construction program was provided by volunteers who provided time and labour. Funding for materials was contributed from several sources, including Wild Birds Unlimited, Kerrisdale Lumber and Ducks Unlimited Canada who provided Wood Duck box kits. Former BCWS Director John Toochn provided used cedar in good condition from dismantled fencing.

Text: Claire de la Salle, Ken Hall and Peter Ward Images: provided by Peter Ward

# 22nd Pig and Corn Roast

*On Saturday, September 11<sup>th</sup> 2010 the Society hosted its 22nd Annual Pig and Corn Roast Dinner. Over the last 21 years we have been very lucky with the weather; in 2006 we had rain during the day but it dried up prior to dinner time and in 2003 it rained through dinner. This year, it stayed dry during the day but as dinner time approached it started to rain! As in past years we were very fortunate to have contributions from local merchants and society members towards our raffle. We thank you all for your charitable support. The following lists our team of volunteers who have all donated their time in set up, bartending, raffle tickets sales, cooking and clean up.*

**Henry Parker**

**Earl Morrison**

**Russ Bissett**

**Willy Hoell**

**Carl**

**Doug Raffan**

**Mary Taitt**

**Dick & Bonnie Anderson**

**Sperandio Family**

**Brian Self**

**Jenny Hards**

**Shurli Tylor**

**Anne Siemens**

**Irene Banack**

**Arlie Darby**

**Barbara Warrick**

**Les & Sylvia Lewchuk**

**Robbie Ross**

**Christopher Ross**

**Brandon Ross**

**Joyce Manary & Boudi VanOldenborgh**

**Debra Herst**

**Christina Struik**

**Wayne Diakow**

*Over the last 18 years, Britco Pork Inc. in Langley has very generously donated two pigs for each Pig and Corn Roast Fundraising Dinner. We are very grateful for your continuing support. We would like to extend a big thank you to the local merchants listed below who donated lovely prizes for our raffle and also to BCWS Director Wayne Diakow who acted as the Master of Ceremonies again this year.*



**Black Bond Books**  
**Britco Pork Inc., Langley**  
**Cobblestone Cottage**  
**Double R Rentals**  
**Doug Raffan**  
**Ducks Unlimited Canada**  
**Heide Young**  
**Ladner Village Hardware**  
**Massey's Marine**  
**River House Pub & Restaurant**  
**Safeway**  
**Save-On-Foods**  
**Stillwater Sports**  
**Treasure Isle Toys**  
**Upstart Crow**  
**Westham Estate Winery**



**Images  
by  
Laura  
Jordison**

# The Volunteer Corner

## *A Special Thank You to the following Volunteers*

- Delta Senior Secondary students, Shurli Tylor, new volunteer April Nugent, and Justin Malkonin who have helped keep our bird feeders and seed supply coming in recent months.
- The team of Eileen Axford and Eric Rossicci who have continued to bag seed in good humour, in spite of us mistakenly calling Eileen "Elaine Whittaker" in the last edition of Marshnotes. Many apologies and thanks again.
- David Bandiera for his hard work on trail maintenance and repairs this summer.
- Jim Martin and all other members who have kept a careful watch over the crowds around the Sandhill Cranes this summer.
- Particular thanks to Mary Taitt, Brian Self, Al Russell, and Bill Topping for helping to host visitors on busy weekends and on the Sunday Walk.
- As always, the "garden ladies" Barbara Warrick, Irene Banack, and Arlie Darby, thanks for their lovely summer flower garden displays.
- Peter Ward, Ken Hall and the volunteers from the Delta Naturalists who have been helping with the song bird nest box program.
- The Marshnotes "mail-out" team.

## *Volunteers are needed for the following*

- Hosting visitors along the trails or in the museum on weekends from October to December. You don't have to do much, just wear a volunteer vest, answer visitor questions, and report back if there are problems.
- Bagging bird seed, which people can volunteer for just an hour or sign up for a regular schedule.
- Horticulture and pruning advice for the apple trees in the house garden.
- Work parties for some periodic trimming of blackberries or shoring up shoreline edges with rock and gravel. No real expertise is required.

To volunteer for the above activities, leave your name and number at the Sanctuary office 604 946 6980 to discuss your interests.

Text: Kathleen Fry, Sanctuary Manager

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## Upcoming Sanctuary Lecture Hall Events

Sessions are free and we encourage you to drop in to learn a little more about the Sanctuary, its nearby community and its birds.

**Saturday, November 20th 2010 "An Introduction to Raptors" with Jude Grass 1 pm to 2 pm**

Jude will provide an introduction to the hawks, eagles and owls visitors might see in and around the Sanctuary.

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## Ladner Christmas Bird Count

will be held on Monday, December 27th 2010

Please contact the coordinator Jude Grass for details if you would like to participate 604 538 8774 or [judegrass@shaw.ca](mailto:judegrass@shaw.ca)

A post-Count gathering starts at 5 pm. in the Lecture Hall of the Sanctuary for the species tally and dinner (\$9 per person, payable to Jude Grass).

## Manager's Report

October has brought the arrival of large flocks of migrant waterfowl, shorebirds, cranes, falcons and lots of visitors to the Sanctuary after months of hot and dry weather. On this day (October 5th), the parking lot has been full of cars. Robertson Slough along the driveway has been full of 10,000 restless Northern Pintail, American Wigeon and Mallards.

Visitors have had prime views of the Black-Crowned Night-Herons and watched a Peregrine Falcon hunting over 1500 Dowitcher. A flock of over 25 Sandhill Cranes has been easily observed near the Viewing Tower and birders are seeking a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and an elusive flycatcher. Over 5,000 Lesser Snow Geese are in nearby marshes.

The fall brings the rain and the birds and is a welcome change after a hot and dusty summer. Visitor use is generally lower in summer compared to other seasons, and this year was no exception. Group bookings consisted mainly of summer camp groups, daycares and seniors groups, although there were also some birding tour groups originating from England and Scotland.

A rainy June netted 5,758 visitors total, and a very hot and dry July brought 6,370 people out. August totals were reduced (5,584) but would have matched July had August 31st not been the rainiest day on record with a total of only five visitors.

September also started with a poorly-attended rainy Labour Day weekend and a rainy ending to our Pig and Corn Roast fundraiser on September 11th. The relatively low overall monthly visitor total was 4,029. Gift Shop Manager Varri Raffan coordinated the Pig and Corn Roast and did an excellent job, but apparently had no power over rain clouds.

We apologize if visitors were inconvenienced by the seemingly endless parade of trucks, lumber, cement, gravel, topsoil, rock, chainsaws, and tractor activity this summer. July and August were extremely busy machinery-oriented labour-intensive months. Members who have not been out for a few months will notice that we have finished the more open waterfront viewing area where the old enclosed bird blind used to overlook Fuller Slough. We also redesigned the nearby sign display structure to provide a more open viewing of the large interpretive panels. Many thanks are due to BCWS Director Barney Reifel, the contractors (Trevi Construction), and Larry Kane for finishing these projects on time for Labour Day.

In addition to the construction projects, our team of Claire de la Salle (Habitat Management), summer student David Bandiera, Larry and myself worked to maintain trails, trim back vegetation along the seaward

dyke and along some of the inner trail network, and experiment with different native plantings.

David helped with many projects over the summer and is now back at his university studies. Ducks Unlimited Canada came out several times over the summer to investigate a malfunctioning water control structure, even bringing out a "sewer" camera, sending it up the pipe to diagnose the mystery problem on a video screen.

Former BCWS Directors Ken Hall and Peter Ward have continued a song bird nest box program with Claire and volunteers from the Delta Naturalists, and will continue this work into the fall.

The Sandhill Cranes attracted a lot of visitor interest this summer because of the growing chick ("colt"), which is now over four months old. In September, our resident pair and colt started leaving the Sanctuary regularly with other cranes to explore some very attractive nearby farm fields. This month, crane numbers have increased to 28 birds, and we predict that many of these will migrate south next month. One of these visiting birds is wearing a satellite transmitter, and was tracked last fall moving south from here to Sacramento.

It was a very pleasant surprise to receive a few awards this year. In July, the South Delta Leader staff came out to present the British Columbia Waterfowl Society with two certificates as a result of their on-line opinion poll. BCWS was the runner-up for Best Place to Take an Out-of-Town Guest and top choice for Best Place to Spot Wildlife. On September 11th, the BCWS was also presented with the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust's 2010 Stewardship Award, recognizing our dedication to wildlife stewardship on the Fraser River Delta.

Here's to the upcoming Snow Goose season!

Text: Kathleen Fry, Sanctuary Manager



*Photographers at the Sanctuary*

Kathleen Fry

# Sanctuary Highlights

*I would like to thank all our visitors and the Sunday morning birding group who record their sightings in our bird log book or report them to staff as these entries really help to make Sanctuary Highlights more detailed and informative. For up-to-date weekly sightings check the list posted on the window of the Gift Shop or ask the staff "what's new?"*

**JULY:** *is certainly known as the quietest month for birding. Most species have migrated northward already. The young ducks and geese have grown and the adults are looking a bit rough around the edges as they go through their annual molt into eclipse plumage. The species count was 77.*

## July 4th—July 10th

This week had a species count of 53. On July 4th we had our first summer sighting of a Belted Kingfisher. The channel of water paralleling the centre dyke (from the wooden viewing platform north to the Viewing Tower) is a popular spot for kingfishers to fish. The male kingfisher has the blue band across a white breast and the female has an additional reddish band below the blue one.

On the same day a female Hooded Merganser was still being seen at the Sanctuary. During the summer they usually disappear from this area to nest through the southern and middle wooded portions of the provinces eastward to Nova Scotia. The Hooded Merganser nests in tree cavities or nest boxes, much like the Wood Duck.

Another bird that didn't migrate from the Sanctuary was a single American Coot. American Coots usually spend the summer in the interior nesting on the lakes. Some other notable sightings for this week were Cinnamon Teal, Bullock's Oriole and Swainson's Thrush.

## July 11th—July 17th

We watched for the Peregrine Falcon as it hunted shorebirds feeding out near the Viewing Tower in the West Field. A Marbled Godwit and a Spotted Sandpiper were both seen on July 11th. The Spotted Sandpiper nests at the Sanctuary; when this sandpiper walks it has a constant bobbing action of the rear body.

## July 18th—July 24th

On July 18th two Cackling Geese (recently split from Canada Goose subspecies) were reported in the Sanctuary. Cackling Geese have much the same markings as a Canada Goose but are a lot smaller in size with a very short stubby beak and a high pitched honk. If you scan large flocks of Canada Geese you may find Greater White-fronted Geese and Cackling Geese. Black-headed Grosbeak, and Bullock's Oriole were others included in our weekly list of 56 species.

## July 25th—July 31st

During this week 13 different species of Sandpiper were reported. Pectoral Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Wilson's Phalarope, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Killdeer and Semipalmated Plover were good ones to find.

The Killdeer, also a member of the plover family, has two black neck stripes versus one black neck stripe on the Semipalmated Plover.

Purple Finch, Caspian Tern, Belted Kingfisher and an early Northern Flicker were some of the other birds reported in this week.

**AUGUST:** *during this month we start to see shorebirds and warblers migrating south. Remember that at high tide you have closer views of shorebirds and ducks as they get pushed in closer to shore. During low tide they move out and take advantage of open mudflats to feed. The species count was 98.*

## August 1st—August 7th

This week our list took a big jump in the number of species seen, from 59 to 72. The first Black-crowned Night-Heron showed up at its usual roosting spot opposite the Warming Hut by the bridge. An early sighting of a Dark-eyed Junco was recorded this week.

Purple Martins (our largest swallow) were seen and heard throughout this month. You often hear them before you can locate them in the sky. Looking north from the Viewing Tower you will notice a grouping of Purple Martin nest boxes on tall posts. In the past few years we haven't been lucky with nesters which could be due to House Sparrows or Starlings as these species nest earlier and are the Purple Martins worst competition when it comes to nesting in boxes.

A Barred Owl was seen drying out on a fence post behind the picnic area after a heavy night of rain and was still being seen in various areas throughout the Sanctuary. Warbling Vireo, Western Tanager, Orange-crowned Warbler, Hermit Thrush, Osprey and a Stilt Sandpiper were a few other highlights for this week.

## August 8th—August 14th

The Stilt Sandpiper was still being reported in the West Field. The Stilt Sandpiper is unusual for this area as it usually migrates southward through Central Canada and USA heading to central South America for the winter. Check flocks of Dowitchers and Lesser Yellowlegs for Stilt Sandpipers.

We had an early sighting of one Golden-crowned Sparrow on the 8th. Two Bullock's Oriole, Pacific-slope Flycatcher and Willow Flycatcher were also seen on the 8th. Six species of warblers and the two Cackling Geese were all seen this week.

*continued on page ten ... ..*





Jim Martin

*Sandhill Cranes at the Sanctuary*

## 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 (please show your membership card at time of purchase).
- 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 (70,000 visitors in 2009).
- 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 need for survival.
- Provide support for like-minded organizations who are working in waterfowl-related projects.

### Enclosed is my cheque or VISA/Mastercard number for:

- |                           |                          |              |
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| SINGLE Membership:        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>\$25</b>  |
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Telephone: 604 946 6980 Facsimile: 604 946 6982

Website: [www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com](http://www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com)

## **Sanctuary Highlights**/continued from page eight

### **August 15th—August 21st**

A Baird's Sandpiper was recorded on the 15th. It was presumably on its way to Central South America for the winter. In this week a Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot and a Red-breasted Nuthatch were all firsts for the season. On August 18th we had five Stilt Sandpiper then four on the 19th. A high count of 30 Killdeer were spotted on the 15th. The last Rufous Hummingbird for the Sanctuary was recorded this week. A Barn Owl and Great Horned Owl were seen on the 18th. A Solitary Sandpiper was reported on August 20th.

### **August 22nd—August 28th**

Five Vaux's Swift were seen over the Gift Shop on the 22nd. The first fall sightings of Greater White-fronted Geese were seen this week. An early report of a Bufflehead with five Hooded Merganser came in on the 22nd. Eleven Sandhill Crane were recorded in the West Field. The Peregrine Falcon was still being seen hunting the shorebirds almost every day.

**SEPTEMBER:** *brings the northern waterfowl southward to winter in the Fraser Delta. During most of September when you drive into the Sanctuary, you will see Robertson Slough is chock-ablock with ducks mostly pintail. In mid-September we start to see the arrival of Lesser Snow Geese from Wrangel Island, Russia. They will spend until toward the end of December in our area and then move to the Skagit Valley, Washington until spring. The species count was 98.*

### **August 29th—September 4th**

Larger numbers of Greater White-fronted Geese began to show up. We lost track of the two Cackling Geese. Northern Flicker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Harrier, Brown Creeper are a few of the newer migrants showing up to spend the winter around the Lower Mainland. An Orange-crowned Warbler, Barred Owl, Barn Owl, Caspian Tern and a Pectoral Sandpiper were some of the other 57 species seen in this week.

### **September 5th—September 11th**

In this week we saw the weekly list jump to 84 species. Shorebirds were plentiful with 14 different species. We had our first sightings for the fall of White and Golden-crowned Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco showing up at the feeders.

A lovely male Western Tanager in breeding plumage was recorded near the end of the East Dyke. This bird is seen more often in the summer as they spend the winter from Baja California through central Mexico to Costa Rica. On September 5<sup>th</sup> a Semipalmated Plover, Cassin's Vireo and a Bank Swallow were spotted.

On September 7th we recorded our last sighting of a Blue-winged Teal and our first sighting for the fall of a single Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is not common for the Sanctuary. Also on the 7th we had reports of Turkey Vulture, Virginia Rail, Short-billed Dowitcher, Chipping Sparrow, Caspian Tern, Common Yellowthroat, and two Red-necked Phalaropes. Five species of swallows were still being seen.

### **September 12th—September 18th**

A Townsend's Warbler was seen this week. Though not often reported, the male is easily distinguishable with its black hood, cheeks and throat and a yellow strip below and above the eye. The female has a yellow throat. This warbler is on its way from the breeding grounds in Northwest North America to wintering grounds in South and Central America

On September 13th on Fuller Slough there was a flock of 35 Greater White-fronted Geese. A Stilt Sandpiper was spotted amongst the yellowlegs on September 14th. Our Sandhill Crane population grew; on September 14th we had 13 Cranes and on September 18th we counted 25. These larger numbers will more than likely be consistent through the winter. Our resident family with its colt is included in this count. We have seen two other Sandhill Crane family units in the flock. On September 18th we recorded a Red-breasted Sapsucker on the East Dyke. The species list for this week was 74.

### **September 19th—September 25th**

Our first Pied-billed Grebe for the fall was recorded this week. The Pied-billed Grebe is one of six grebe species in Canada. It is a "tailless" water bird but is an excellent diver and swimmer. Its beak is short and chicken-like and they have lobed toes like coots. Watch for them on Robertson Slough and Fuller Slough.

A single Lesser Snow Goose was seen flying over the house at the Sanctuary on September 19<sup>th</sup>. If it hadn't honked I wouldn't have seen it! Nine days later roughly 800-1000 Lesser Snow Geese arrived.

The 10:00 am Sunday morning tour group spotted a Black and White Warbler. This showy warbler's body is black and white striped except the belly which is white.

Hermit and Swainson's Thrush, Chipping Sparrow, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, American Bittern, Barn Owl and a Bank Swallow were other highlights for the week.

### **September 26th—October 2nd**

The juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was seen again in the West Field closer to the Viewing Tower end as it mixed in with hundreds of Long-billed Dowitchers. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper breeds on the boggy tundra of Northeast Asia and winters in Southeast Asia and Australasia. It is a rare migrant in the fall along the Pacific Coast which resulted in a lot of photographers searching for the chance to record this sighting.

On October 2nd a Eurasian Wigeon was recorded. Other birds of note for this week were Varied Thrush, Merlin, Hermit Thrush, Virginia Rail and Double-crested Cormorant.



Jim Martin

*Sharp-tailed Sandpiper*

**References:**

**The Birds of Canada** by W. Earl Godfrey

**The Birder's Handbook-A field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds** by Ehrlich, Dobkin, Wheye.

**The Birds of British Columbia (Volumes I-IV)** by R. Wayne Campbell, Neil K. Dawe, Ian McTaggart-Cowan, John M. Cooper, Gary W. Kaiser, Michael C.E. McNall, G.E. John Smith.

**History of North American Birds et al. The Bird Watching Answer Book** by Laura Erickson

Text: Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager

## **Gift Shop News** with Varri Raffan

Next time you are visiting the Sanctuary leave a little time to drop into the Gift Shop to see our new merchandise. We have items for birders and non-birders, I am sure you will find unique gifts for friends and family.

A yearly membership to the Society is a great gift at \$25 for a single membership and \$50 for a family membership. This will entitle the recipient to 365 days free entry to the Sanctuary plus quarterly issues of our magazine Marshnotes. Buying a gift membership is simple just telephone us at 604 946 6980 with the details of the recipient.

We stock puzzles and books for all ages, T-towels,

bird feeders, decorative floor mats, "Toadal Fitness" ( a fun line of toads in various yoga positions), mugs, shirts, baseball caps, tote bags and binoculars.

A gift to enjoy all year is our Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary Calendar 2011 which is still \$17.95 per copy. We also carry the "2011 Entertainment Coupon Book" for \$46.00.

The Sanctuary Gift Shop is open daily between 9 am.—4 pm. We close for lunch between 12 noon and 1 pm. We accept cash, Visa and Mastercard

As a member you are entitled to a 10% discount on your Gift Shop purchases—please show your membership card at point of purchase. Unfortunately, this discount is not transferable to guests or visitors.

Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager

# BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

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