

Marshnotes®



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
FALL 2011**

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 16th 2012**

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Kathleen Fry

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Sanctuary Manager: Kathleen Fry
Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan
Reception: Laura Jordison
Habitat Maintenance: Dave McClue

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+): \$3.00
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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Gift Shop News with Varri Raffan



Varri Raffan

Sanctuary Gift Shop

Next time you are visiting the Sanctuary, drop in to the Gift Shop and find ideas for festive gifts. Audubon series of stuffed birds with real sound chips, very colourful stained glass window art, fancy front door mats, tea and coffee mugs, challenging jigsaw puzzles, youth and adult T-shirts, a good selection of bird identification books and the 2012 BCWS Calendar make up a sampling of items you might find fitting for those on your gift list.

The Gift Shop is open 9am-12noon and 1-4pm daily. Mention that you are a member in good standing to receive 10% off your purchases but please note that this discount is not transferable to non-member guest shopping. We accept cash, cheques, MasterCard and Visa but we are not able to accept Debit Cards.

All money spent in the Gift Shop supports the ongoing enhancement and upkeep of the Sanctuary.

Time to Say Goodbye!

As the Lesser Snow Geese return from their breeding grounds on Wrangel Island to their wintering grounds on Westham Island and beyond it is time for me to say goodbye as Editor of Marshnotes.

The years have slipped by so quickly since January 1993 (72 issues ago) when I began helping with a new look for the publication.

Writing an anonymous column "Walks with Daisy" led quite quickly to a very satisfying and much bigger role which embraced responsibility for editing, production and distribution.

I am very grateful for the support I have received over the years from BCWS Board of Directors and Staff and to the many dedicated volunteers who have contributed articles and images and tirelessly helped me with quarterly mail preps—we have never missed a deadline!

Marshnotes will now pass into the very capable hands of Sanctuary Manager Kathleen Fry.

I am looking forward to spending more time at the cottage where I can quietly concentrate on exploring the wonderful world of being retired. As a Life Member of the Society with memories of bringing my own young children to the Sanctuary in the early 1970's it will be so nice to visit with the next generation—six year old granddaughter Jennifer—who is already showing an interest in wildlife and conservation.

All the very best,

Patricia M. Banning-Lover, Editor

About Our Covers

Front Cover:

Lesser Snow Goose © Jim Martin

Back Cover:

Lesser Snow Geese © Jim Martin

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Pig and Corn Roast 2011

The Society held its 23rd Annual Pig & Corn Roast Fundraiser Dinner on Saturday, September 10th 2011. We were very fortunate that the nice warm stretch of weather held which added to the enjoyment of the one hundred and eighty-five people who attended. As darkness fell a large moon illuminated the Picnic Area providing further enjoyment for those who gathered around the bonfire to roast marshmallows.

We are extremely grateful to those who donated their time to make our dinner a success. For their help with set up, food preparation, bar service, raffle ticket sales, cooking our dinner, and cleaning up we thank the following volunteers:

Dick & Bonnie Anderson	Dave McClue
Jack Bates	Ed McKim
Irene Banack	Jim Morrison
Russ Bissett	Carl Nastasi
Keith Bogart	Henry Parker
Leonard Brady	Doug Raffan
Arlie Darby	Dave & Rita Richardson
Shanna Fredericks	Rob & Chris Ross
Kathleen Fry	Brian Self
Willy Hoell	Mary Taitt
Laura Jordison	Gordy Tull
Su Langlois	Joyce Manary
Les & Sylvia Lewchuk	Boudi VanOldenborgh
Gerry Lyon	Barbara Warrick



Dinner's Ready!



Pig and Corn Roast Dinner 2011

We extend a big "Thank You" to the following merchants and individuals for donating great prizes towards our raffle.

Black Bond Books	Pets-N-Us—Tsawwassen
Donald's Fine Foods	River House Restaurant and Pub
Double R Rentals	Roddicks Feed and Farm Supply
Ducks Unlimited Canada	Canada Safeway—Ladner
Fletcher Building Supplies	Save-On-Foods—Ladner
Garden Work at Mandeville	Stillwater Sports
Heide Young	West Coast Seeds
Ladner Museum and Archives	Westham Estate Winery



Moonlit Marshmallow Roast

Text: Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager

Images: Patricia M. Banning-Lover

Sanctuary Manager's Report



Kathleen Fry

BC Nature Field Trip led by Mary Taitt, September 2011

Summer in the Sanctuary was hot and dry and dusty well into September. Visitor use was slightly up from previous years, with a July and August schedule full of groups of summer camp children and seniors.

On July 23rd, over 130 children and adults came as part of a promotion of Kids World Day 2011 held in partnership with the Delta Museum. In late September we were on the receiving end of several BC Nature group outings led by Mary Taitt and Brian Self as part of a convention held in Tsawwassen. Total visitors for the three months totalled 17,955.

July started with a rousing chorus of coyotes from fields behind the Picnic Area, possibly celebrating the end of rain and the arrival of hot weather. We had many sightings of Red-eared Slider Turtles sunning everywhere on logs, but this year at least three were seen in July laboriously trying to dig nests in our gravel paths. Most turtles need the really hot summer days to reach a certain body temperature before egg-laying is initiated.

In the waterfowl world, July is Gadwall month. As in previous years, this often-overlooked duck nested later than the other species, with broods hatching throughout July and the ducklings often mistaken for late Mallard broods. Our Sanctuary always seems to have fair numbers of this species, possibly due to propagation programs decades ago.

The Sanctuary initially had the concept of captive birds and display ponds, with ducks and geese either pinioned and kept in captivity, or purchased from breeders as far away as Alberta, Nova Scotia and Illinois. In 1969 and 1970, eggs from some local Gadwall nests were taken and incubated, with the offspring released to the wild (BC Waterfowl Society files). This procedure requires special permits but adds to wild populations, as the wild nesting pairs often raise an additional batch of ducklings when the first eggs are removed for incubation.



Kathleen Fry

Gadwall and young at the Sanctuary

Gadwall used to nest mainly in Southwest Marsh. They seem to prefer areas with dense pondweeds and algae, and they are sociable nesters, with many pairs nesting on an island. Southwest Marsh once contained over 30 small islands made of driftwood and silt. Over the years, wave action has reduced many of these islands to their component parts, freeing the logs to wander the high seas of the pond, and the silts to become one with the bottom sediments. The Gadwall now seem to prefer the islands along the central path to the Viewing Tower, where the slough is thick with underwater vegetation.

In late summer more Sandhill Cranes began visiting the Sanctuary, in spite of the objections of our resident pair and colt. Crane numbers increased gradually, and reached 29 birds at the end of September. Five of these were colts. A few recent early morning checks verified most of this crowd were using West Field as a night roost. Fall congregations of cranes are not uncommon, with Sanctuary fall numbers ranging from 8 (2000) and 15 birds (November 2001) to 22 (October 2005) and 25 birds (2010).

The Sanctuary's first 2011 Sandhill Crane colt drowned upon hatching, but the second colt is now over five months old and still with its parents. It miscalculated a few times during flying lessons, ending up swimming one day and floundering around in a blackberry hedge another day, but it is doing fine. It has been very interesting to see what the cranes eat. The colt has consumed many a mysterious thing gleaned from digging, plus whole Townsend's Voles, hundreds of grasshoppers, damselflies and blackberries, and one large fleshy brown caterpillar of the Sphinx Moth variety. The colt had to be really encouraged by its mother to eat that last item.

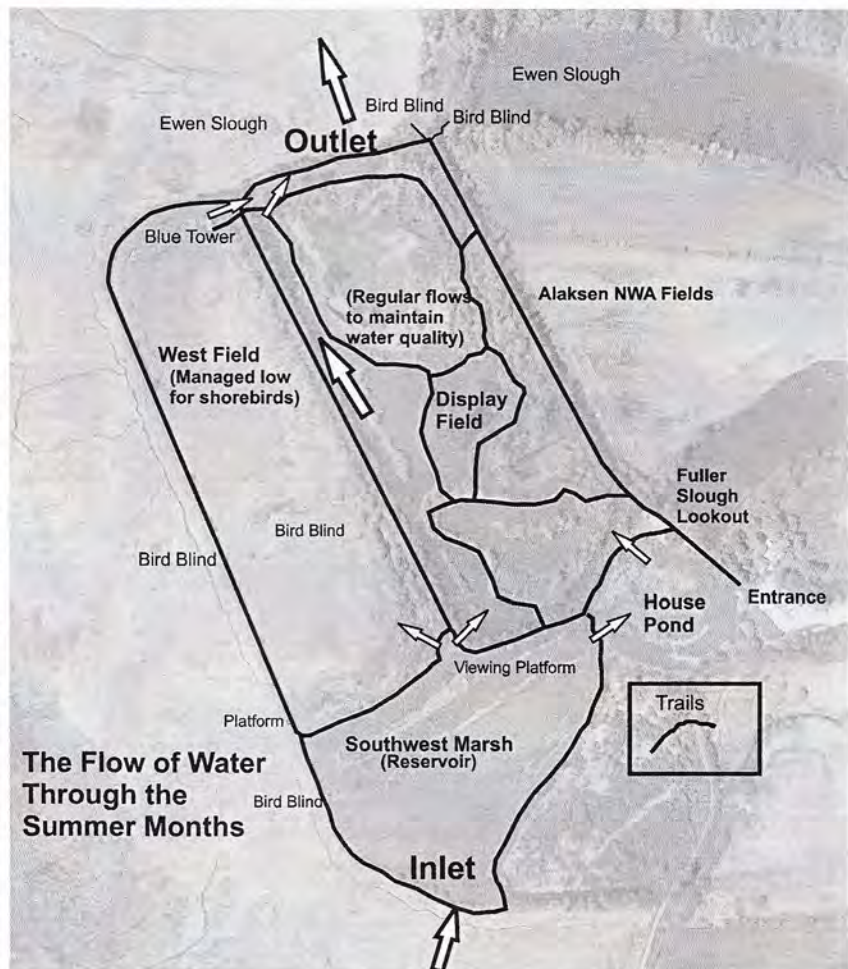
We have made a small contribution to science by forwarding the body of the first colt for tissue sample and genetic analysis to the International Crane Foundation (ICF), with the assistance of Myles Lamont from the David Hancock Wildlife Centre in Surrey. A lot can be learned about birds through bio-samples like this. Gender and family relationships can be determined from heart tissue samples or blood samples (Hayes et al, 2006). Even feathers can be used to investigate the genetic diversity of a crane population. Our tissue samples and some feathers have gone to ICF Research Associate Matt Hayes who has been gathering genetic data wherever possible when cranes are captured and banded.

Dr. Nancy Mahony, from Canadian Wildlife Service, is using isotope analysis of local Barn Swallow tail feathers to determine the wintering grounds of the individual birds. A few Barn Swallows were caught and banded here for this study. Stable isotopes are naturally-occurring forms of elements like Hydrogen, and some have distinct known distributions across continents. Plants and animals in a given area incorporate the elements, and reflect a chemical marker for that area. The chemical markers are identifiable in feathers grown while birds are living in those areas. Barn Swallows moult and re-grow their tail feathers in their wintering grounds. This kind of approach is supplementing bird-banding as a method of tracking bird populations (Hobson, 1999).

Shorebird watching as usual became interesting in late July and well into the fall, with large flocks of Western Sand-

pipers (July-August), Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs (July-August), and Long-billed Dowitchers (mainly August onwards) using the West Field. Birders have been searching these flocks for the other rarities such as Stilt Sandpipers.

The management of water levels in this field is critical but feasible, given the flexibility of the water control structures provided by Ducks Unlimited Canada. To attract shorebirds, only shallow water is needed, but after a few weeks of hot weather, shallows dry to cracked mud, and more water needs to be transferred. The Southwest Marsh acts as a reservoir, with water transferred into the West Field or Display Field, with each area operated through a control to either keep water or let it drain towards the outlet control.



Kathleen Fry

Diagram of Water Controls at the Sanctuary

Water management activities were ongoing for most of July and August, not just to make good feeding for shorebirds. Visitors may have noticed blooms of Cyanobacteria, which were formerly called blue-green algae. Cyanobacteria are capable of photosynthesis, and thrive when light, temperature and nutrient content are optimized. They multiply rapidly and form gas-filled cavities to float as mats to the surface. Each year during hot weather, we have some floating mats throughout the centre ponds. There is an associated mucilaginous layer that makes the mats unpalatable to fish and ducks. It certainly looks unpalatable to people, sometimes resembling a contaminant or paint spill or clots of sewage.



Kathleen Fry

Cyanobacteria Mats on their way to the Outlet Control

The large floating mats block oxygen and sunlight to other wetland organisms, and when they die off, they decompose and give off ammonia and other gases and some toxins, sometimes causing fish kills. The bacterial forms do not thrive in areas where there is turbulence or too much water movement, so for most of this July, we created an ongoing flow from Southwest Marsh through Display Field to minimize the build up of toxins and ammonia smell and to break up accumulations. Tidal waters were brought in to replenish Southwest Marsh levels, but quite high tides are needed for this. If visitors noted that water levels in Southwest Marsh were low several times this summer, it was just because we were in between water transfers and refills.

With September came the subsequent drop in summer family-oriented crowds, the return of the regular birdwatchers hoping for special shorebirds or migrant warblers, the Pig and Corn Roast fundraising event and finally some Lesser Snow Geese at the end of the month.

There are a few issues brewing, and if members can be aware of them perhaps they will not grow into big problems. We now have a few small barriers and fences in key areas to stop people from going off trails. Some folks have been hand-feeding the squirrels, and I would like to discourage that practice before someone gets bitten or the squirrels lose all fear of people. Members should also be aware that playing bird calls even through small portable devices annoys other birdwatchers and those devices should be played only at a personal hearing level.

All in all, it has been a busy few months, with our team keeping visitors happy, grass mowed, transplanted shrubbery watered, trails resurfaced with gravel, benches and tables fixed up, shorelines protected, small construction projects finished, and the Pig and Corn Roast carried off in fine form..

Many thanks are due to our staff Dave McClue, Shanna Fredericks, David Bandiera (our summer student now back at university), Varri Raffan, Laura Jordison, and all the volunteers who have helped these past months.

References

- Hayes, M.A. , Britten, H. B., and J. B. Barzen, 2006. Extra-pair fertilizations in Sandhill Cranes using microsatellite DNA markers. *The Condor* 108: 970-976 The Cooper Ornithological Society.
- Hobson, K.A. 1999 Tracing diets and origins of migratory birds using stable isotope techniques. *Biology & Conservation of Forest Birds. Society of Canadian Ornithologists, Special Publication 1: 21-41*

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

**Upcoming Events
at the Sanctuary Lecture Hall
Climate Change Workshop
Friday, November 25th 2011
(details TBA by end of October)**

Teachers and other educators will enjoy going through activities to explore the issues and Society initiatives around climate change, with a trip out along the trails at high tide to talk about sea level rise and its impact on natural ecosystems.

Please watch the notice board at the Sanctuary Office for upcoming events before the next issue of Marshnotes. We encourage you to drop in to learn a little more about the Sanctuary, the estuary and its birds.

Sanctuary Highlights

I would like to thank everyone who contributes their bird sightings to the log book on the deck of the Gift Shop or to the Staff. We couldn't compile such a concise list of sightings without your help.

JULY: *July's species list drops quickly as most species move through our area to complete their northward migration. However some shorebirds such as Western Sandpipers were already on their way back south. During July a total count of 81 species was recorded.*

July 3rd—July 9th

The Common Nighthawk seen last week reappeared on July 3rd. On July 4th we had our first summer sighting of a Belted Kingfisher and of a Northern Harrier. The harriers were seen flying low and slow over grassy fields and foreshore hunting for rodents. They stand out easily from other hawks with their white rump patch. Shorebird viewing was good and stayed good until mid-September. One of the best places to spot shorebirds at the Sanctuary is in the West Field at high tide. The Peregrine Falcon also knows this as it was spotted on most days of the month hunting the shorebirds. On July 4th two Eastern Kingbirds were seen. These birds have a white tail tip and dark gray back. If you are lucky you will be able to see a bright yellow-orange crown patch but it is seldom visible. Eastern Kingbirds are most often found sitting atop open perches watching for insects which are their main diet. The two kingbirds seen at the Sanctuary were on top of the dead snag behind the Gift Shop. This snag is also used by the Peregrine Falcon as it watches for prey. On July 6th the first of the Black-crowned Night-Herons showed up at the usual place opposite the Warming Hut by the bridge. This sighting was early as we do not usually see them until the beginning of August. On July 8th the first hatch of nine Gadwalls was spotted. The Gadwall is a late nester at the Sanctuary. A total count of 64 species was reported during this week.

July 10th—July 16th

The first summer sighting of a Pied-billed Grebe was recorded this week. This small diving bird with a pale beak which has a dark circle around the tip is rarely seen flying. When in danger it prefers to sink out of sight rather than take to the air. Like the American Coot the Pied-billed Grebe is a great swimmer even though the grebes don't have fully webbed feet; their toes are lobed.

On July 11th the first sighting of a Wilson's Phalarope was seen feeding on the West Field. When feeding the phalaropes spin around like a top; a movement which helps bring food to the surface of the water. As in all phalaropes the males are kept busy building the nest. They actually build a few nest sites and the female picks one. The males also incubate the eggs and care for the young. The female is known to be the one to defend the nest. During this time we saw Eurasian Collared-Doves daily along Westham Island and at the Sanctuary. On July 11th and 15th an immature Great Horned Owl was recorded. Caspian Tern, Osprey, Cinnamon Teal and Yellow Warbler were among the 58 species seen in this week.

July 17th—July 23rd

The Sunday morning birding group reported seeing three Purple Martins flying over the outer marsh. The male has a bluish-black body and the female has a bluish-black back and a dirty

gray tummy and are actually in the Swallow family. They get all their food (insects) on the wing and even get their drinking water by swooping down and dipping their beak into the water. Unlike their eastern counterparts which prefer condominium style nest boxes, western Purple Martins choose a nest box which can't be seen from others martins nests. We do have boxes out in the marsh north of the Viewing Tower but we haven't had any takers!

On July 17th the second adult Black-crowned Night-Heron showed up. We also had six visiting Sandhill Cranes along the seaward dyke and a Killdeer with its young in the middle display pond. The Peregrine Falcon was still hunting the West Field area keeping the shorebirds on their toes. On July 18th a single Rufous Hummingbird was seen at the Gift Shop feeder. Sightings were few and far between during this time as many started their migration south to Mexico for the winter. Generally by mid-August we don't see Rufous Hummingbirds at the Sanctuary until their return in mid-March of the following year. Two adults and one young Great Horned Owl were still being spotted.

July 24th—July 30th

Sixty-nine species were recorded this week compared to 58 species two weeks ago an indication migration was underway. Late in the day on July 24th a Sora Rail was spotted near the wooden Viewing Platform. This shy rail is chicken-like in appearance, has a yellow beak, is black on face and neck with a greyish-brown body. As it inhabits marshes with grassy vegetation it is not often seen. Rails are very thin and laterally compressed thus it is easy for them to escape into the dense grasses or reeds. This will be where the expression "thin as a rail" comes from!

On July 26th the first three Red-necked Phalaropes returned to the Sanctuary. On the 27th the first two Hooded Mergansers and Yellow-rumped Warblers were recorded. Other highlights for this week were American Bittern, Black-bellied Plover, Mew Gull, Turkey Vulture and Swainson's Thrush.

AUGUST: *the species count now rose as we started to see more shorebirds and waterfowl returning to the coast from their breeding areas. During August a total count of 91 species was recorded.*

July 31st—August 6th

On August 2nd the first American Coot was spotted. Coots have charcoal gray bodies with black heads and a white beak; their green leafy-looking feet are not fully webbed. Throughout the winter coots are plentiful at the Sanctuary mixed in with the ducks. They are not classed as a duck but are in the family of Rails, Gallinules and Coots. Their call is a unique sound much like a clucking noise. On August 6th a Green Heron was sighted. These birds are numerous in the Eastern United States through the summer breeding season. However they do nest in southwest British Columbia reportedly in the Fraser Lowlands and southeast Vancouver Island. At the Sanctuary in the summer we never have more than a couple of sightings of this heron.

The Volunteer Corner

A Special Thank You to the following Volunteers

- Eileen Axford, Eric Rossicci and Justin Malkonin and his helpers who have helped keep our bird feeders and seed supply coming in recent months.
- The work party team of Dave and Rita Richardson and high school students Anna Yao and Beau Matheson who spent a very hot day in early August clearing a path into the back woods behind the house.
- College students Orla Tobin and Sherwin Cacatian, who spent similarly hot days helping to resurface our gravel trails.
- Jim Martin, Brian Self, Michelle Lamberson and everyone else who have kept a careful watch over the Sandhill Crane family this summer, and all the birders who have contributed to our bird reports. Particular thanks to Mary Taitt, Brian Self, and Bill Topping for helping to host visitors on busy weekends and on the Sunday Walk.

- As always, a big thank you to the "garden ladies" Barbara Warrick, Irene Banack, and Arlie Darby, for their lovely summer flower garden displays, and a welcome to new volunteer Bob Wilmot.
- The Marshnotes "mail-out" team.

Volunteers are needed for the following

- Hosting visitors along the trails or in the Lecture Hall/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 to do just an hour or sign up for a regular schedule.
- There may be specific additional projects as well over the fall months. If you would like 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, R. P Bio., Sanctuary Manager

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 (approximately 70,000 visitors in 2010).
- 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:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| SINGLE Membership: | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$25 |
| FAMILY Membership: | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$50 |
| LIFE Membership: | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$500 |
| Donation (tax deductible) | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

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 Facsimile: 604 946 6982
Website: www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com

Sanctuary Sightings/continued from page eight

The Green Heron is one of the few tool-using birds. It has been known to dangle bait (insects, earthworms, feathers and twigs) on the surface of the water to attract fish to the surface.

This week saw a small jump in American Wigeon from one to three birds. Hooded Mergansers were on the rise with 12 birds being seen this week. Other birds of note for the weekly list were the Semipalmated Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Belted Kingfisher and Virginia Rail which was heard with its distinctive "Kid-Ick" call but not seen.

August 7th—August 13th

A total count of 75 species was recorded this week. Here are a few of the highlights. This week must have been the peak for Cedar Waxwings as they were seen everywhere! August 7th was the last report of Rufous Hummingbird at the Sanctuary. Eleven Sandhill Cranes plus our family of three birds were present this week. Both August 11th and 12th saw a high count of three Black-crowned Night-Herons. A single apparently Greater White-fronted Goose was seen with Canada Geese. For a Greater White-fronted Goose it had a very white head and probably has some sort of pigment problem or is a hybrid goose. Shorebirds were great this week with 13 different species seen. Only one or two Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teals remained at the Sanctuary. This week we started to see the beginning of the early arrivals of Yellow-rumped Warblers and Yellow Warblers. The Merlin in tandem with the Peregrine Falcon was still being seen out by the Viewing Tower harassing the shorebirds. Black-headed Grosbeak, Bonaparte's Gull and the Green Heron were still being reported.

August 14th—August 20th

On August 14th at the Front Entrance Gate to the Sanctuary a family of Bullock's Orioles was spotted. Also on the 14th two Heerman's Gulls were reported along the foreshore. This gull is one of the easiest to identify with its white head, red bill and gray body. It breeds in western Mexico and comes north along California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia for the summer. Bigger numbers of shorebirds and warblers were being reported now. We had a flock of approximately 80 Ring-billed Gulls circling over the parking lot feeding on flying ants or termites that had just hatched. Four Red-necked Phalaropes were recorded near the Viewing Tower. A total count of 73 species was recorded this week.

August 21st—27th

The last Cinnamon Teal was seen at the Sanctuary this week before heading to Mexico and South America for the winter. The first fall sighting at the Sanctuary of a Double-crested Cormorant was on August 21st. These birds are over all a shiny greenish black with dusky coloured bill with tinges of yellow. Apparently the young birds have a very pale front which gets darker as they age. Further into the winter you can spot the cormorants sitting on logs under the Westham Island Bridge and on Fuller Slough. Sometimes they extend their wings as if to dry them. Sixteen Sandhill Cranes were now seen around the Sanctuary.

A single Pied-billed Grebe, Great Horned Owl, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Bonaparte's Gull and Merlin were other interesting birds recorded this week.

August 28th—September 3rd

A high count of 83 species was recorded this week. Shorebirds seemed to be at their peak this week with 14 different species being recorded. Up to four Stilt Sandpipers were a highlight. The adult stilts have a reddish brown ear patch with heavy barring on the breast. They feed like dowitchers with a fast up and down probing action reminiscent of the action of a sewing machine.

The following birds were all first reports for the Sanctuary for the fall season: Black-throated Gray Warbler, Warbling Vireo, Hammond's Flycatcher, White-crowned Sparrow, Oregon Junco and Western Tanager. The Belted Kingfisher was seen on most days this week.

SEPTEMBER: is certainly the start of fall migration. Dabbling ducks start to return from their interior breeding areas. In the last week we began to see the arrival of Snow Geese from their breeding grounds on Wrangel Island, Russia. During September a total count of 98 species was recorded.

September 4th—10th

On September 4th a single Baird's Sandpiper was spotted in the West Field. On September 6th a Belted Kingfisher was reported. On the 8th two Pileated Woodpeckers were recorded along the East Dyke as they hammered at a dead tree. On September 10th a Hairy Woodpecker was spotted on the East Dyke. A few fall sparrows were starting to appear such as Lincoln's, Fox, White-crowned and Golden-crowned. Black-headed Grosbeaks, Western Tanager, Willow Flycatcher, Stilt Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Great Horned Owl, Barn Owl, Red-necked Phalarope and Warbling Vireo were other highlights from this week.

September 11th—17th

This week's list recorded 72 species. I have never seen so many Green-winged Teals on the ponds and sloughs throughout the Sanctuary; this week had to be the peak count for this species. Sixteen Hooded Mergansers were also reported.

On September 12th—15th up to 15 Purple Martins were seen circling over the parking lot and Picnic Area. Maybe the herd of Guernsey cows in the field behind the Picnic Area were attracting flies thus attracting the Purple Martins who almost strictly dine on flying insects. Another flying insect eater spotted at the Sanctuary this week was Vaux's Swift. This swift is only about 4 1/2 inches long with a pale gray belly and dark brownish gray back. When you see them flying their body is very short with no tail to speak of and the wings are proportionately long.

September 18th—September 24th

The Cedar Waxwings, Brown-headed Cowbirds and some of the shorebird species had now left the Sanctuary. With these departures came southward bound warblers and some of the northern waterfowl (American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail). The Great Horned Owl, a pair of Belted Kingfishers and an adult and juvenile Peregrine Falcon were all being seen every day.

September 25th—October 1st

The first report of Lesser Snow Goose arrival at the Sanctuary was on September 30th when a member pointed out five geese calling as they flew over the parking lot.

September 25th—October 1st

On September 25th three Turkey Vultures were circling over the driveway. The Turkey Vulture is just about as big as a Bald Eagle. The vultures have dark two-toned wings with the lighter coloring on the flight feathers. Their reddish heads seem small as they are not feathered. They do breed locally in southern B.C. among the Gulf Islands and southern Vancouver Island but they don't build a nest. They use cliffs, hollows beneath fallen logs or on the ground among rocks. During this week we had our first fall report of a Swamp Sparrow. This sparrow is always a challenge to locate as they are mostly located in thick bushes or cattails. When reports of these birds come in they are mostly from the area of the North Dyke near the Viewing Tower.

Greater White-fronted Geese, Western Tanager, Black Swift, Belted Kingfisher, Townsend's Warbler and Black-throated Gray Warbler were other birds of note for this week.

References

The Birds of Canada by W. Earl Godfrey
The Bird Watching Answer Book by Laura Erickson
The Practical Birdwatcher's Handbook
by consulting editors Terence Lindsey and R.G. Turner Jr.
Peterson Field Guide to Western Birds by Roger Tory Peterson
Marshnotes from the BCWS Archives

I am frequently asked what the two mini-barns at the Sanctuary Front Gate are for; they are for Barn Owls to nest and roost in.

I contacted Canadian Wildlife Service at Alaksen Wildlife Refuge and received a reply from the person who monitors these mini-barns and other Barn Owl nest boxes in the Lower Mainland. She had just checked the box in the field to the left of the Sanctuary Entrance and found one pair of Barn Owls but no nesting activity (the owls bred last year). The other mini-barn (east of Robertson Road) had one Barn Owl chick ready to fledge; this chick was one of five original eggs which all hatched but only one chick fledged.

Text: Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager



Varri Raffan

Barn Owl "Mini-Barn" at Sanctuary Front Gate

Ladner Christmas Bird Count 2011

will take place on Tuesday, December 27th.

We are looking for birders to assist the experienced Area Leaders by recording sightings, driving, or spotting. Birders should be willing to go out for the day starting at first light until late afternoon—no experience is necessary.

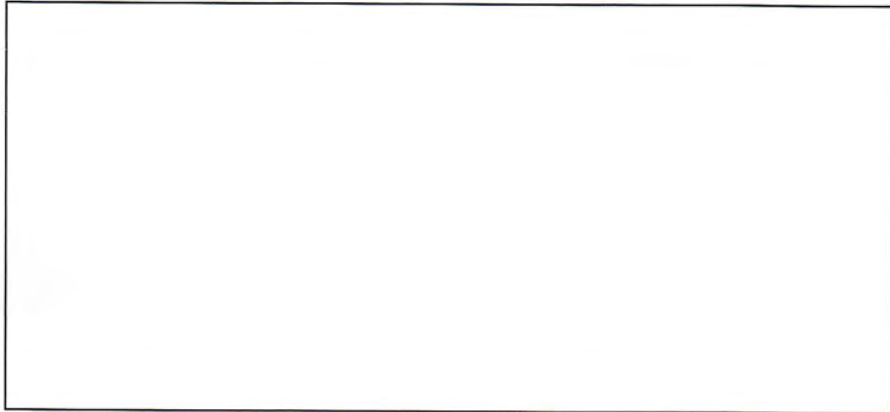
The 12 Count Areas within the count circle include South Richmond, South Delta including parts of Burns Bog, Tsawwassen and Point Roberts, Boundary Bay, Brunswick Point and Westham Island and the George C. Reifel Bird Sanctuary.

For those who do not want to spend the day outdoors we are also looking for feeder watchers who will record the birds seen at their feeders. The Post Count get together will start at 5pm in the Lecture Hall of the Sanctuary where dinner will be available (\$9.00 per person) and where we will do a count summary of species seen.

For more information or to sign up please contact the Count Coordinator
Jude Grass at 604 538 8774 or judegrass@shaw.ca.

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