Marshnotes®



BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Fall 2026

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: Marissa Sasaki

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Prices: (effective January 1st, 2026)

Daily Admission:
Adults: $10.00
Seniors: $8.00 (65+ years)
Children: $7.00 (2-14 years)
Bird seed: $2.00/bag

Annual Admission:
Family: $140.00
Individual: $ 70.00

Hours of Operation:

Reservations are required for all visitors.
Open 9:00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. every day except Mondays. (closed Mondays)
Entry is closed at 3pm, visitors need to leave by 4pm.
The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible

We now send out a tweet from our Twitter (X) account @ReifelSanctuary when it looks like there is a weather alert, all reservation spots are full, or something interesting has been seen. Facebook account BCWS2023 has also recently been set up.

The 2027 calendars are now available!

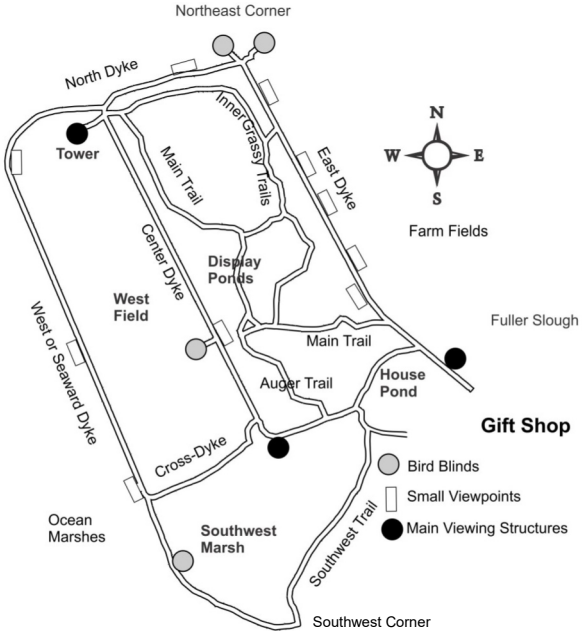
The 2027 Sanctuary calendars are now available to purcahse in the Giftshop for $22!

For the last 25 years, we have encouraged our visitors to submit their best photos to be featured in our annual calendar. As every year, the calendars are one of the most popular items in the Giftshop this time of year. Grab yours while supplies last!



Sanctuary Locations Map

Please refer to the location map to the right to locate place names used in the Marshnotes articles.



About Our Covers

Front Cover: American Avocet
© Jim Martin
Back Cover: Least Sandpipers
© Evan Gogal

Marshnotes is issued four times a year but is now available only in electronic format on our "Archives" page at ~~www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com/archives.html~~ If you would like to be notified when a new edition is posted, email *marshnotes@reifelbirdsanctuary.com.*

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Managers Report

Summer in the Sanctuary is always an exciting time of year. Many visitors look forward to seeing the hatchlings from spring, such as ducklings, goslings and various juvenile songbirds.

By July, packs of young Canada Geese and Mallards roamed our trails begging visitors for handouts as they learned how to navigate life within the Sanctuary. Many songs birds spent this time feeding insects to their young while also teaching them how to catch their own. Even our resident pair of Great Horned Owls made periodic appearances through July with their two, or possibly three young.

Our resident beaver was also active during July and all throughout the rest of the summer. Beavers in the Sanctuary work hard to block our water control structures all throughout the warmer months of the year. Beavers try to raise the water levels by blocking water ways to conceal the underwater entrance of their dens from predators. In practice, this dam building behaviour is actually great for creating habitat for other wildlife. However, in the Sanctuary, the beaver doesn't understand that that we manage our own water levels in the summer to keeping them suitable for waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife. Our interspecies misunderstanding leads to many mornings of staff clearing sticks, mud, rocks, and debris from water control structures that the beaver left for us overnight.

When we weren't cleaning up after the beavers in the summer, most days were spent carefully managing invasive plant species in the Sanctuary. Every year invasive species such as Broad-leaved Peavine, Canada Thistle, Himalayan Blackberry, and Purple Loosestrife grows all throughout the Sanctuary. If left unmanaged, these plants would take over, outcompeting many of the native plants that our local birds and other wildlife rely on for food, shelter, nesting, and various other habitat needs. Much of this management comes in the form of manual removal. Some plants like the Broad-leaved Peavine can easily be pulled out by hand, while others such as the Himalayan Blackberry require cutting with hand tools and shovels to dig out the roots.

This summer, a sizable group of volunteers from Teledyne Technologies came out for a day to help us do a large-scale removal of Canada Thistle along the Seaward Dyke. Staff had been periodically working away at removing this expansive growth throughout the early part of the summer, making slow progress. The volunteer work party allowed us to complete the removal before major seed production occurred, reducing the likelihood of intensive regrowth in the future. We are



Volunteers from Teledyne Technologies *Photo: Evan Gogal*





Center Dyke before and during the breif August closure *Photo: Evan Gogal*

very grateful for their assistance as it vastly reduced the time needed to complete this project.

In mid-August, the Sanctuary was closed for a week. The closure allowed us to finish our trail repairs from earlier in the year that were halted due to the Westham Island Bridge closure. East Dyke, North Dyke, and Center Dyke all took some damage from equipment that was used to repair the flood damaged caused by the dyke breach in January. Trail conditions improved significantly but a few trails still needed some resurfacing, which was completed over the following month.

Once the trails were back to normal, we once again turned our attention to habitat enhancements. The south side of the North Dyke where the January flood repairs took place was left as a fairly steep, gravel slope. Without intervention, erosion would become inevitable and the encroaching Himalayan Blackberry would take over. We got to work quickly removing all existing blackberries from the slope itself and in the areas adjacent. With the slope free of invasives and now prepped for work, we plan to create soil terraces and plant native shrubs along the slope. The goal of this slope project is to stabilize the bank, increase the habitat value for our native birds and wildlife. Work on this project will continue throughout the fall and winter.

With summer coming to an end in September, the feeling in the Sanctuary started to shift with the season. The air cooled, the mornings were foggy, and the sights and sounds began to change. By the end of September, flocks of Canada Geese, Cackling Geese, and Snow Geese started to appear offshore and overhead. A flock of around 30 Sandhill Cranes appeared, foraging in the Alaksen fields off East Dyke. Many winter species of ducks started to arrive in small numbers as well during this time. The fall migration was beginning, and we began preparing for our yearly overwintering guests to arrive.

Text: Evan Gogal
Sanctuary Manager

Introducing New Reifel Merchandise in the Giftshop!





American Avocet *Photo: Evan Gogal*

We meet again, American Avocet!

The American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*), is a bird that we sometimes see in the Sanctuary that is an embodiment of beauty, elegance, and grace all encompassed in one bird. Funnily enough, the three adjectives I used to describe the bird is in its name. The name "avocet" is derived from the Italian word "avosetta", meaning graceful bird. When you look at the bird it is no surprise that it was named so. The bird appears to have some ethereal and majestic qualities.

American Avocet is one of four species of avocet that can be found around the world, and the only avocet species that can be seen in North America. These avocets, when seen in the Sanctuary, generally sport a mostly white plumage with a little bit of black on their wing feathers. Their long legs used for wading in the water are a light dusty blue, which is a colour that is not commonly seen in nature. They also have a long black beak that curves slightly upward, which they gently swipe left and right (a movement called "scything") to stir up sediment from shallow pond bottoms to forage on aquatic invertebrates, seeds, and sometimes even small fish.

In the last few years, the sightings of American Avocets in the Sanctuary have become more common. Most recently, we had the privilege of hosting four American Avocets in 2023, and two avocets over the fall and winter of 2022. Before these last two occasions, the last record of American Avocets in the Sanctuary was in September of 2002. An avocet sighting is always a big draw whenever they show up in the Sanctuary, as B.C. does not fall within their typical range distribution. Their distribution mostly encompasses the western U.S. and only a small portion of their breeding range bleeds into Canada, which is restricted to Southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, and a small portion of southeastern Manitoba.

The closest known breeding location to the Sanctuary is located south in central Washington state where they nest in the wetlands of the Okanagan and Columbia Plateau and put on their best show. During breeding season, American Avocets wear a special breeding plumage. From March to August, their white head changes to a beautiful rufous colour. It is worth noting here that all other species of avocets do not have a separate breeding plumage like their American counterpart. While wearing their best garb for mating season, American Avocets participate in two unique and elaborate displays with their partner that they have selected for the season.

One display is known as the "cross-bill display", where the male preens its feathers and frantically dips its beak into water, increasing in the motion intensity and frequency. The female then invites the male bird to mount her for copulation. Once copulation is completed, the male holds one of his wings over the female and they cross their bills over each other and intertwine their necks as they run for a few steps in a direction. The second interesting display is called the "circling display" which involves two pairs of avocets during breeding season. It is suspected that this display is meant to be territorial, as it has been documented to occur when one pair of avocets overstep into another breeding pair's territory. The display involves the two pairs placing their heads inward of the circle and they walk in one direction and then the other, rotating the circle in doing so. The description sounds as if they are almost performing a folk dance.

Records of avocet sightings in the Sanctuary have been restricted to late August and early September, likely birds that have left their nesting grounds in pursuit of suitable areas to spend the winter. Over winter, avocets seek intertidal mudflats and shallow brackish water wetlands with silty soils… sound familiar? Different populations of avocets spend their winters in various locations along the southern coast of the North American

(... .../continued page 8)



American Avocet in West Field *Photo: Evan Gogal*

(Continued from page 7)

continent, but they all share this trend of preferring shallow salty marshes with fine sediment deposits. Although the Sanctuary seems to meet all of its conditions, it is still out of their typical distribution. But who are we to tell this bird what to do and how it should spend its time? After all, this group of birds have been around for thousands of years, and are more than capable of adapting and moving around to suit their survival needs.

I was surprised to learn that American Avocets are living fossils. Avocets belong to an ancient family of birds known as Recurvirostridae. The oldest fossil record of an American Avocet has been recorded in the McKittrick Tar Seeps in California from the Pleistocene Period. This means the bird has been around from anywhere between 11,000 to 2.5 million years ago! Other fossil records have been documented in other areas of the United States, such as Fossil Lake in Oregon, San Luis Valley in Colorado, Smith Creek Cave in Nevada, and Haile, Florida.

Despite their resilience for many years, like many birds around the world, the American Avocets have also experienced major population declines. Historical and fossil records suggest that the distribution of this bird used to be more widespread across the continent. There are historical records of avocets breeding as far north as the Northwest Territories and more commonly through the eastern half of the United States, but unfortunately, they have been extirpated from those areas due to several factors. In the early 1900s, avocet hunting was one of the biggest contributing factors in reducing their population. Thankfully, avocets received legal protection from hunting in 1918. However, due to past hunting coupled with the fact that many of their wetland habitats were either destroyed, drained, or polluted as a result of human development across North America, the populations never recovered. These historical impacts still haunt the remaining avocet populations today. As a bird in the modern world, no matter where they go, they still face many challenges in forms of human disturbance in addition to facing the typical challenges of surviving in the wild.

Currently, avocet populations in North America seem to be stable (populations are not declining or increasing), but without intact and functioning, healthy wetlands, this may not always be the case. For birds where their entire lives rely on wetlands, conservation of the few remaining wetlands is paramount to maintaining a stable and resilient population for years to come. When we have rarities like these in the Sanctuary, I am reminded of how important our job is here, spreading the message on the importance of wetlands for us and the occupants within it. The least we can do, and more important than ever, is to provide and protect a place where these birds can rest and eat to their heart's content to replenish their much-needed energy as they navigate the modern world.

With that, thank you for choosing to stay with us and we hope you enjoyed your stay in the Sanctuary, dear American Avocet.

Text: Marissa Sasaki
Sanctuary Biologist

Reference: Ackerman, J. T., C. A. Hartman, M. P. Herzog, J. Y. Takekawa, J. A. Robinson, L. W. Oring, J. P. Skorupa, and R. Boettcher (2020). American Avocet (Recurvirostra americana), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (A. F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.ameavo.01

Bird Highlights for July to September 2026

Table of bird highlights by week	
June 28th-July 4th	Cinnamon Teal, American Coot, Parasitic Jaeger, Mourning Dove, Grea-horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Merlin, Eastern Kingbird, Swainson's Thrush, Bullock's Oriole
July 5th -11th	Cinnamon Teal, Turkey Vulture, Great Horned Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Western Wood-pewee, Bullock's Oriole, Pine Siskin
July 12th-18th	Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Bufflehead, American White Pelican, Osprey, Western Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope, Mourning Dove, Great-horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Kingbird, Dark-eyed Junco, Black-headed Cowbird, Bullock's Oriole, Pine Siskin
July 19th-25th	Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Bufflehead, American White Pelican, Osprey, Sora, Great-horned Owl, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Hutton's Vireo, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbreak, Bullock's Oriole, Pine Siskin
July 26th-August 1st	Cinnamon Teal, Sora, Spotted Sandpiper, Great-horned Owl, Belted Kingsifher, American Kestrel, Merlin, Hutton's Vireo, Fox Sparrow, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole, Pine Siskin
August 2nd - 8th	Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Bufflehead, Pied-billed Grebe, Virginia Rail, Black-bellied Plover, Western Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Caspian Tern, Merlin, Hutton's Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Western Tanager, Pelagic Cormorant
August 9th-15th	Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, American Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope, Belted Kingfisher, Merlin, N. Rough-winged Swallow, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak
August 16th-22nd	Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Osprey, Rough-legged Hawk, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Sanderling, Stilt Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, Mourning Dove, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Bank Swallow, Northern Waterthrush, Nashville Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole, Red Crossbill, Evening Grosbeak
August 23rd-29th	Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, American Bittern, Rough-legged Hawk, Sora, Semipalmated Plover, Stilt Sandpiper, American Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, Great-horned Owl, American Kestrel, Merlin, Northern Waterthrush, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak
August 30th - September 5th	Greater White-fronted Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Sora, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope, Bonaparte's Gull, Mouringing Dove, Great-horned Owl, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Waterthrush, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Western Tanager
September 6th-September 12th	Cinnamon Teal, American White Pelican, Sora, American Avocet, Stilt Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Bonaparte's Gull, Great-horned Owl, Vaux Swift, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Bank Swallow, Northern Watershrush, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin
September 13th-19th	Snow Goose, Cackling Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Greater Scaup, Sora, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Stitlt Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, American Avocet, Wilson's Snipe, Red-necked Phalarope, Caspian Tern, Band-tailed Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Merlin, American Kestrel, Hutton's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Bank Swallow, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Lapland Longspur, Horned Lark, Townsend's Solitaire, Varied Thrush, American Pipit, Northern Waterthrush, MacGillivary's Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Western Tanager
September 20th-26th	Greater White-frronted Goose, Snow Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Horned Grebe, Virginia Rail, Sora, Black-bellied Plover, Spotted Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Caspian Tern, Common Nighthawk, American Kestrel, Varied Thrush, American Piptit, Lincoln's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Western Tanager, Red Crossbill, American Avocet
September 27th-October 3rd	Greater White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, Cinnamon Teal, Ruddy Duck, Horned Grebe, American White Pelican, Sora, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Stitl Sandpiper, Mournign Dove, Barred Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Northern Watertrhush, White-throated Sparrow, Harris' Sparrow, Western Meadowlark



Ruddy Shelduck in House Pond *Photo: Kristina Breit*

At first glance, July, August, and September tend to be a sleepy time of the year for both visitors and birds. As the summer heat intensifies, the smaller summer residents, like songbirds, become more secretive as they raise their young. Larger summer residence, like ducks and geese, tend to have siestas in the afternoon once they've had their fill of food, adding to the quiet summer ambiance of the Sanctuary. By late summer the scenery of the Sanctuary can be painted with hues of brown and green. Most of our waterfowl have traded in their bright breeding plumage for muted brown camouflage. Most plants have also dropped their colorful flowers only hanging onto various shades of green and yellowing leaves as they prepare to go into dormancy. To the keen eye, though, this time of year is a turn of the season as many birds begin to migrate. The young birds of this nesting season will soon undertake their first long and arduous journey on the Pacific Flyway southward, which often results in lost wayward birds making a pitstop in the Sanctuary.

July

To our pleasant surprise, we had some one-off sightings of some-what unusual species which resulted in observations of 103 species for this month. The Great Horned Owl family continued to be seen through the month of July, and remained a highlight for many visitors who got to see them. Nesting season for most species approached its end, especially for those who arrived in early spring. As their last broods fledge, species like Rufous Hummingbirds and Tree Swallows prepared for their departure. For these reasons, the later half of summer is generally a quiet time and usually doesn't yield high species diversity compared to the other times of the year.

For the later half of the summer, most interesting sightings are the miscellaneous duck broods. The Sanctuary Mallards are friendly and frequently introduce themselves and their young to passing visitors in hopes of scoring some feed. Most species of ducks, however, would prefer to have little to nothing to do with humans which often results in many broods going under the radar. On July 1st, a brood of eight Gadwall were seen swimming in Display Pond followed by a Wood Duck brood in Robertson Slough on July 3rd. Unlike Mallards, these ducks hatch their young later in the nesting season and fresh broods are commonly seen around the end of June and beginning of July.

Many familiar faces have begun to appear across the Sanctuary after taking their leave for nesting season. In and amongst the resident waterfowl, an American Coot was seen in House Pond on July 4th. American Coots typically leave the Sanctuary area for the nesting season and travel up the Fraser Valley and into the interior of BC. We typically don't see them return to the Sanctuary until end of August to mid September. I wonder what prompted this bird's early return? To keep up with the trend of early returns, a few Long-billed Dowitchers had a restful day in House Pond on July 7th, taking a break from the periodic foraging and napping on the little islands, quietly passing the day. Shorebirds in general are not surprising to see at the end summer. Their nesting season is short due to the geography of their nesting location being in the northern coast of the Arctic, where winter arrives much earlier than the South.

On July 10th, a juvenile Pied-billed Grebe was seen in Southwest Marsh. Young Pied-billed Grebes are distinguishable from adults, as they have a stripy black and white face. The adults have a simple greyish-brown face and as the name suggests, a pied beak. Pied-billed Grebes tend to vanish from the Sanctuary over the nesting season, trading the brackish water ponds for freshwater lakes and other wetlands farther inland. Following the return of Pied-billed Grebes, a brood of nine Cinnamon Teal was seen swimming in Display Ponds. Much like the Pied-billed Grebes, Cinnamon Teal have been documented to prefer freshwater lakes and ponds for nesting, but we have records of Cinnamon Teal broods being raised in the Sanctuary in the last few years. Without the vibrantly cinnamon coloured male around, female Cinnamon Teals lack any obvious distinguishing features as they have brown feathers and a sky-blue speculum that is only visible when they are in flight. The one feature that is most noticeable is their enlarged looking beak, as if the duck is experiencing an allergic reaction.

July is typically the time where the diving ducks are absent from the Sanctuary, but on July 17th a visitor had spotted a juvenile Bufflehead. At first, we were skeptical as it is highly unusual to have any diving ducks around let alone a juvenile. But lo and behold, there it was, adorably resting on one of the small islands off of Auger trail. The young Bufflehead was consistently seen for about two weeks since its initial sighting, often resting on the same small island that it had claimed for its own when it wasn't busy foraging. Right around when the juvenile Bufflehead was reported, many juvenile Hooded Mergansers began appearing in Display Ponds as well. Both species enjoyed partaking in the feast of the small fish and invertebrates.



Juvenile Bufflehead resting on its island
Photo: Kristina Breit

The later half of July had many interesting sightings over the skies of the Sanctuary. On July 23rd an Osprey was seen flying over the Sanctuary, followed by Caspian Terns on the 24th. On July 26th, a rainy and gloomy day, roughly 50 swallows of different species attended an insect buffet over House Pond. Most of the swallows flying around were common species like Barn Swallows and Tree Swallows, but a few Northern Rough-winged Swallows and Cliff Swallows were participating as well. Birds foraging in lower altitudes during rain or cloudy days is a commonly observed behaviour, as changes to atmospheric pressure influence how birds navigate the sky.

On July 29th, we had the first observations of its kind seen in the Sanctuary. While the staff were conducting the annual bat survey in the evening, a Ruddy Shelduck was seen flying into House Pond with some Mallards. The sight of it was quite stunning, as the duck almost appeared to be glowing in the warm light of the sunset cast over House Pond. The staff and volunteers took turns to look at this dabbling duck in awe. They are beautiful birds with a white face and a black beak, while the rest of their plumage is a warm tawny-brown. The tips of their warm brown wings are black, as well as their tail feathers. The duck swam around the pond with it's new found flock until we lost sight of it as darkness set in. I wonder if this has been its routine for a little while and no one was around to be able to observe it until the bat survey? With our fingers crossed, staff concluded the night and hoped to see the duck in House Pond the following day. Much to our disappointment, the duck was no where to be seen and was not seen since then.

Ruddy Shelducks are native to south-eastern Europe and central Asia, but also a common duck kept in captivity. All sightings in Canada are considered escapees and not a part of the wild population, so this duck is unlikely to be a vagrant on holiday from its native range. I wonder for how long this escapee has been on the run with the Mallards and where they have gone since making thier jail break?

To end the month, we had some exciting falcon action. As shorebirds move in for migration, falcons tend to follow them into the Sanctuary in pursuit of their next meal. Both species of the smaller falcons, Merlin and American Kestrel, were seen zipping through the Sanctuary. It is common to see the shorebirds erupt to the sky in chaos this time of year as they try to escape the deadly talons of the falcons.

(... ...continued page 12)

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August

While the first half of August can still carry some of the summer lull from July, the later half can be action packed. Many birds, particularly ones that breed north start to make their way down south this time of year. Locally, many young birds fledge their nest and start to navigate the world without parental guidance in preparation to make their first migration as well. This August saw 114 species. A great list despite the doldrums of summer and a great indication that migration is indeed picking up.

Many exciting shorebirds had begun showing up in various shallow bodies of water across the Sanctuary. On August 7th, Wilson's Phalaropes were seen busily foraging in West Field, which became a common sighting for much of August. Not many days later, the Wilson's Phalaropes were joined by Red-necked Phalaropes and an unexpected guest, an American Avocet. For a few winters, the seasonal appearance of the American Avocet seemed to become a staple as we saw them consecutively for 2022 and 2023, but not for 2024 or 2025. What a pleasant surprise to have one in the Sanctuary again. The arrival of the Avocet seemed to kickstart exciting sightings of various other shorebird species. On August 16th, a Stilt Sandpiper and Solitary Sandpiper were seen foraging in West Field among congregations of Yellowlegs and Dowitchers. West Field remained to be a hotspot for all kinds of shorebird sightings ranging from big to small shorebirds.

Back under the cover of trees, smaller birds were making their way through the Sanctuary as well. On August 18th, a Northern Waterthrush was seen flying through the deciduous trees of Inner Grassy, a typical area where they are normally seen. The waterthrush was seen a few days after that on and off in other areas of the Sanctuary. On August 22nd, to keep up with the surprise rarities, an Evening Grosbeak was seen on Center Dyke perched in one of the trees. Some of the less common summer regulars, like the Bullock's Oriole and Blacked-headed Grosbeaks were seen as well on this day. Songbirds in particular are harder to find and identify this time of year, as they are no longer singing their distinctive songs and they busily forage in the cover of the thick tree canopies. Non-breeding adult and juvenile warblers of different species also come together to form flocks of small, yellow, almost indistinguishable birds.

By the end of July, the flashy Rufous Hummingbirds have already begun to move up to higher altitude to cache in on the alpine flowers. By the end of August, they are seldom seen in the Sanctuary. But on August 25th and 26th, a female was seen feeding on one of our feeders. To end the month, on August 30th, a group of four Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were reported in West Field which was a highlight for many keen birders.

September

Leaves started changing from lush green to dull yellow to brown colours, and had begun to carpet the ground all over the Sanctuary. The songs of birds that filled the air were gone now, but replaced with boisterous honks of migrating Canada Geese over the sky and anxious chatters of Yellowlegs and Dowitchers in the ponds. Birders had begun returning, like the migrating birds, throughout the week and reported their interesting sightings to us. For this September 138 species were recorded. Some new species were seen this month as well as some hanging around from August. You could definitely feel the hustle and bustle of birds moving about the Pacific Flyway at this time in the Sanctuary.

On September 1st, the American Avocet was joined by a Wilson's Phalarope in West Field. The following day on the 2nd, a Stilt Sandpiper and a Red-necked phalarope were seen in and amongst the south end of West Field as well. On the same day away from the excitement of West Field, a seldom seen bird, a Black-throated Gray Warbler, was seen on East Dyke. They are a bird we typically see about once a year, since like most warblers, they are small and flit about very quickly as they duck under cover of leaves.

Amongst the calls of geese and ducks that filled the sky, the Sandhill Cranes could also be heard making a ruckus. On the 5th, seventeen cranes were seen flying over the Sanctuary. Our resident cranes become quite friendly with the neighbouring cranes of the Metro Vancouver area, which result in a large flock travelling to different farm fields of Westham Island. Unfortunately, visitors are out of luck this time of year if they are hoping to see the resident pair roam the trails of the Sanctuary. Most of the later half of August and the entirety of September, our pair joined the local non-migratory flock for an excursion to different farm fields hoping to score some leftover root vegetables and grains from the fall harvest.

As we got into the swing of early fall, many visitors excitedly await for the return of large flocks of waterfowl. Depending on the weather up North, the arrival times of these flocks can vary from year to year, but generally we begin to see some birds return sometime in later half of September. On September 14th, after their long absence, Cackling Geese kick started the return of these larger migratory flocks by appearing in the hundreds in the farm fields in and around the Sanctuary. You can hear the pleasant little cackles of their calls echo across the sky as large flocks fly over your head. The arrival of larger flocks must have been a sign for a major influx of birds migrating, as the next few



Common Nighthawk in a Alder of the parking lot
Photo: Evan Gogal



Marbled Godwit in Fuller Slough
Photo: Jim Martin

days we were surprised by the variety birds moving through the Sanctuary.

On the 15th, a variety of less common songbirds were reported for the species list. A MacGillivary's Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, and Hutton's Vireo were seen flitting about and foraging in the Sanctuary. On the same day, a Horned Lark and a Lapland Longspur were seen briefly flying out in the offshore as well. The following day on the 16th, a couple of Chestnut-backed Chickadees were seen foraging on the cones of the fir tree across from the giftshop above the bird bath. Without losing momentum, on the 17th, an Evening Grosbeak and Hammond's Flycatcher were also reported, followed by a Barred Owl on Center Dyke, a Townsend's Solitaire, a Lapland Longspur once again, and a Stilt Sandpiper on the 18th. What a rapid fire of interesting birds in three days.

Until the 22nd, the excitement of new additions to the species list had quieted down, but not for long. After their absence for a few weeks, a Great Horned Owl graced us with its presence in the North East Corner of the Sanctuary. On the same day in the Sanctuary parking lot, an American Kestrel was seen chasing off a Peregrine Falcon. Below where the battle of the two falcons was taking place, a group of keen visitors spotted a sleepy Common Nighthawk, peacefully basking in the sun on an exposed branch of an Alder Tree. The camouflage of nighthawks is incredible, and combined with their posture, they look like a small nub on branch. No wonder it can sleep so soundly with the two falcons flying overhead. Despite the exciting addition to the species list on this day, unfortunately, the 22nd was the last known sighting of the American Avocet in the Sanctuary.

Over the last few days of September in the Sanctuary, most notable bird sightings were limited to the large flocks of cranes circling above the Sanctuary. Sometimes all at once, or on other occasions several smaller flocks ranging from four to fifteen cranes would flyover at different times of the day. Perhaps the most memorable occasion of cranes flying over was on the 26th when separate flocks of cranes, totaling 35 birds, were circling over the parking lot and House Pond as they made their ear-piercing vocalizations at one another. The display was spectacular and stopped most visitors in the vicinity in their tracks to watch these prehistoric birds go on with their crane business. Over the winter we tend to have a small flock of Cranes hang around. I wonder if all 35 of them would stick around, or are they short term visitors making a quick social visit before they continue with their migration?

The excitement of birds moving through the Sanctuary picked up once again toward the end of September. A Marbled Godwit was reported getting comfortable with Long-billed Dowitchers on the logs of Fuller Slough on September 27th. When godwits are seen in the Sanctuary they tend to be in West Field, so a sighting of them in Fuller Slough was an unusual one. On the Same day, a Harris' Sparrow was reported on West Field Dyke, foraging on the ground with other sparrows. What great birds to end the highlights with!

Text: Marissa Sasaki
Sanctuary Biologist

Pre-season Mallard Banding at Reifel Bird Sanctuary

Each August before hunting seasons open across North America, waterfowl banding stations are established by biologists. In Canada, the pre-season banding program is led by the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Permitted banders use baited traps to capture waterfowl as they disperse from their breeding grounds and begin their migration south. Each captured bird is fitted with a metal leg-band with a unique identification number stamped on it. When that banded bird is encountered - whether by a hunter, bird watcher or biologist at a different banding station, the band number can be reported to ECCC by phone or online. These reports provide valuable information to biologists about the survival and migratory movements of birds. Banding data provide insights to ECCC biologists about waterfowl ecology and population dynamics; information that is critical for making management decisions that ensure healthy waterfowl populations are maintained well into the future.

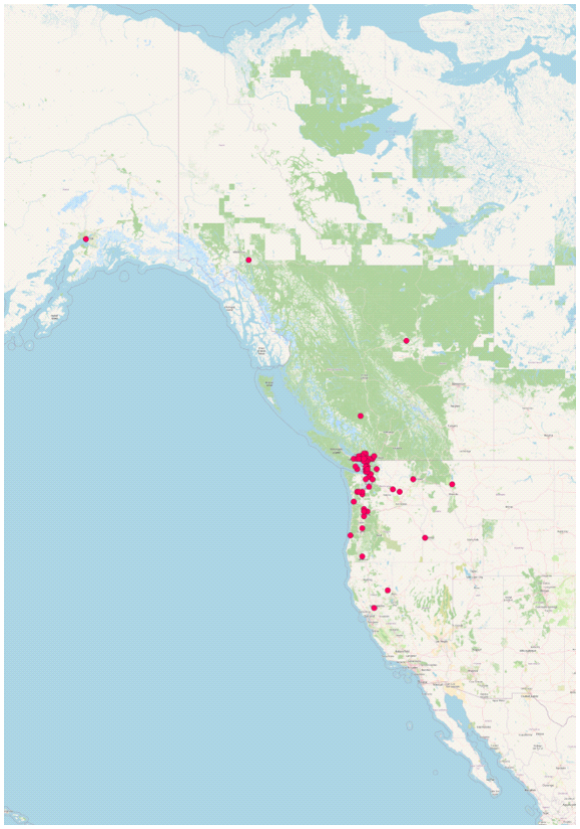
The Fraser River Estuary is an important migratory stopover and overwintering site for waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway. The location of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary provides an excellent opportunity to capture and band large numbers of ducks that use the estuary. Waterfowl banding programs have been carried out on and off at the sanctuary between 1933 and 2006. The map below shows the locations where birds banded at Reifel have been recovered and reported in the past. Most band recoveries occur in BC, Washington and Oregon; however some birds have been recovered as far away as Alaska and California. By continuing this work today, ECCC can better understand how harvest rates, distribution and migratory pathways may have changed over time, and how human impacts are shaping waterfowl populations in Canada generally.

This year, ECCC banded 338 ducks at George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. The majority of these were Mallards, with two Green-winged Teal banded on the last day of the banding season. To support Canada's Interagency Surveillance Program for Avian Influenza Viruses in Wildlife, a subset of birds were also tested for highly pathogenic avian influenza. Wild aquatic birds are natural reservoirs for avian influenza viruses, and this program is in place to better understand infection and exposure dynamics in wild birds.

Many of the banded birds have already left the Sanctuary to continue their southwards migration, while some will remain on the Fraser River Estuary for the duration of winter. You may notice some of these banded mallards as



A clover leaf trap with ducks inside *Photo: Environment Canada*

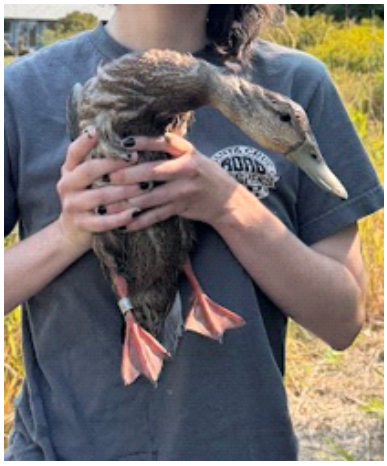


Band recoveries of 164 birds banded at Reifel (1930 – 1995)

you walk through the Sanctuary. Within a month, hunting seasons will open across the Pacific Flyway and ECCC will begin to receive reports of birds that were banded at George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary.

By reporting bird bands you are contributing to our ability to monitor and conserve migratory bird populations! Information on how to report a banded bird can be found here: https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/bird-banding/how-to-report.html

Text: Willaim O'Shea
Environment Canad



A male Mallard fitted with a band
Photo: Environment Canada

Volunteer Corner

Special thanks to:

- Mary Taitt for leading our Sunday bird walks.
- Jim Martin and Brian Self for their year-round trail hosting.
- John Chandler, Carmen Prang, Jim Lowood, Paige Gardiner, Sherry Dolseji, Rio Agis, for helping us with trail maintenance during the week.
- Brian Self, Peter Candido, Ben Lambert, Dirk Flemming, Sabine Jessen for helping with the bi-weekly bird survey.
- Margaret Gorham and Carmen Prang for hosting visitors at the Museum every Saturday and Sunday.
- Rio Agis for bagging bird seeds on Sundays.
- Teledyne Technologies for helping us remove invasive plants.
- Our hardworkling volunteer Directiors.

Annual Admission Benefits

- FREE admission for a year to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary.
- Access to quarterly issue of the BCWS publication "Marshnotes".
- A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Giftshop.
- Support one of the 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 the visitors and supporters; provide interpretive and education programs, including guided tours for organized groups of all ages; contribute towards important scientific research on waterfowl to determnine their life cycle needs for survival; and provide support for like-minded organizations who are working on waterfowl related projects.

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

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Least Sandpipers © Evan Gogal