

Marshnotes®



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
SPRING 2013**

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

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

- dedicated to the conservation and study of migratory waterfowl-

Marshnotes:

Editor: Kathleen Fry

The contents of Marshnotes may not be reprinted without written permission of the Editor.

Circulation: 2,400.

Published four times a year.

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

Telephone: 604 946 6980

Facsimile: 604 946 6982

Website: www.reifelbirdsantuary.com

Email: bcws@reifelbirdsantuary.com

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

JULY 15th, 2013

Executive:

President: Jack Bates
Vice-President: George C. Reifel
Treasurer: James A. Morrison
Secretary: Barney W. Reifel

Directors:

Jack Bates
John H. Bowles
F. Wayne Diakow
Hugh A. Magee
James A. Morrison
Gerald S. Oyen
Douglas B. Ransome
Barney W. Reifel
George C. Reifel
Kenneth I. Thompson
Dennis Zentner

Committee Chairs:

Building/ Grounds: Barney W. Reifel
Community Relations: George C. Reifel
Interpretation/Education: F. Wayne Diakow
Outreach: George C. Reifel

Administrator:

Robert Butler

Staff:

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

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

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

About Our Covers

Front Cover: Sandhill Crane and Egg on the 2013 Nest © Jim Martin

Back Cover: Short-eared Owl Hovering Over the Marsh © Jim Martin

**Marshnotes, Snow Goose Festival and the Snow Goose logo
are all registered trademarks of the British Columbia Waterfowl Society.**

A Bird Murder

Louise and I arrived at the west dyke at 09:59 on March 29th, Good Friday, to check up on two American Bitterns spotted earlier in the week. We were disappointed that only one Bittern was hunting that day. It accurately speared two minnows in about 10 minutes and then it moved eastward towards higher reeds. It moved stealthily towards the reeds with its eyes looking higher than its normal fishing posture. Its head darted toward the reeds and when it turned towards us it had a Marsh Wren firmly in its bill.

The Marsh Wren objected strenuously, squawking and beating its wings attempting to escape. The Bittern looked

puzzled for a minute and then decided to drown the little Wren. The first dip in the water didn't work so it tried again, this time more successfully. By 10:15 the Wren had disappeared down the throat of the Bittern. The Bittern then slowly marched out through the reeds and disappeared. Bird watchers are warned to be vigilant and report any suspicious Bittern behavior to the Manager.

Text and photo: Glen Darou

Glen trained as an accountant and is one of our regular Sanctuary birders, although he brings a big lens with him.



Editor's Note:

For those who are amazed that an American Bittern would eat a Wren, in the southern United States, Finches and Buntings are in the list of incidental foods for this species, and biologists in the Prairies witnessed a Bittern eating a Sora Rail.

Reference:

American Bittern Depredates Sora. Jane E. Austen & Michael Vslivinski, 2000. *Prairie Naturalist* 32(1): 59-60.

Contents

Page		
3	A Bird Murder	Glen Darou
4	Winter Roosts of the Saw-Whet Owl	Shanna Fredericks
6	Bob Harris and the Sanctuary's Early Years	Kathleen Fry
6	Volunteer Corner	
* Insert	1963-2013: A Look Back Through the Archives	Kathleen Fry & Varri Raffan
7	Minutes of the 2013 AGM	Robert Butler
8	Sanctuary Bird Highlights	Varri Raffan
10	Updating Our Bird Checklist	Varri Raffan
10	Why be a Member	
11	Manager's Report	Kathleen Fry

Winter Roosts of the Northern Saw-Whet Owl

During the winter months, we see a wide variety of birds of prey in the Sanctuary, but the smallest wintering raptor, the Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) has been a regular favourite of visitors. Thousands of people have enjoyed watching these small owls in their daytime roosts. Unfortunately, all the attention often leads to high levels of site disturbance. In a 1988, former Sanctuary Manager John Ireland noted that “Habitat degradation becomes a problem with owl viewing...areas are soon flattened and birds disturbed by over-enthusiastic people”. Years later the issues remain the same. It is hoped that a greater understanding of these wintering owls and their roosting habits will foster a greater respect for these owls and their roost requirements.

Northern Saw-whet Owls can be found year-round across southern Canada and the northern United States. Despite being common and widespread, their life history and migration patterns are poorly documented, especially in western North America (Nightingale *et al.*, 2012). In British Columbia, understanding of seasonal movements of this species is growing each year thanks to the efforts of various banding stations such as the Rocky Point Bird Observatory on Vancouver Island (rpbo.org). Over 4,000 Saw-whet Owls have been banded at Rocky Point since 2002. This species was once thought to be nomadic or

resident across its range and not truly migratory. However, recapture data from banding stations are now revealing that these owls do follow annual migration corridors, as Saw-whet Owls from central B.C. travel along the length of Vancouver Island during the southern fall migration to their wintering grounds (Nightingale, 2012).

On their wintering grounds, these small owls often go unnoticed and their highly nocturnal nature makes them difficult to study. Saw-whet Owl populations fluctuate on a 3 to 4 year cycle in response to changes in their prey populations, and numbers seen at the Sanctuary vary from year to year. Researchers predicted a boom year for Saw-whets in 2012 based on abundant prey populations (Nightingale, 2012), and the owls certainly did not disappoint us, with as many as 10 Saw-whets recorded during some of the daily counts this winter.

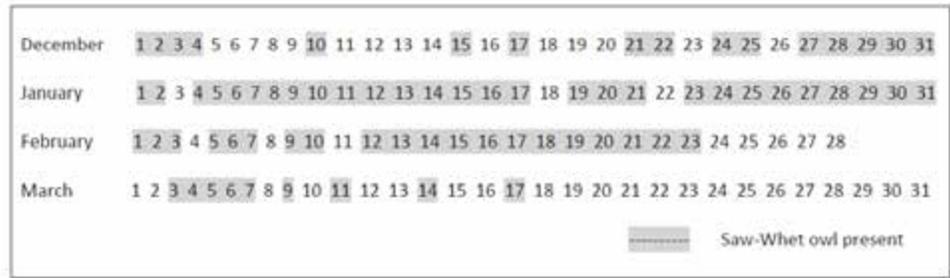
We mapped and monitored their roost sites daily from December 2012 to April 2013 to better understand their roost selections. The first sighting occurred on October 4th 2012 and was followed by just a handful of sightings throughout October and November, in locations that did not end up being used as regular roost sites. These early fall owls may have just been passing through as part of a southern migration and not part of our wintering



Northern Saw-whet Owl roosting along North Dyke (above) and some photographers at the East Dyke roost site Sw1 (below). Photos: K. Fry Northern Saw-whet Owl and Deer Mouse (right). Photo: George Pierce



Figure 1. Saw-whet Owl sightings at roost site Sw21, Dec/12 to Mar/13



population at all. By December, 3 to 6 owls seemed to have settled into the area and established regular roost sites. Throughout January and February a population of at least 10 Saw-whet Owls could be found roosting within the Sanctuary, with an apparent strong roost fidelity, as certain branches were consistently occupied.

Perhaps the most well-known roost site was the low hanging fir bough on the East Dyke Trail where it intersects with our inner grassy trails. Known to us by its GPS code ‘Sw21’, this roost site drew a great deal of visitor attention over the winter months, as it was at eye level and just off the trail. As Figure 1 shows, this site was used consistently despite all of the peering eyes and lenses. Many of the absences seemed to follow days of high visitor numbers or some sort of disruption. As a defense mechanism, Saw-whet Owls remain very still, relying on their camouflaging plumage and small size for protection instead of flushing. Our data seem to suggest that high levels of disturbance will result in alternative roost sites being chosen on the following day. What is it about the Sw21 site that would attract an owl day after day despite the disruptions? Two winters ago, this same branch was one of the regular winter roosts (K. Fry, pers. comm).

Studies have found that these owls prefer sites that provide a view of the surrounding area, while offering protection from predators and bad weather at the same time, and that human activity is not a factor when choosing roost sites as long as they are not ‘bothered’ (Grove, 1985). Exactly what constitutes ‘bothering’ is a rather contentious issue. At Sw21, visitors were observed pulling on roost branches, crowding right up into the tree or behind the tree off-trail. When a barrier of windfall branches along the trailside failed to contain crowds, we were eventually forced to erect temporary fencing.

Our Saw-whet Owls showed a strong preference for conifers as roost sites, with 73.6% of all observed roosting birds seen in Douglas Fir trees, 18.3% in Holly trees, 4.5% in Cedar trees, 3.1% in Pine trees, and just 0.5% of all sightings in Birch trees. The owls were found roosting at varying heights, ranging from 3 to 30 feet, with an average perching height of 12.6 feet. Two Saw-whet Owls were found roosting together in the same tree on four different occasions.

Prey items were seen cached at roost sites on 18 occasions, either draped over a nearby branch or held in the owl’s

feet. Saw-whet Owls most preferred prey, deer mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), comprised nearly 72% of the cached prey items observed, followed by 3 voles and 2 songbirds. Visitors are sometimes lucky enough to watch as the owls tear apart or swallow these prey items whole as a late morning snack.

By late March the Saw-whet Owls had started to migrate out of the Sanctuary, with just 2 or 3 remaining throughout early April. We start to wonder just where they are headed when they leave. An exploration of E-bird data shows a concentration of nesting records in the Okanagan Valley and on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington. There is still much to learn about our wintering Saw-whet Owls: what are their migration patterns, where are they breeding, are the same individuals returning each year, and are they using the same roost sites each winter? To answer these questions we hope to work with other organizations to come up with a strategy for tracking these owls.

Based on our observations of Saw-whet Owl roosting habits, it is clear that the trailside Douglas firs offer highly attractive roost sites. We ask visitors to maintain a respectful distance of several meters, and to keep noise to a minimum. In order to maintain a healthy body condition for migration and breeding, these owls need safe wintering grounds where they can rest during the day and keep stress levels to a minimum. The Sanctuary has and will hopefully continue to provide such a habitat for these owls long into the future.

Text: Shanna Fredericks, MSc.
Biologist.

References:

Fry, K. (2013). Personal Communication.
Grove, R. (1985). Northern Saw-whet owl winter food and nesting habits in North-Central Washington. *The Murrelet*, 66(1), 21-24.
Ireland, John. (1988). Marshnotes: Spring Edition.
Nightingale, A. (2012). Nocturnal owl monitoring: Rocky Point Bird Observatory 2012. rpbo.org/reports/nswo_2012_rpad.pdf (April 10, 2013).
Nightingale, A., Marks, J., McCullough, J. & Conway, C. (2012). Northern Saw-whet owl monitoring on Boardman Tree Farm: 2012 Annual Report. rpbo.org/reports/nswo_2012_botf.pdf (April 10, 2013).

Bob Harris and the Sanctuary's Early Years

It was with great pleasure that the BCWS was able to help give Dr. Robert (Bob) D. Harris something he really wanted this month (a bench where he could relax and enjoy the Sanctuary and remember the “old days”) on the 50th anniversary of the Sanctuary. I met Bob in 1976 when I began my career doing waterfowl surveys for the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). This was only a few years after CWS biologists such as Bob had moved from lowly offices at the University of BC to spacious rooms at the old Reifel home as a result of the transfer of the Reifel property to Environment Canada.

Bob Harris, now a spry 93 years old, remembers the start of our Society and the creation of the Sanctuary as a very big thing at the time, as he was one of the 14 charter members or signatories to the incorporation of our Society in 1961. He served as a Director for many years during the development of the Sanctuary and helped to coordinate efforts between the Society and Environment Canada when the land was transferred and became Federal government land.

“I am happy and at the same time sad that I am apparently the last of the pioneers who had the vision and determination to create the Society and the Sanctuary. “ Bob states. “Fifty years ago, it all started with an Englishman newly settled in BC. Retired Army Captain Barry Leach had worked for a time at Peter Scott’s famed Wildfowl Trust property Slimbridge in England. His letters suggesting a similar sanctuary on the Fraser estuary caught the interest of Fred Auger, publisher of the Province, who brought together a number of government and non-government biologists, and the BCWS was formed. As you know, the Sanctuary was created when Mr. George H. Reifel granted some choice land for the



Dr. Robert (Bob) Harris, one of the 14 signatories to the 1961 establishment of the British Columbia Waterfowl Society.

project, and the Society went to work. In 1972, George Reifel invited me over to see a plan which developers had proposed if he would sell them his land. I was bit shocked to know this excellent habitat could be lost, and was able to get the Minister of Environment (Jack Davis) involved, and a land ownership transfer negotiated. An elder at the Musqueam Reserve offered “Alaksen” or “a flat piece of land looking out to sea” as a name for the land formerly known as the Reifel Island Farms.”

Bob retired to Vancouver Island but has recently moved back to Delta and enjoys his visits to the Sanctuary.

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

The Volunteer Corner

Special Thanks To:

- ◆ Our regular Sunday birding team of Mary Taitt and Brian Self, as well as Jim Martin, Istvan Orosi, Murray McDonald, Karl Pollak and new volunteer Mark Devries for helping host visitors on weekends.
- ◆ Special thanks to Bill Topping for helping in the Museum Sunday mornings all summer.
- ◆ Eric Rossici, Eileen Axford, and Justin Malkonin, for bagging seed and filling bird feeders.
- ◆ Our winter newsletter mailout team of Jim and Jean Marsh, Eric Rossici, Eileen Axford, Laura Jordison, and Jim Martin.
- ◆ Grade 7 students from York House School who came

out March 5th to help us maintain the swallow nest boxes with naturalists Ken Hall and Tom Bears.

- ◆ Su Langlois, Jeremy Watkins and Vera Maceluch for joining our Sanctuary bird survey team.
- ◆ As always, the team of Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick for the beautiful flower gardens around the Museum and washrooms.

Volunteers Wanted For:

- ◆ Hosting visitors along trails on busy weekends. The spring season brings even more visitors who have questions and hope to learn a little about birds. Please leave your name and contact information at the Office.

Thanks very much, everyone!

1963– 2013: A Look Back Through the Archives

June 8th, 1967 *The Optimist*

May 8th, 1963, *The Optimist*

Wild bird sanctuary planned for Reifel Island

Reifel Island, off Westham Island, is the site chosen for the first wild bird sanctuary planned by the newly formed B.C. Waterfowl Society. The society will use the 400 acres west of the marsh on Reifel Island for the sanctuary. It has taken a 30-year lease on a 30-acre strip of land from George H. Reifel. The strip will hold a parking lot, building for the breeding of ducks and geese, offices for a game biologist and students, a training and handout stand, and areas

for experiments in artificial propagation and improvement of water-plants. Observation huts will be built along the sea dyke and the improvement of the present marsh by dyking are part of the project. Lagoons will be made in the present unproductive cattail beds to provide a larger area for wild birds to feed and live. The project was explained to the B.C. Federation of Fish and Game Clubs Convention in Vernon by W.A. Berman of the B.C. Wildlife Service. The sponsoring society has \$20,000

towards the project to date and is asking for a matching government grant. Membership sales will be started to raise funds. The Reifel Island sanctuary will be started this summer, and it is hoped to be in working order by the summer of 1964. The sanctuary will be open to the public to see the habits of waterfowl in their natural surroundings in pens. An entrance road to the sanctuary will be made just the Westham Island RCAF station onto Reifel Island on a sandspit over London Slough. May, 1963

1965 photo (*The Optimist*) showing biologists (left to right) D. A. Munro, W. E. Stevens, R. H. McKay, W. A. Morris, R. D. Harris, touring the Sanctuary with B. Leach (BCWS).



Wildfowl refuge now open

The George C. Reifel Waterfowl Refuge will be open to the public Saturday and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Through the summer months, the Delta branch of the B.C. Waterfowl Society decided at the June 8 meeting. The refuge is on Reifel Island, off Westham Island, and there are clear directions on how to get to the refuge. Many people trespass on the Reifel Farms but there is no need as the refuge has a large sign pointing to it. The stage of any kind are allowed in the grounds of the refuge and children must be accompanied by adults. Visitors are asked to be as quiet as possible, remembering that the refuge is for birds first and humans second. Mrs. Ruth V. Mobergsten visited the refuge June 7, the previous Sunday, and the Third LaSore Club visited the same day, ending their travels at the home of Ted and Iona. Robert Halliday with a waterfowl team.

1967 photo: Ducks Unlimited Canada

"It is hoped that the pressures of population will never destroy almost 40 years of the encouragement and fostering of waterfowl on this site."

-George H. Reifel (1972, The Optimist)

The British Columbia Waterfowl Society (BCWS) was formed in 1961 to conserve and promote waterfowl and wetlands in BC and has managed the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary since 1963.

When the Society was incorporated, its 14 charter members were all key players in the promotion of resource and game management, being either federal and provincial biologists, university researchers, outdoor writers or key members of sportsmen's associations. Fred Auger, then publisher of the Province and President of Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), brought these interests together to discuss the idea of waterfowl sanctuaries in the Fraser delta.

The timing was right, as industrialization of the Fraser River foreshore had begun and government biologists had just highlighted the major waterfowl breeding and migration habitat areas across Canada and knew of the importance of the Fraser delta. At the same time, DUC had begun looking for their first wetland conservation

projects in BC. The Society began to investigate wetlands in the Pitt Valley, the Serpentine River floodplain, and at the mouth of the Fraser River for project opportunities.

The lands owned by Mr. George Henry Reifel seemed ideal for a sanctuary, and Mr. Reifel was quite receptive to the idea. On March 13th, 1963, he granted a 30-year lease to the BCWS for \$1 a year for the use of 98 acres of his land and the use of the adjacent foreshore, and the Sanctuary had its beginnings.

We hope you enjoy the following pages of gleanings from our files from the past 50 years.



Planning the Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is named after the late George C. Reifel, who acquired the land at the north end of Westham Island in 1927. Mr. Reifel was keenly interested in waterfowl hunting and conservation, and modified islands and channels on the property to provide road access for farming and built six earthen dams to form three sloughs (Robertson's, Fuller's and Ewen's) to attract waterfowl. By feeding waterfowl, he was able to band more than 20,000 ducks between 1930 and 1933.

His son, George H. Reifel was farming the property in the early 1960's when the BCWS approached him with the idea of a waterfowl research center along the lines of the Wildfowl Trust's Slimbridge property in England, with penned birds used for propagation and education purposes, and the outer marshes set aside for free-flying wild migrants.

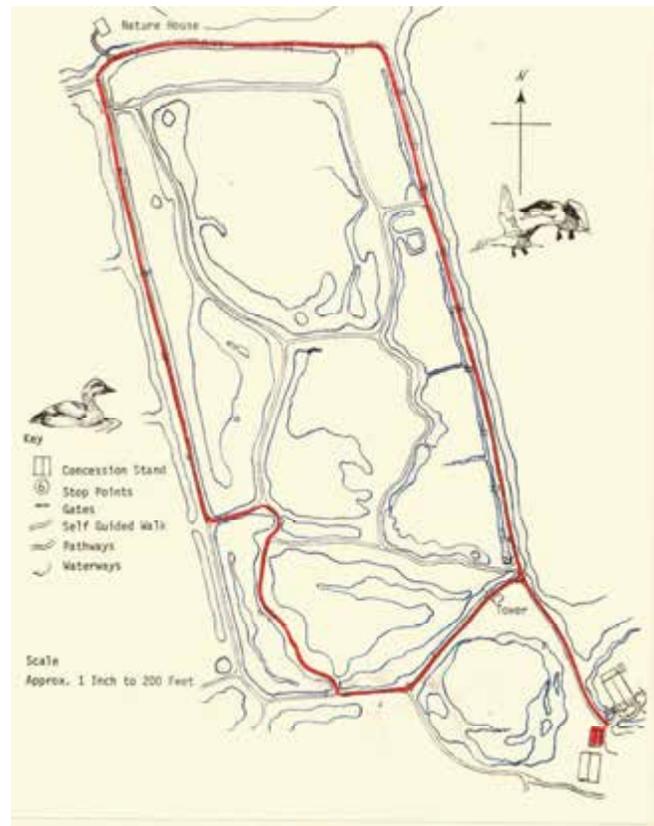


Mr. George Henry Reifel (Conservator, 1993).

Work began as soon as the lease was agreed upon, with considerable effort put into designing an effective layout of ponds, water controls, dykes and the infrastructure required for access. Planning and early work was done under the supervision of retired British Army officer Barry Leach, who had moved to Vancouver and was familiar with Slimbridge.

The outer dyke system and the cross dyke separating what is now West Field and Southwest Marsh was one of the first "dirt-moving" projects at the Sanctuary. Prior to this work, the outer edge of the Display pond was the most seaward dyke. Outer dykes were completed with assistance of Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC). Ponds were then cleared of dense cattail stands then dug further with a dragline to create long linear nest islands. DUC, a wetland conservation organization, commits to long-term partnerships on wetland projects, and returned to refurbish the cross-dyke and water controls in 1984, and to repair pipes in 1996.

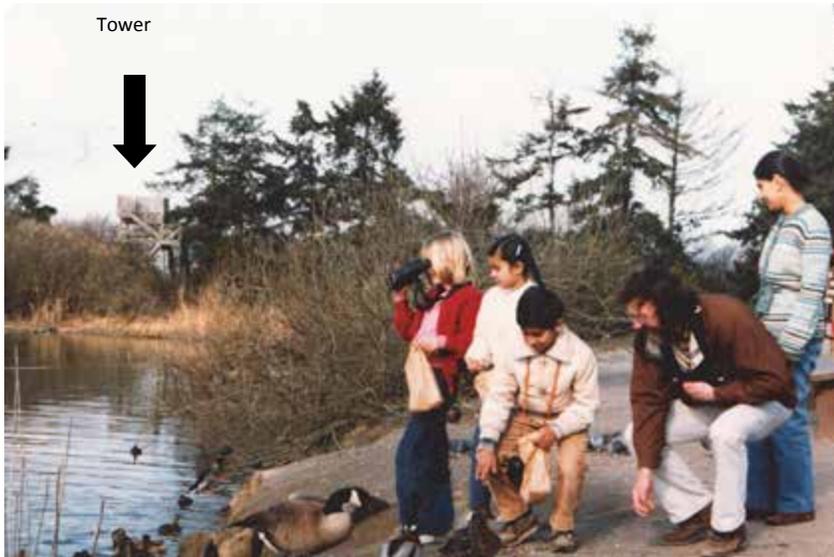
1971 aerial view of the outer ponds, after the initial dyking was done. Trails, ponds and water flows have not changed much over 50 years.



One of the 1972 handouts with a suggested route through Display Field. Note that a small Nature House was established in the early 1970's just offshore on the north dyke, but eventually had to be removed due to wave action and erosion of supports.

The Display Field was originally set up as a complex of pens and walkways, with electric fencing to keep predators from the up to 450 captive waterfowl on display. Areas were landscaped into islands and ponds, peninsulas, shallow water and deeper channels by Robert Husband and John Trevitt, and when the concept changed to the hosting of free-flying wild migratory birds, this area was reshaped again, fencing removed and minor changes made to trail layouts.





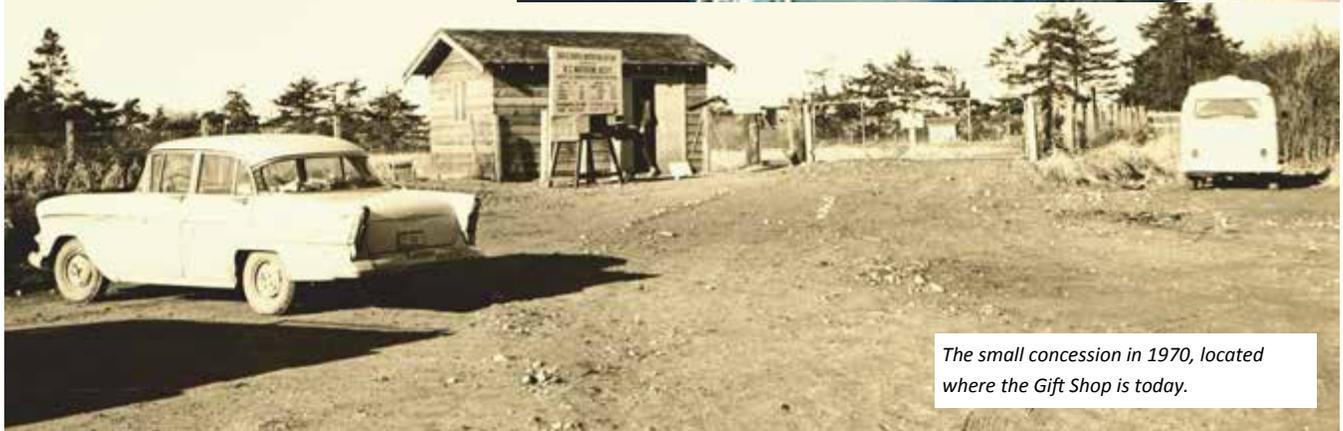
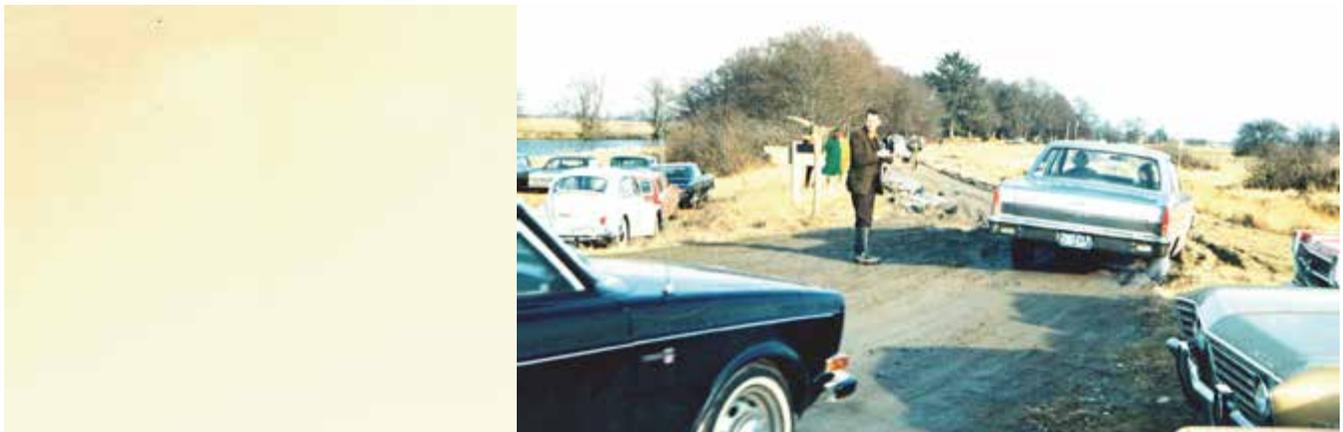
Volunteer Brian Self (second from right) and children along House Pond shoreline, with the first wooden tower in the background (top left). Photo circa 1972.



The blue metal tower was built in 1981 in the West Field to replace the wooden tower. The metal was salvaged from scaffolding used in the construction of the atriums of Lansdowne Shopping Center in Richmond.

Work on road access, parking, and planning how to host visitors effectively also began right away. The only road access into the area belonged to the Department of National Defense (to the Coast Guard transmission towers) and it did not extend in to our current parking lot. Road building, the parking lot, and bringing in power, water and telephone were all major capital expenditures between 1963 and 1966. The driveway was not paved until 1984, and parking remains an issue on busy weekends.

The driveway circa 1970, and manager Brian Davies directing traffic.



The small concession in 1970, located where the Gift Shop is today.

A Brief Timeline

1961 The British Columbia Waterfowl Society is created.

1963 On March 13th, the first lease from Mr. George H. Reifel to the BCWS is signed, giving the BCWS use of what is now our Display Field and the area offshore. In October 1963, the Province of BC establishes a 600 acre game reserve over the adjacent foreshore. Work begins right away on plans, with Barry Leach coordinating efforts.

1965 The outer seaward dykes are constructed, plus the cross-dyke separating what is now Southwest Marsh and the West Field.

1966 The area is posted as a no hunting area, a lease from DND is acquired to build road access on their land to what is now our parking lot. Trails are constructed and the Royal Canadian School of Engineering builds our parking lot. A residence is built and Brian Davies becomes the first on-site manager. Power and water are brought into the area.

1967 The Federal government incorporates the BCWS lease area, the Department of National Defense lands, and the foreshore provincial reserve and designates it the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. The Sanctuary is open to the public, and by then has an observation tower and some bird blinds.

1968 Roberts Bank coalport development starts.

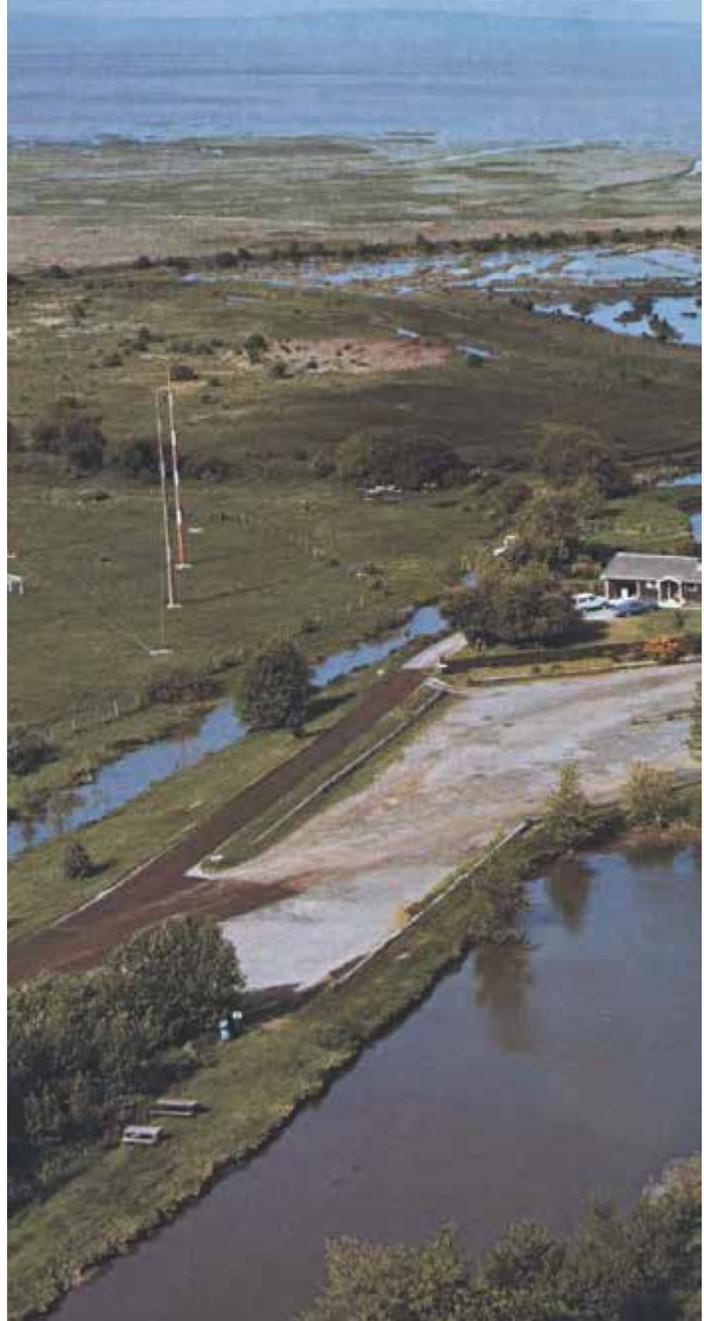
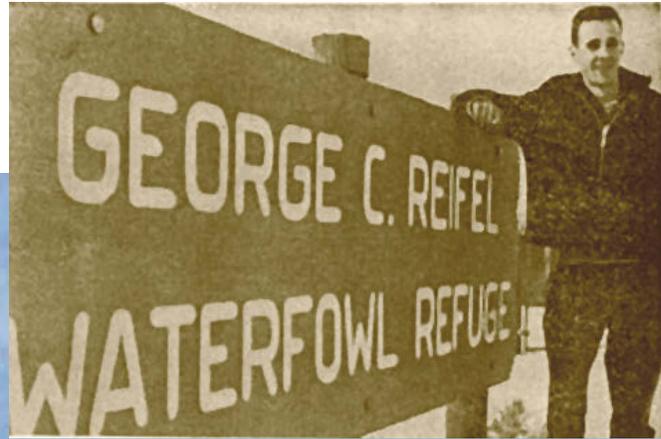
1969 A small concession and information booth is built where our current Gift Shop sits. Bird seed was ten cents a bag and admission was free! By this time, the Sanctuary housed over 450 captive (pinioned) waterfowl on display.

1970 The Sanctuary starts to charge admission, after operating only on membership fees and donations. In May, the National Audubon Society visits the Sanctuary during their convention. Hundreds of birders come out November 3rd, 1970 when a Spotted Redshank is sighted, and again November 10th, 1971 when a Brambling visits the Sanctuary. Even today, these birds would draw crowds.

1972 The BCWS delivers nature programs with funding from BC's Local Initiatives Program providing naturalists working with Neil Dawe of CWS. Programs included birding courses and workshops. Facilities on-site include by then many penned waterfowl on exhibit, a workshop, kitchen and washrooms, a bird hospital, lookout tower, gate house and a nature house on pilings offshore. The Reifel property is transferred to Environment Canada through a combined sale (of the farm) and donation (of the Sanctuary lands). Conditions of the transfer were the Sanctuary would be managed for the primary benefit of waterfowl and would be named after the late George C. Reifel in perpetuity. The Reifel lease to the BCWS also had to be honoured.

1973 Environment Canada establishes the Alaksen National Wildlife Area and the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. The former Reifel home becomes the new headquarters of the Pacific and Yukon Region of the Canadian Wildlife Service.

The first resident manager, Brian Davies, circa 1969.



The Nature House on the foreshore . Photo: Vancouver Sun, 1972.



The paths and ponds in the Display Field in 1970.



A Bird's Eye View in 1978
Photo: Beautiful BC Magazine, 1978.

1974 The Sanctuary, along with many other areas around Vancouver, becomes part of a re-introduction program for Canada Geese.

1976 Sir Peter Scott from the Wildfowl Trust in England visits the Sanctuary.

1978 A bequest of \$50,000 from Dr. Riddehough provides operating capital for a few years.

1980 The Sanctuary has 70,000 visitors, and there are some signs of discontent from the farming community regarding road traffic and crop depredation.

1981 Our present-day blue metal tower is installed in the West Field. The parking lot logs are installed, and Brian Davies leaves after 15 years of service, to be replaced by Colin Trefry as resident manager. There are many birds now being brought in for rehabilitation.

1982 A rare bird (Temminck's Stint) in September draws crowds of birdwatchers.

1983 The program of caring for wounded birds on-site is discontinued.

1984 Ducks Unlimited Canada upgrades the dyke from the viewing platform to the seaward dyke, and the water control structures for Southwest Marsh. Income is down at the Sanctuary, partly due Federal cutbacks of CWS support for programs, and because income from visitors was down (70,000 visitors 1979, 30,000 in 1984). Portable washrooms need to be brought in because of plumbing problems. Staff are laid off and Director John Trevitt keeps the Sanctuary open over the winter.

1985 Two of the BCWS's longest-serving employees start this year. Varri Raffan (then Johnson) is hired for the Gift Shop and John Ireland becomes the resident manager. BCWS actively campaigns for more memberships and support from partners. The road gets paved, CWS helps pay for the retaining wall along parking lot, and a blind at Fuller slough. DUC provides temporary funds for salaries. The first of the now traditional Sunday Morning Bird Walk starts in November.

1986 The first annual Birdathon is held at the Sanctuary. Wildlife Habitat Canada funds brochures and large interpretive art panels which are installed in the new sign kiosk. The Gift Shop (what is now our Warming Hut) gets an upgrade. Lesser Snow Goose are captured and provided with distinctive neck collars, and again in 1987 and 1988. In 1988, the Russian, American and Canadian biologists all work together to capture and neck-collar several hundred birds just outside the Sanctuary gates.

1987 BCWS begins major fundraising to upgrade the Sanctuary's buildings to accommodate the display of the recently-acquired Leo Malfet collection of 500 taxidermy birds. The Adopt-A-Snow Goose Program starts, where for a small contribution, participants can receive reports about a research bird. Lynn Valley Ecology Center brings 50 volunteers to plant trees along the Sanctuary's trails. The BCWS along with the Save the Salmon Society has its first Fin and Feathers fundraising dinner. The first annual Snow Goose Festival is held on the long weekend of November.



Birdwatchers from throughout North America focus intently on one of nine rare Trumpeter Swans of George C. Reifel Waterfowl Refuge in Delta. Members of America's National Audubon Society-held annual convention made a special trip to see the swans. (May 17th, 1970, Vancouver Sun).



Naturalists Neil Dawe (above) and Colin Trefry (below) led many hundreds of school programs in the early 1970's. Photos: BCWS Archives

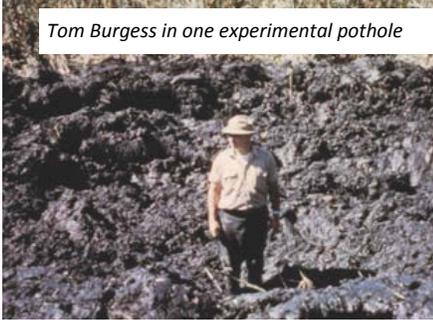


Some Headlines and Visitors

(January 25th, 1966 Vancouver Sun)

Ducks Had to Be Airlifted, But Taxes Could Easily Fly

Operation wild duck airlift could cost taxpayers up to \$2,500. Air Canada's price for air freighting a duck from Calgary to Vancouver is approximately \$2.00. And the Canadian Wildlife Service plans to airlift between 4,000 and 5,000 ducks to Vancouver by the end of the week. (The CWS is a federal government agency which has an annual budget of about \$1 million.)



Tom Burgess in one experimental pothole

(November, 1987, Delta Optimist)

Explosives aid waterfowl

by Jo Marshall
VANCOUVER — Improving waterfowl habitat by blasting open potholes with C-1 explosives is a current activity at the George Reifel waterfowl refuge, near Vancouver. Initially, the company provided technical assistance and now the work is continuing with explosives donated by Continental Explosives Ltd., our distributor. C-I-L Wildlife Management Fellowship holder, Thomas Burgess (L), and unidentified assistant stand beside a newly-created marsh pond. Establishing ponds by banishing cattails leaves room for increased and varied food supply around the edges. The project is being carried on by the B.C. Waterfowl Society in cooperation with the Canadian Wildlife Service.

10*** THE PROVINCE, Friday, October 18, 1972

Reifel bird refuge grows by 570 acres

Environment Minister Jack Davis announced Thursday the federal government has bought 570 acres of farmland on Westham Island in Delta to

had already been created by the founders of the refuge." Davis added the refuge, a

(May 27, 1986 Delta Optimist)

Bird fanciers flock to see a rare Stint

When a group of bird-watchers peered through the rushes at a flock of sandpipers earlier this week, they went into a flap. Peering back at them was a Temminck's Stint, a tiny Siberian bird never seen before in North America. And now it is a bird fancier's flock to see a bird. The Temminck's Stint arrived in a flock with a flock of other birds.

Special bird-a-thon at Reifel on Sunday

Sunday, June 1 is National Bird Day, and an excellent time to visit the Reifel Bird Sanctuary on Westham Island. There will be several knowledgeable bird people around that day to help in a Bird-a-Thon. The purpose of the Bird-a-Thon is to combine the fun of bird-watching with raising funds for an interpretation centre at the sanctuary. If you want to participate, you can pledge a certain sum per bird species seen by "super birders" John Toochin and Wayne Diakow (Beware, they're out to tally up 100 species!) If you prefer, collect your own pledges and

First Snow Goose Festival

Twenty thousand snow geese, arriving at Westham Island from their breeding grounds on Wrangell Island in the USSR, will be welcomed Saturday and Sunday during B.C.'s first Snow Goose Festival. These creatures "non-stop over the water and arrive every year at

B.C. residents can flock to the show

(May 15th, 1987 Delta Optimist)

Reifel Sanctuary creator dies at 69

George Henry Reifel, who dedicated 30 acres of land on Ladner's Westham Island for a wildlife sanctuary that bears the family name, died suddenly at his Palm Desert home on Saturday. "He passed away in his Palm Desert home, but I think his real home is here," said his son George Reifel, 32.

ject of his thesis was the sugar beet seed project, as his family grew 500 acres of the seed on Westham Island during the war. The beet seed venture was the largest such experiment of its kind in Canada. It successfully supplied one-third of the country's seed demand. Reifel donated a portion of that land for the creation of the Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary in 1963. The sanctuary was named in memory of his father. Reifel also successfully founded the Delta



Visitors were surprised to have Patrick Duffy (of TV show Dallas) helping Varri at the Gift Shop! (Sep. 11th, 2000 Delta Optimist)

Want a snow goose?

Have you ever wanted a snow goose of your very own? Well if the answer is yes, then the folks at the Reifel Bird Sanctuary on Westham Island have an offer you just won't be able to refuse. They are offering 400 of the

(Oct 5th, 1996 Delta Optimist)

(Aug. 11th, 1992 South Delta Today)

Reifel Bird Sanctuary featured in fall exhibit at Delta Museum and Archives

Jan. 10th, 1998 Delta Optimist

Society cooks goose festival

Organizers conclude annual event causes too much wear on sanctuary

Funding awarded for Reifel

A facilities expansion at the Reifel Wildlife Sanctuary got a shot in the arm last week from the provincial government.

(May 12th, 1991, Delta Optimist)



Prince Philip visits Reifel for birdathon

Delta was host to a royal visitor over the weekend. Prince Philip made a stop at the Reifel Bird Sanctuary Sunday during a tour of the Lower Mainland. The prince, here in his capacity as international president of the World Wildlife Fund, participated in a birdathon to raise money for the world's largest private conservation group. "We're expecting to raise about \$100,000 as a result of the prince's visit," said David Love, executive vice-president of the Canadian branch of WWF. On his two and a half day visit to Delta Sunday, Prince Philip counted 89 species of birds. Love said people can make pledges on each of the birds the prince spotted during his walk. "Most people are pledging about 75 cents for each bird," said Love. Prince Philip was accompanied on his walk through the Westham Island sanctuary by artist Robert Bassman and Wayne Campbell, curator of ornithology at the Royal B.C. Museum. The prince will end his western Canada visit tomorrow.

Mr. George C. Reifel, Prince Philip, and Monty Hummel from the World Wildlife Fund.



Birders break record for 24-hour sightings

(Mar. 2nd, 2002 Seattle Times)

Birds and Their Watchers Flock to World Class Refuge

1988 The first BCWS Pig and Corn Roast fundraising dinner is held, with chief cooks Henry Parker and Robert Husband. BC Hydro upgrades power lines and services.

1989 Another bird blind is constructed in the NE corner.

1990 The Greenfields program begins to coordinate efforts of wildlife agencies and local Delta farmers in areas of wildlife value through a winter cover crop program. Roger Tory Peterson visits the Sanctuary.

1991 Go BC (BC Lotteries) provides a major grant needed for the upgrading of the facilities at the entrance in the form of a new Gift Shop, the redesign of the old one into the present Warming hut, and the upgrade of the whole service building into the present-day Lecture Hall.

1992 George H. Reifel passes away, Prince Philip visits as part of the Royal Birdathon for the World Wildlife Fund, and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney visits. The new Gift Shop opens.

1993 The 30 year lease to BCWS expires, and after reconfirming the Society's primary focus as managers of the Sanctuary, a new 30 year term is signed with CWS. The Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust is formed.

1994 DUC replaces all of the water control structures in the Sanctuary and in Alaksen NWA. Fred Auger is recognized with a cairn overlooking Southwest Marsh.

1995 Major water line improvements are done to equip the Sanctuary with better washroom plumbing and fire protection. A section of the driveway is widened to make more parking. Barry Leach passes away.

1996 After 10 years, the annual Snow Goose Festival is cancelled due to the impact on Westham Island residents and Sanctuary habitats of hosting up to 8,000 visitors in just in one weekend. November is now introduced as Snow Goose month. The Bio-Green waste water treatment system is installed. Marshnotes starts publishing covers in colour. DUC replaces control structures and partners on interpretive signs.

1997 New interpretive panels are installed on the sign kiosk.

1998 A partner project involving interpretive signs at Lost Lagoon in Stanley Park is finished.

1999 Directors of BCWS start to explore partnerships to rejuvenate the education program, and visit DUC's Oak Hammock Marsh in Manitoba.

2000 Kathleen Fry from DUC is contracted by BCWS to carry out some tours and coordinate education program opportunities.

2001 The Vancouver Foundation provides a grant to BCWS and DUC which funds training workshops, and upgrades to Lecture Hall and school program equipment.

2002 Great Horned Owls nest in cottonwood on East dyke.

Changes to Accommodate Visitors

The Gift Shop and admissions gate have changed a few times over the years. Initially, there was only a small concession stand in 1967, when the Sanctuary opened. By 1985, a small building served as our Gift Shop and admissions gate. In 1992, when the new (current) Gift Shop was constructed, the old one was converted to the Warming Hut and the bridge that led to it was decommissioned.



The first shop circa 1985 (right), which was later converted to the Warming Hut.. It was very crowded in there.



Front view of our current Gift Shop (below), constructed in 1991-92 and views of its more spacious interior (bottom of page).





The original "service building" (left) originally housed a bird hospital, washrooms and a basic classroom. In 1992, when the new Gift Shop was built, this building was also renovated to become what is our current Lecture Hall, kitchen and washrooms. (below).



In 2005, the viewing platform overlooking Southwest Marsh (left) was rebuilt to include a roof, benches and an access ramp for strollers and wheelchairs. (below).



John Ireland and the Kiwanis Club (above) constructing the most recent bird blind along the Center Dyke in 2004.

By 1990, John Stewart (Varri's father), had planted 4,050 daffodils along the East and North dykes. Each spring this lasting legacy provides a cheery splash of colour along the trails (right).



A comparison of price structures over the years (below), with admissions introduced in 1970.

	1970	1976	1982	1983	1990	1991	2000	2010
Adults	50 c	\$1	\$1.50	\$2.50	\$3	\$3.25	\$4	\$5
Children	free	50 c	75 c	\$1	\$1	\$1	\$2	\$3
Seniors	free	50 c	\$1	\$1	\$1	\$1	\$2	\$3
Life Membership	\$150	\$150	\$200	\$200	\$200	\$225	\$250	\$500
Single Membership	\$5	\$5	\$7	\$7	\$12.50	\$13.50	\$20	\$25
Family Membership			\$15	\$15	\$25	\$27	\$40	\$50
Bird Seed	10 c	10 c	25 c (1981)	50 c (1985)	50 c	50 c	50 c	\$1

2003 Portable toilet is installed near the tower. The BCWS website is up and running, with hosting provided courtesy of DUC. The Habitat Conservation Trust Fund provides funds for a translation of some of the Sanctuary information into 7 different languages, plus the conversion of other Fraser River estuary handbooks into digital formats. The first annual Sanctuary calendar is produced.

2004 The Kiwanis Club provides funds and manpower to construct a blind along the center trail, just off into West Field.

2005 The viewing platform overlooking the Southwest Marsh is revamped to provide a much larger deck area, an access ramp for wheelchairs and baby strollers, and bench seating under a basic roof. Jack Bates, president of the BCWS, is recognized for his conservation achievement through the BC Lieutenant Governor's Greenwing Award

2006 With funds from RBC Royal Bank, DUC provides some bird identification signs for the new platform.

2006 The first successful grant application to HSBC Bank Canada results in funding for 50 classes of inner city schools to visit the Sanctuary. From 2006 to present date, HSBC has continued this annual grant.

2007 Wild Birds Unlimited provides a \$5,000 grant to the school program.

2009 John Ireland retires as well as two part-time staff. Over the next two years, Claire de la Salle, Jason Young, Larry Kane, and Randy Lorenz temporarily help out, then Laura Jordison is hired for reception. Kathleen Fry becomes Sanctuary Manager. A roof is built at the workshop to house the tractors, and the deck of the blue tower is replaced. Telephone lines are upgraded to provide greater flexibility with multiple lines to serve all the buildings.

2010 Facilities continue to be refurbished, with the Fuller Slough Blind replaced with a more open waterfront lookout. The sign kiosk is also redesigned to a more open shelter with all signs facing the entrance. Some parts of the entrance trail area are cleared of blackberry and planted in a variety of native shrubs.

2011 Internet service is made available at the Sanctuary for the first time through a wireless hub. Dave McClue (maintenance) and Shanna Fredericks (biologist) are hired.

2012 Bank erosion at the Viewing Platform by Southwest Marsh (due to the ducks) is solved through creation of a special wall of the Delta-Lok system. The drawdown required for the work affects other areas of the Sanctuary, making for an interesting birding year. Extra log booms are put in Southwest Marsh to reduce erosion. Young Douglas Fir trees are planted along East Dyke to eventually replace some aging veteran trees. Patricia Banning-Lover retires as Editor of Marshnotes, with Kathleen Fry becoming Editor.

2013 The Sanctuary turns 50!



The "team" circa 1996-97 with (left to right) Al Grass, Varri Raffan, Norm Hill, Randy Lorenz, and John Ireland.



John Ireland, Sanctuary manager from 1985 to 2009, (now retired) showing rodent skulls and owl pellets to a school class class sponsored by HSBC Bank Canada. HSBC to date has provided more than \$100,000 towards a special program for disadvantaged schools in the Lower Mainland.

Kathleen Fry, current Sanctuary Manager, (below, far left) showing a class the sign about the migration of the Lesser Snow Goose.





Did you know that long-term volunteer and past Director Norm Hill bagged 34,500 bags of bird seed in 1994?



Marshnotes Editor from 1992 to 2012 (now retired) Patricia Banning-Lover (2nd from left) with some of her long-term newsletter mailout team at the 2009 Volunteer dinner.



Our "garden ladies" Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick (left to right) have tended the front entrance gardens for the past 15 years.



The first Sanctuary barbecue was 1988, with Directors Robert Husband (left) and Henry Parker (right) as chefs.



Directors and staff at the 2003 Annual General Meeting of the BCWS (left to right):

George Reifel, John Bowles, George Reifel (Jnr), David Shackleton, Randy Lorenz, Wayne Diakow, Jack Bates, John Ireland, Jim Morrison, Varri Raffan, Patricia Banning-Lover, Kathleen Fry and Jeremy McCall.

Charter Signatories, Presidents and Major Donors

Charter Signatories

Robert (Bob) D. Harris
Ian McTaggart Cowan
Frank R. Butler
Ernest W. Taylor
Barry A. Leach
W. Arthur Benson
Jim Murray
Ed Meade
Allan Best
Ronald Jackson
Richard A. Littler
Jim S. Railton
James Hatter
Mike Cramond



Founding Donors

Gordon Farrell
H. R. MacMillan
Kathleen Norgan
George H. Reifel
Alma J. Reifel
Mr. & Mrs. Douglas M. Stewart

We would also like to recognize and thank our growing number of Life Members, who are listed on the outer wall of the Warming Hut.

Presidents

Frank. R. Butler
R. Vernon Kirkby
P J. Bandy
George H. Reifel
Robert C. Husband
Len H. Cornell
Grenville P. Finch-Noyes
Craig Runyan
Wayne Diakow
Barney W. Reifel
George. C. Reifel
Ken Hall
Jack Bates (current)

Special Donors

Alberta Distillers
Alcan Smelters & Chemicals Ltd
Fred S. Auger
L. L. G. Bentley
Rita Butterworth
Canadian Airlines International Ltd
Canadian Industries Ltd
Canada Permanent Trust
Conservation International Bahamas
Daon Development Corporation
Delta-Ladner Rod and Gun Club
Distillers Corporation Ltd
Ducks Unlimited Canada
The Estate of Olga Marilyn Dutton
The Estate of Margaret Ford
Fraser River Pile and Dredge Ltd
Ed and Evelyn Foster
Gray Beverage Inc.
Graymont Limited
The Estate of John Phillip Gofton
Hongkong Bank of Canada
Robert C. Husband
International Forest Products Limited
Kirkland Island Waterfowl Society
Ralph Koonts Memorial
The Estate of Toni Korsan
Langley Rod and Gun Club
C. P. Leckie Memorial
The Estate of Delores Lemaire
Leon and Thea Koerner Memorial
MacMillan Bloedel Limited
H. R. MacMillan
The Jean MacMillan Southam Foundation
Archie McLarty Trust
The McLean Foundation

Eleanor Malfet
Mr. and Mrs. Martin Malfet
Hugh C. Monahan Memorial
Ministry of Environment- Canadian Wildlife Service
Ministry of Northern Affairs and Development
Molson Breweries
The Estate of John Nivea
North Shore Fish and Game Club
Pacific Elevators Ltd.
Pacific Shooters Association
Henry Parker
The Estate of Earl A. Pletsch
H. E. Perry Memorial
Patricia R. Phillips
Port Coquitlam & District Hunting & Fishing Club
Ron Prinz Memorial
Province of British Columbia Lottery Fund
Province of British Columbia Wildlife Branch
Reifel Cooke Group of Companies
George H. Reifel Memorial
Norma E. Reifel Memorial
Geoffrey B. Riddehough
Edith Mountjoy Riggs
Richmond Rod and Gun Club
Sapperton Fish and Game Club
Scott Cedar Products
Audrey Selander Memorial
Jean Southam
The Estate of Fred Stevens
William G. Turnbull
Olga Virtue Memorial
The Honorable Clarence E. Wallace
Judy T. Wertz
Westham Island Gun Club
Wildlife Habitat Canada
W. John D. Woodward

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Report on the 52nd Annual General Meeting

The 52nd Annual General Meeting took place on Tuesday April 16, 2013 in the Lecture Hall of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. BCWS Vice-President George Reifel called the Meeting to order at 7:33 pm and welcomed everyone. He declared a quorum in attendance. BCWS Administrator Robert Butler acted as Secretary.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE 51st AGM: The Minutes of the 51st Annual General Meeting, held on Tuesday April 17, 2012 with minor amendments were approved.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS: The financial statements for the year ending December 31, 2012 along with the Accountants' Report, prepared by KPMG were presented by the Society's Treasurer James Morrison together with a brief summary of the highlights. Questions from the floor were responded to by the Treasurer.

APPOINTMENT OF THE ACCOUNTANTS FOR 2013: KPMG were appointed as the Society's Accountants for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2013, with remuneration to be determined by the Board.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Vice-President George Reifel introduced those Society's Directors that were present, and gave a brief report on the Society and the Board's activities for the year 2012 noting the Society remains in a strong financial position. He thanked our staff, the Directors and all of the volunteers for their contributions during 2012. He also recognized Sanctuary Manager Kathleen Fry for her work on the Marshnotes production in addition to all her other work initiatives during the past year, Gift Shop Manager Varri Raffan for her 27 years of service to the BCWS, Laura Jordison for her Marshnotes photos and assisting in the Gift Shop, Dave McClue for his work on Sanctuary maintenance, and the newest staff member and biologist, Shanna Fredericks.

SANCTUARY MANAGERS'S REPORT: Sanctuary Manager, Kathleen Fry, reviewed the Manager's report briefing members on the 2012 activities. The report noted there are 2,226 Members as of December 31, down slightly from the prior year. There were 70,125 visitors to the Sanctuary in 2012. April was the best month with 8,021 visitors followed by March with 7,553 then May with 7,155 through the gates. We also experienced 20 days during 2012 where visitor numbers exceeded the parking lot capacity. There were 245 group bookings in 2012. Once again, as in most prior years, many people buy seed and remain in the parking area to feed the birds. The report acknowledged all staff and all the volunteers who, through their hard work, contribute to making the Sanctuary a feature destination for visitors.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: In accord with the Society's bylaws, three Directors were elected for a two year term by acclamation. The Directors are: Douglas B. Ransome, Barney J. Reifel and Kenneth I Thompson.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 pm.

Coffee and Tea and refreshments followed the meeting.

The British Columbia Waterfowl Society
gratefully acknowledges the continuing support of its Accountants

KPMG Peat Marwick Thorne Inc.,
Suite 400, North Tower, 5811 Cooney Road, Richmond, B.C. V6X 3M1

Bird Highlights



Winter Evening Grosbeak and Crabapple. Photo: Jim Martin

January was a cool and foggy month. Although nothing out of the ordinary was reported this month, the 91 species counted was the highest count for the last 3 Januarys.

December 29 – January 5

On January 2nd, 8 Short-eared Owls were seen hunting along the outer marshes. This is a high count for the Sanctuary. The Short-eared Owl is a diurnal bird of prey and hunts during the day. Diurnal owls (Snowy Owl, Northern Hawk Owl and Short-eared Owl to name some of our local ones) have a different type of eye from the nocturnal owls who see better in the dark. January 5th was the first winter report at the Sanctuary of a Red-breasted Merganser.

January 6 – January 12

On the 6th a large flock of 30 Evening Grosbeaks were spotted. On the 10th a male and female Canvasback and two Swamp Sparrows were seen. Swamp Sparrows can be a challenge to spot, as they are elusive and often take a few visits to find one. Most of the sightings are in tall vegetation along the west dyke and northward to the corner behind the tower. The Swamp Sparrow is a stout bird with a dark back, a chestnut cap and chestnut on the

wing edges. They have no wing bars and apparently their legs are longer than most Sparrows in order to forage in water. January 11th the first winter sighting of a female Common Goldeneye.

January 13 - January 19

The Common Goldeneye is still around this week. We only get 1 or 2 of these birds a year if we are lucky. The Common Goldeneye, a diving duck, winters on coastal bays, fresh water lakes and rivers. The male has a white spot located between the bill and its golden eye. Females have a brown head with a white ring around their necks. Both sexes have definite white wing patches noticeable in flight. We are now down to 4 of the 6 Black-crowned Night Herons. Nine Western Meadowlarks were seen along the central trails of the Sanctuary. January 15th nine Red Crossbills were spotted. The Anna's Hummingbird is still being seen feeding at the feeder in front of the house.

January 20 – January 26

Offshore a Common Loon was seen with the assistance of a spotting scope. The Common Loons in winter prefer inshore seacoasts or large bodies of water near the ocean. They feed primarily on fish but their diet also includes crustaceans, frogs, molluscs and vegetation. Late spring we will lose them as they head to northern freshwater lakes to nest. The first noticed return of a Lincoln's Sparrow at the Sanctuary was this week. We haven't seen them around the Sanctuary since the end of August. A few of the Meadowlarks, Cackling Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Rough-legged Hawk and Canvasback were other birds of note for this week.

January 27 – February 2

Red Crossbills are still being seen around the Sanctuary. Early returns of Greater Yellowlegs were reported this week. We haven't seen them since they left last October. Birds of prey are plentiful this week which had a total of 76 species.

February generally does not have much in the way of migrating birds. There is usually a bit of a lull before the spring migrants shows up. Each week in February was very similar as far as the types of birds present so I have summarized the month. Early nesters like Great Horned Owl, Barn Owl and Bald Eagle will be building their nests and laying eggs. Even though it was quiet we recorded 94 species.

February 3 – March 2

February 3rd a single Yellow-rumped Warbler was reported. The Yellow-rumped Warblers are the first Warblers to show up at the Sanctuary in spring and the last to leave in the fall. On the 6th 10 Northern Saw-Whet Owls were counted. Some were spotted while doing

maintenance in out of bounds area. Looking back in old issues of “Marshnotes” I notice that in December 1995 we also had 10 Saw Whet Owls recorded.

On the 6th a small flock of 25 Greater White-fronted Geese were spotted. Flocks of Evening Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls and Red Crossbills are still being seen most days. Larger numbers of Snow Geese are noticeable now as they are arriving here from Skagit Valley Washington. They will be around the Fraser Delta until about middle of April when they will leave our area and head back to Wrangle Island Russia to nest.

February 10th Red-throated Loons were spotted offshore. Hooded, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers were all present this month. February 18th a single male Eurasian Wigeon was seen on the House Pond behind the Gift Shop. The male Eurasian Wigeon is easily identified from the American Wigeon by the rusty-red head and buff crown. Females of both species are very similar but the head of the female Eurasian Wigeon is often tinged reddish. February 24th 2 Anna’s Hummingbirds were found at the Sanctuary. The following species were further highlights reported for the month of February- Ruddy Duck, Black-bellied Plover, Cedar Waxwings, Merlin, Canvasback and Rough-legged Hawk.

March picks up as spring brings new birds migrating into our area. Singing birds looking for mates and the budding pussy willows and daffodils are welcome signs of spring. Total species count for March was 85.

March 3 – March 9

On March 3rd the first spring Tree Swallow was sighted flying at the southwest corner of the Sanctuary. March 4th the 4 remaining Black-crowned Night Herons are still present. March 9th a Snowy Owl was spotted about 300 meters off the west dyke sitting on a log. Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shrike, Canvasback and Greater White-fronted Geese were the other highlights for the week.

March 10 – March 16

Although seldom seen at the Sanctuary the Brewer’s Blackbird was reported this week. These blackbirds when seen in the sun are nicely colored with a purple glossy head and green gloss on body and wings and really bright yellow eyes that stand out. On the 16th the first Sanctuary spring sighting of a Rufous Hummingbird was seen at a feeder. Over the last many years at the Sanctuary like clockwork, we have had the first report of a Rufous Hummingbird either on the 15th or 16th of March.

March 17 – March 23

This week a total of 67 species were reported. An unusual Sanctuary sighting was the White-throated Sparrow which

was seen on the 17th. This is usually an eastern species, but it was spotted along the east dyke and has been seen at feeders. It resembles a White-crowned Sparrow except for the yellow dots between its eyes and beak along with the white throat. March 17th a Short-eared Owl was reported flying along outer marsh. A Northern Shrike was also seen that same day at the northwest corner of the Sanctuary on the outer dyke. Two American Bitterns were also being spotted in the reed at the same northwest corner. They were fishing in the shallow water and seemed to be oblivious to the binoculars and cameras that were trained on them.

March 24 – March 30

This week’s list jumped to 73 species. There is only one Black-crowned Night Heron left now. A few of the highlights for the week were Evening Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, Red Crossbill, Savannah Sparrow and Snowy Owl. On March 29th the first report for the spring was a single male Cinnamon Teal out on the southwest marsh. We don’t get many of these small ducks but males sure stand out with their overall bright cinnamon color. The females look much like female Green-winged Teals. This week every year we notice a decline in the waterfowl population especially the ones that hang out in the pond by the parking lot. They are now pulling out to head back to nest where they were born. The resident population is now sitting on eggs and we expect to see the first hatch around the last week of April if the nests are not predated upon by the numerous eggs eaters out here.



Common Redpoll

Photo: Jim Martin

Text: Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager

Updating Our Bird Checklist

The last George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary bird checklist was printed in March, 1995 (Wildlife Viewing Program) and included 263 species. 26 new species have been recorded since then, with the list now standing at 289 species.

The following list of birds are the species seen since 1995, with the sighting dates, as compiled from previous Marshnotes and office records.

Cackling Goose
(became a separate species of Canada Goose, 2004)
Eurasian Green-winged Teal (January 2007)
Barrow's Goldeneye (January 2011)
Mandarin Duck (November 2002)
Boreal Owl (November 1995)
Rock Sandpiper (November 1998)
Wood Sandpiper (October 2010)
Red-Necked Stint (June 1997)
Willet (August 2006)

Common Murre (December 2001)
White Pelican (September 1997)
Brown Pelican (December 1998)
Heermann's Gull (August 2007)
Eurasian Collared Dove (August 2007)
Tropical Kingbird (November 2010)
Ash-throated Flycatcher (September 1999)
Dusky Flycatcher (September 2004)
American Dipper (July 2001)
Gray Catbird (May 2007)
Tennessee Warbler (August 2005)
Magnolia Warbler (April 2011)
Prothonotary Warbler (October 2002)
Yellow-breasted Chat (May 2005)
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (September 2006)
Cassin's Finch (March 2012)
Green-tailed Towhee (September 2002)

Text: Varri Raffan, Gift Shop 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.

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

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

Staff, maintain and expand facilities at the Sanctuary for the benefit of its visitors and members.

Provide interpretive and education programs, including guided tours for organized groups of all ages.

Contribute towards important scientific research on waterfowl to determine their life cycle needs for survival.

Provide support for like-minded organizations who are working on waterfowl-related projects.

Enclosed is my cheque or VISA/Mastercard number for:

SINGLE Membership: **\$25**

FAMILY Membership: **\$50**

LIFE Membership: **\$500**

Donation (tax deductible)

VISA Mastercard

VISA or Mastercard # _____

Expiry Date: _____

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

Address: _____

_____ Postal Code _____

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

Telephone: 604 946 6980 Fax: 604 946 6982
Website: www.reifelbirds sanctuary.com

Manager's Report

I was thinking while preparing this edition that some things do not change much over the years. Decades old photos of the manager out in the parking lot directing traffic and references to excessive habitat damage due to overeager visitors trying to see owls.... all of these things seem very familiar somehow.

It has been quite busy so far this year, with over 22,000 visitors already in the first three months. March figures were particularly high (a record-breaking 11,000 people), with the sunny two weeks of school spring break and all of the Easter weekend being days when the parking lot and most other parking was full to overflowing.

Throughout the first three months of 2013, we had many interesting sightings of Evening Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls, and Red Crossbills, but days of heavy visitor use all seemed to be due to the almost-predictable presence of Northern Saw-whet Owls along East and North Dyke, the mysterious comings and goings of a pair of Great Horned Owls and the ever-changing Sandhill Crane sagas.

I hope people understand our intervention at the one Saw-whet Owl roost where we ended up erecting a fence in early February and leaving it in place for nearly a month. Shanna has done an excellent summary of our roost site surveys of the Saw-whet Owls (see page 4). It was a great year for owl watching for our visitors. Two winters ago, we also had relatively high owl numbers, and some of the roosts used that winter were the exact same sites used this winter, down to the exact same branch. There were many opinions voiced by visitors packed around one of the roosting birds, arguing about the impacts of camera flashes, loud voices, or whether it really bothered the bird to have a camera in its face. We decided to restrict any activity that physically threatened the habitat or changed the nature of the drooping fir boughs for the bird, as these roost sites seem to be consistently used from year to year. Imagine if all the camera equipment and body parts of March's 11,000 visitors were inserted into the branches near this one bird or on top of the understory vegetation around the tree! The branch and tree would not be the same. These physical disruptions were deemed most damaging, hence the fence.

Elsewhere in the Sanctuary, there were, as usual Sandhill Crane dramas. We had nine cranes for most of the winter. Our resident pair tolerated the extra seven birds until late February, when the family of 2 adults and 2 grown colts from Richmond were sent packing, and presumably went right to the golf course and adjacent wetland where they usually nest. Unfortunately, one of the colts was hit by a golf ball Feb. 28th, and the resulting broken leg was severe enough to require considerable time in a rehabilitation facility to see what a vet can do for it. The pair must have chased out the remaining healthy colt, as it arrived back at the Sanctuary March 8th and has joined the trio of young

non-breeding 2nd and 3rd year birds that we have had visiting for the past year. This lovely team of four has charmed visitors for months now, practicing their courtship dances, parading around the parking lot, weeding and aerating all lawns, and generally talking back to the resident male of our nesting pair. Our resident pair began trying to chase these four out of the Sanctuary from mid-March onwards in preparation for their own nesting season. We did a little crane island reconstruction on Feb. 19th, bringing out sandbags, rotten logs, topsoil and bark mulch to fill in the eroded areas. The pair was first seen checking out the nest island starting March 26th, and there were serious crane fights between the pair and the non-breeding younger birds a week later all over the parking lot to the amazement of visitors. The pair is currently incubating an egg (laid April 14th), on their nest island with the hatch date predicted to be mid-May. At least once a day our resident male stalks through the Sanctuary looking for those pesky other four birds and puts them to flight.

Apart from that spring is here in its many forms. Wood Ducks have staked out their boxes, Salmonberry has been in bloom since mid-March, coinciding with Hummingbird arrivals. Lesser Snow Geese have been here since mid-February, with flocks increasing substantially in March, carpeting fields around the Sanctuary driveway and feeding up into intertidal channels on the foreshore. In the first week of March, the first few Red-eared Slider turtles were seen sunning themselves on Fuller Slough logs.

Plans for the next few months include the repair of the bird blind in the far northeast corner, now that the hazard trees surrounding it have been removed. A clearing next to a stand of oak trees on the inner paths in the northeast corner will be planted with some native shrubs, and some shorelines and slopes will need some erosion protection. April, May and June are some of the busiest months of the year for school class visits, coinciding with the hatch of ducklings, goslings and (hopefully) Sandhill Crane young.

Here's hoping for good weather and peaceful conditions throughout the Sanctuary in upcoming months.

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

A Reminder to Visitors

We are obliged to keep roads clear for emergency vehicles (and for everyone to be able to get in and out). Please do not get creative about finding new parking spots even if all available ones seem to be full. On very congested days there are staff in the parking lot who can try find you a space. Please avoid blocking fire hydrants, the driveway by the house, or the main driveway, where your vehicle needs to be right off the pavement or it causes problems.
Thanks very much!

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

5191 Robertson Road, Delta, British Columbia V4K 3N2



CANADA		POSTES
POST		CANADA
Postage paid		Port payé
Publications Mail		Poste-publications
40924050		

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO 40924050
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO
CIRCULATION DEPT.
330 - 123 MAIN STREET
TORONTO ON M5W 1A1
email: circdept@publisher.com



Short-eared Owl Hovering Over the Marsh © Jim Martin