

Marshnotes[®]



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
SPRING 2015**

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

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

- dedicated to the conservation and study of migratory waterfowl-

Marshnotes:

Editor: Kathleen Fry

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

July 15th, 2015

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Administrator:

Robert Butler

Staff:

Sanctuary Manager: Kathleen Fry
Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan
Reception: Laura Jordison
Biologist: Dan Dixon
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 (60 yrs +): \$3
School Groups: Special discounts available; pre-booking is required.

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A Visit From a Great Gray Owl



On February 7th, a casual remark about “there’s some sort of big owl over there in the trees “ began a three-week interlude of Great Gray Owl watching. We quite enjoyed providing “guided tours” to the bird for the endless crowds coming just to see this bird. As seen on the front cover photo, the bird seemed quite unconcerned about audiences watching it hunt Townsend’s Voles and some excellent photos and videos were taken. On sunny days when it seemed too bright to expect the bird to be hunting out in the open, small groups were led into its roost site.

We think this was an immature bird, relatively calm about nearby people and maybe even curious. After February 26th, its started to be unpredictable, disappearing for up to a week, appearing briefly then disappearing again. We quit offering to find the bird, but it was somewhere nearby for almost three more weeks and may have simply enlarged its hunting territory and found alternative roost sites. Our very last very brief sighting was on March 21st when we could see the white feathers on its neck (the “bowtie”) across the meadow through the pouring rain in a big tree.

Text and Photos: Kathleen Fry, R.Bio
Sanctuary Manager

About Our Covers:

Front Cover: Great Gray Owl
© Michelle Lamberson
Back Cover: American Coot Preening
© Ken Young

A Note From The Editor:

The most useful photos for Marshnotes are those featuring something in the three months covered by that edition. The best approach is to send thumbnails or reduced images or links to posted images. I will then contact you for higher resolution versions. See page 2 for my email and upcoming deadlines. Kathleen Fry

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Bird Highlights

January isn't a big month for migration as birds have settled in for the winter. The total species count for January 2015 was 95.

December 28 – January 3

From the tower, visitors could spot Red-throated Loons and Red-breasted Mergansers. December 30th a Killdeer was reported. The Killdeer has a double dark breast band. When a threat is present either to the nest or their young, Killdeer perform distraction displays. They feign injury and drag a wing or tail while moving away from nest site or young birds. On December 29th there were reports of 16 to 30 Bohemian Waxwings along various trails. A very early migrant Orange-crowned Warbler was seen on the 29th. In the first three days of January, a Sora, Western Meadowlark, Lincoln's Sparrow, Western Grebe, Northern Shrike and Wilson Snipe were all found.



Bohemian Waxwing

Photo: Ken Young

January 4 – January 10

The 9th was the last time the Horned Grebe was seen. It was here on and off since October 23rd 2014. We don't usually see Horned Grebes in the Sanctuary as they prefer to winter on deep open water. On the 10th the first 3 Barn Swallows were found flying over the inner Display Pond. Last year we first saw them on January 4th, 2014. A White-crowned Sparrow was seen this week. Although it is a popular sparrow at backyard feeders in the winter, here at the Sanctuary we don't see many.

January 11 – January 17

This week's list numbered 78 species. On the 11th nine Saw Whet Owls were found. We also had reports of Barred Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl and Barn Owl. An early Greater Yellowlegs was seen this week and on the 14th a Snow Bunting was seen in the potato field off the East Dyke. Seven species of sparrows were reported this week. The Harris' Sparrow is still showing up around the Fuller Slough lookout. Bohemian Waxwings are still being seen amongst a small flock of Cedar Waxwings.

January 18 - January 24

A Sora was spotted at the base of the tower in the reeds. This is an unusual sighting because usually they leave our area by beginning of November to head south to Columbia and Peru for the winter. Five Barn Swallows are now being seen this week. On the 19th a juvenile Northern Shrike was spotted along the West Dyke.

January 25 – January 31

Black-bellied Plovers, Red-throated Loons, Trumpeter Swans, Snow Geese, Red-breasted Mergansers and Dunlin can be seen from the tower at this time of year. January 25th an American Bittern was seen on the northwest corner of West Field. You might have to spend some time staring at the reeds waiting for this species to make a move. By holding its head skyward and having subtle coloring on its neck, throat and breast, it blends into the surrounding marsh plants and is a master of camouflage. Two Swamp Sparrows have been found on most days in this same area. A Greater Yellowlegs was seen on the 27th and throughout the week Western Meadowlark, Lincoln's Sparrow and Mew Gull were also reported.

February 2015 ended with 79 species being observed. At the end of year 2014 I wished that 2015 would bring you a bird you've never seen. Well that came true for the Sanctuary on February 7th when a Great Gray Owl arrived, a first record for the Sanctuary.

...../continued page 6

Important Notices For All Visitors

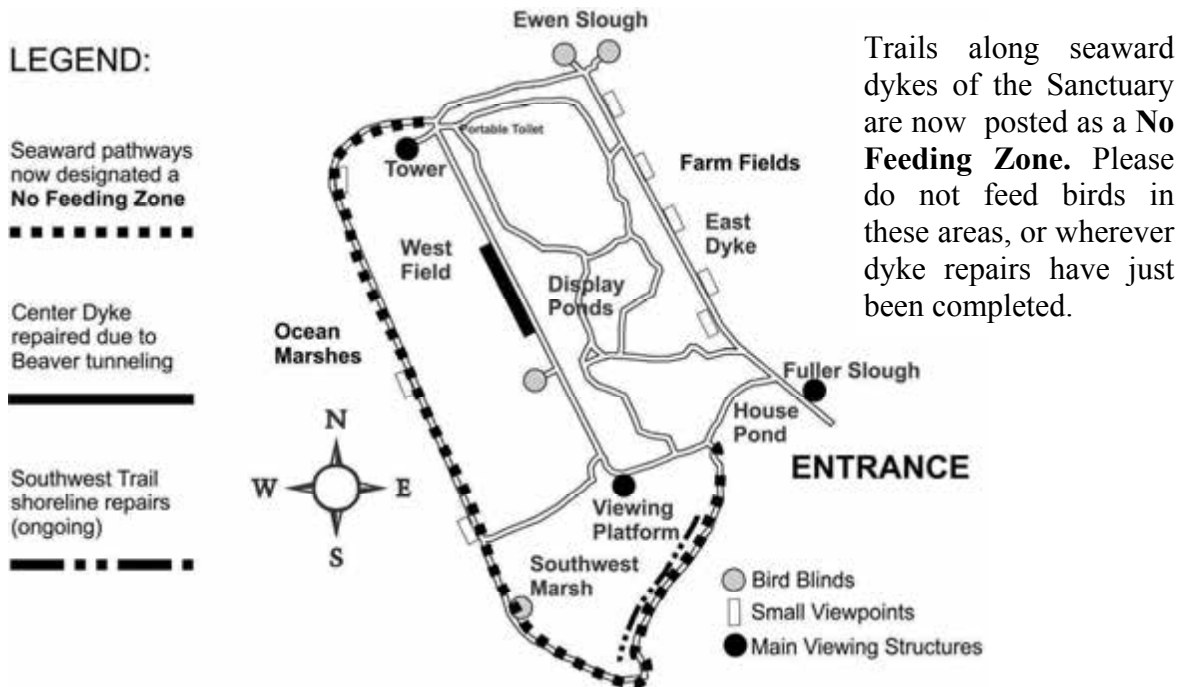
Revised 2015 Sanctuary Checklist

The Sanctuary's checklist has been updated to include all 290 species recorded here since 1963. The previous version dates back to 1995 and was a partnership with the BC Wildlife Watch program. The new checklist provides a synopsis of the months species are likely to be seen, based on detailed weekly species lists since 1990, the long-term knowledge of staff and volunteers, and previous checklists. It is for sale in the Gift Shop as a pocket-sized 12 page booklet.

Calendar Submission Deadline

If you would like to contribute photos for the 2016 Sanctuary calendar, please leave them at the Gift Shop for the attention of Varri Raffan by July 15th, 2015. We limit contributions to only 5 photos taken at the Sanctuary, brought in as either 4 x 6 or 5 x 7 inch glossy print photos, or as jpeg files on a disk. Please remember to include your name and contact information. We look forward to seeing your photographs.

A No Feeding Zone is now designated for the outer dykes



Trails along seaward dykes of the Sanctuary are now posted as a **No Feeding Zone**. Please do not feed birds in these areas, or wherever dyke repairs have just been completed.

This closure is for two reasons.

This area's highest and best use is for visitors to enjoy quiet seaside walks and views of the wilder and more secretive birds such as American Bittern, Sora and Virginia Rails, shorebirds, and the migrant estuary birds who have come in to roost in these ponds at high tide. None of these birds benefit from visitors trying to feed them.

The sloping banks of the dykes in the closure area are made of fine silts and held together mainly by the grass sod and shrubs. Too much "foot traffic", whether it be ducks, geese, or cranes up and down these slopes in pursuit of seed is damaging the vegetation.

Thank you very much for your cooperation in this matter.
Kathleen Fry, Sanctuary Manager.

February 1 – February 7

On the 4th a dark morph Red-tailed Hawk was seen perched in a tree behind the washrooms. This Red-tailed Hawk has an overall rusty brown body with no mottling visible on the chest. Apparently there are more dark morphs in the west and lighter birds to the east. Next time you see one sitting on light posts or fence posts of farms fields check their variable plumage. Adult Red-tailed Hawks have a brick red tail and the eyes are red. The juvenile Red-tailed Hawks have a brown barred tail and yellow eyes.

In the afternoon of the 7th the Great Gray Owl was first seen in a tree on the house driveway. For the next 19 days in late afternoon many visitors were able to observe it hunting in the meadow. Between the owl and the remarkably sunny weather, our visitor numbers were 188% above the average for February. Along with higher attendance, it was nice to see the interest and support from visitors as they purchased annual memberships to the Sanctuary. Our membership enrollment was 222% above that of last February. Here's to great weather and a rare bird.

February 8 - February 14

The variety of waterfowl, songbirds and birds of prey are still excellent this week. Around the bird blind on West Dyke 3 Western Meadowlarks were spotted. On the 13th, a single Savannah Sparrow was reported, and a male Common Merganser was seen on Fuller Slough. Usually we have a few pair but it is likely that during freezing conditions at the beginning of the year, they would have moved out to open water. Black-capped Chickadees are plentiful and are readily land on visitors' hands if there are black-oiled sunflower seeds. Red-winged blackbirds seem to be taking lessons from them and are getting in on the action.

February 15 – February 21

On the 17th we had a very high count of 83 Great Blue Herons here. With the Fraser River Delta as a major wintering area, some high tides and good carp fishing these could be reasons for so many Great Blue Herons in the Sanctuary. The first return date for a Tree Swallow was on the 17th. The Canada Geese are now pairing up and staking claim to nest sites. The Sandhill Cranes are starting to fight amongst themselves as new and renewed bonds are being made. Please give them lots of space on the trail. Their focus has changed from winter feeding to breeding.

February 22 – February 28

At the northeast corner of the Sanctuary on the 22nd the Sunday morning walk encountered approximately

200 Pine Siskins. Pine Siskins (finch family) feed on seeds of birch, alder and pine also small insects. They travel in large flocks and are sometimes mixed in with American Goldfinches and Red Crossbills. Winter shorebirds, Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover, and Killdeer are still being seen especially from the tower viewing out to the marsh. New for this month the first report of a Violet-green Swallow and a Brown-headed Cowbird both spotted on the 24th. I am not sure if the Cowbird is a good sighting or a bad sighting as the Cowbirds are parasitic nesters and lay their eggs in other birds' nests and let the host bird feed and raise their young. Usually the host birds are a smaller species and the larger cowbird young will end up getting more attention and food.

February 26th was the last day of consistent viewing of the Great Gray Owl. On the 28th or 29th a member noticed Bushtits starting to build a nest in a blackberry bush near the end of the east dyke. When finished it will be about 10 inches long resembling a hanging sock made of twigs, moss, leaves and spider webs. Bushtits have between 5 and 7 eggs which only take 12 days to hatch and then roughly 14 days to fledge. By starting early in the season they will have time to have a second brood.

March is a good month to see a crossover of wintering birds and the start of the new spring arrivals. This month we had a total of 95 species observed, the highest March count for the last 7 years.

March 1 – March 7

On the 1st a Sora was seen in the northwest corner of West Field. On the 5th we had a report of one Belted Kingfisher. Both sexes of the Belted Kingfisher have the blue gray ragged crest and blue-gray backs. Males have a single blue-gray band across breast, while the female has a second rusty band across the belly. Three Saw-Whet Owls were found on the 6th. Greater Yellowlegs are now being seen in the west field. Large numbers of Spotted Towhees are notice scratching in the underbrush looking for insects, seeds and berries.

Quite a few pairs of Wood Ducks are now checking out the nesting boxes. Wood Ducks prefer cavities in trees but will use nest boxes. They lay a clutch of between 10 and 15 eggs that take between 28 and 32 days to hatch. When ready to leave the nest site, the chicks, equipped with claws at the end of their webbed feet, will climb up and out and drop to the ground. Next time you drive in glance over to the

eagles nest halfway along the driveway to see a bird that you do not expect to see nesting in a tree. Canada Geese have taken over the nest and look right at home.

March 8 – March 14

On the 8th flying along the Strait of Georgia 8 Brant Geese was spotted. The Rufous Hummingbird usually returns to the Sanctuary either March 15th or 16th but this year, maybe because of being so mild, we had a male Rufous Hummingbird show up at the feeder on the 8th. The males are first to arrive back to the breeding grounds from Mexico. Also on the 8th, two Long-billed Dowitchers were found in the West Field. A Cedar Waxwing was seen, as was the first of the spring Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Lesser Snow Geese are starting to return to our area from the Skagit River estuary in the State of Washington and the large flocks of Trumpeter Swans are starting to head north to northern British Columbia the Yukon and Alaska in time to nest. The Harris's Sparrow is still at the Fuller Slough lookout area daily. When it first showed up in the week of November 9th it was in juvenile plumage. Now 4 months later it has nearly full adult breeding plumage, and a very handsome Sparrow. Belted Kingfisher, American Bittern, Brown-headed Cowbird and Common Goldeneye were other weekly highlights.

March 15 – March 21

Black-crowned Night-Heron numbers have dropped from 7 to 3 this week. Three Canvasback ducks were spotted along the channel of water parallel to the Center Dyke. An unusual single Mourning Dove was seen perched on the power line along the driveway. It seems the hardier introduced Eurasian Collared-Doves have taken over the native Mourning Dove's habitats. Brown-headed Cowbird, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Goldfinch, Peregrine Falcon and Northern Shrike were some notables for this week's list of 77 species.

March 22 – March 28

Ten species of sparrows and three species of finches were present this week. Have you ever noticed on the male House Finches that they vary in color from red to orange and even yellow? The red on the males comes from pigments contained in food eaten during molt. The more pigment in the food the redder the male. New birds species showing up this week were White-throated Sparrow, Hutton's Vireo and Lincoln's Sparrow. A Varied Thrush was seen this week, although most are heading to nest in the forests of northern British Columbia and Yukon. Northern Saw-whet Owls are still being found. We have one



A Hungry Purple Finch

Photo: Ken Young

juvenile Black-crowned Night-Heron left but come first week of April it will be gone. Some other highlights for this week were Ring-billed Gull, Hutton's Vireo, White-throated Sparrow, Pine Siskin and Purple Finch.

Text: Varri Raffan
Gift Shop Manager

References:

Reader's Digest Book of North American Birds, 2005.

The Birds of Canada by W. Earl Godfrey, 1986
The Practical Birdwatcher's Handbook.

Marshnotes Archives
www.Whatbird.com



Trail reconstruction on Center dyke

Sanctuary visitors are always required to stay on the trails, but in the case of the grassy-lined pathways on the outer seaward side, this is particularly important. Anyone standing on the shoulders or climbing down the embankments can cause the soft silt to shift and start eroding. **Please also note the No Bird Feeding Notice on page 5.**

No spring report would be complete without a section on the Sandhill Cranes. At the beginning of 2015, our eleven birds consisted of the resident pair, a pair from Richmond with their two 2014 colts, and our gang of 5 non-breeding birds. As usual, in mid-January, the peaceful winter flock turned back into its component groups with their own agendas. In the last two weeks of January, we started to notice some of them were starting to do their annual feather staining to prepare for the nesting season. Even the 2014 colts got into this action, although not very adept at it, and there were many funny episodes of a game we dubbed “playing with weeds”. The Richmond pair and their two colts started to disappear for parts of the day and by February 12th, they were gone, for days, presumably over to Richmond to check out their nest site next

to the golf course. This was timely, as we had just rehabilitated the crane island in Display Pond and our resident pair had started to act territorial about it. On February 18th the two Richmond colts came back without their parents, and began to try join our current gang of 5 non-breeding birds, making a total of 9 cranes strolling the paths.

Early this spring the gang still included our 2010 colt “Junior” and his mate, both now mature birds. They tried to nest last year, and continued to battle with our resident male this spring. In these past few months, it has also been clear that two additional members of the gang are maturing and getting territorial. On March 8th, after a particularly noisy day of endless territorial calls from all six of these birds, the resident male was sporting a scratch on his face, and Junior and his mate were gone and haven’t been seen since, and the upcoming newly-maturing pair now seem to be in charge of the gang. For most of the summer, that gang will likely consist of the two 2014 colts, the two loud maturing birds, a two-year old plus an extra bird or sometimes visiting.

In the meantime, our resident pair of cranes settled in to nest on their island, laying their first egg either April 1st or 2nd, and a second one on the 4th. Some unfortunate predation episode occurred overnight on the 8th, though, as there were eggshells on the island, and the pair seemed spooked, eventually checking out various potential alternative nest sites. It may have been something like a raccoon coming up on the island. As of the 21st, after a little time to themselves and some staining and courtship activities, they seem intent on re-nesting, somewhere in House Pond or n Southwest Marsh. Here’s hoping for success this time.

Early in April, many of the mature Canada Geese set up nests on the islands in Southwest Marsh and other select islands., and are likely to have young by the end of the month. Younger first-time nesters seem to select less than optimal nest sites in plain view along the trails, and these nests have nearly all been predated, as have many of the early Mallard nests. As with last year, there also seems to be a component of Canada’s that have become fixated on romping about on the roofs of the Sanctuary’s buildings and sometimes on visitors’ cars, creating a lot of noise and doing weird things like nibbling the clumps of moss off the roofs or peering down at visitors from just above the gutters. Never a dull moment here!

Text and photos: Kathleen Fry, R.Bio
Sanctuary Manager

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Report on the 54th Annual General Meeting

The 54th Annual General Meeting took place on Tuesday April 14, 2015 in the Lecture Hall of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. BCWS President Jack Bates called the Meeting to order at 7:35 pm and welcomed everyone. He declared a quorum in attendance. Moira Moore acted as Secretary.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE 53rd AGM: The Minutes of the 53rd Annual General Meeting, held on Tuesday April 16, 2014 were approved.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS: The financial statements for the year ending December 31, 2014 along with the Accountants' Report, prepared by KPMG were presented by the Society's Treasurer Jim Morrison together with a brief summary of the highlights. Questions from the floor were responded to by the Treasurer.

APPOINTMENT OF THE ACCOUNTANTS FOR 2014: KPMG were appointed as the Society's Accountants for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2015, with remuneration to be determined by the Board.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS: The Chairman introduced the Society's Directors that were present, and gave a brief report on the Society and the Board's activities for the year 2014, noting the Society remains in a strong financial position. He thanked the staff, the Directors and all of the other volunteers for their contributions during 2014. He also recognized Sanctuary Manager Kathleen Fry, for her continuation as Editor of Marshnotes in addition to all her other responsibilities during the past year. Gift Shop Manager Varri Raffan was formally acknowledged by the Society for her 30 years of service to the BCWS. Congratulations Varri!

The Chairman also thanked Laura Jordison for her assisting in the Gift Shop, Dave McClue for his work on Sanctuary maintenance, and Dan Dixon the Sanctuary Biologist. The agreement with DUC to administer and deliver education and interpretive programs at the Sanctuary was restructured in 2014, the Society now administers and delivers these programs under Kathleen Fry's direction.

SANCTUARY MANAGER'S REPORT: Kathleen Fry reviewed the Manager's report on the 2014 activities. The report noted there are 2,507 Members as of December 31, an increase of almost 6% over last year. There were 77,334 visitors to the Sanctuary in 2014. November saw the busiest month with 8,612 visitors followed by May with 7,940 then April with 7,327 through the gates. Overall there was a slight decline in visitors through the gate from 2013, which may be attributed to the teacher's job action, fewer class bookings and the loss of sponsorship for the Sanctuary's inner city program. The figures do not include the many families, seniors and cyclists who stayed in the parking lot or picnic area feeding the ducks and/or use of the washrooms. In 2014 the emphasis continued to be on the regular upkeep of trails and facilities as required. The Sanctuary continues to be supported by many volunteers and the Canucks' "Live to Give" program brought a team of volunteers out to help resurface the gravel trails again in November.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: In accordance with the Society's Bylaws, three Directors were elected for a two year term by acclamation: Doug Ransome, Barney Reifel and Ken Thompson.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 pm.
Coffee, 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

The Volunteer Corner

Special Thanks To:

- ◆ Our regular Sunday birding team of Mary Taitt and Brian Self, as well as Jim Martin, Istvan Orosi, Karl Pollak, Emma Turgeon, David Bruce new volunteer Lorraine St Martin, and long-term member Ian McGregor for helping host visitors on weekends.
- ◆ Bill Topping for hosting visitors in the Museum on Sunday mornings.
- ◆ Justin Malkonin, Eric Rossicci, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed and filling bird feeders.
- ◆ Our winter newsletter mailout team of Jim and Jean Marsh, Jean Gartner, Eric Rossicci, Eileen Axford, Laura Jordison, and Jim Martin.
- ◆ The team of Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick for the flower gardens around the Museum and washrooms, and for cleaning all the Warming Hut windows.

- ◆ Our high school student Georgia Taipalus for her hard work filling feeders, bagging seed, bird inventories, and general maintenance.
- ◆ Our new volunteers Sammy Penner, Kristina Boomkamp, Ivy Whitehorne and Stacey Hilton for helping with bird inventories, and hosting people along trails.
- ◆ A special thanks to Kristina Boomkamp also for her hard work helping to re-build the Southwest Trail and resurface Center Dyke.

Volunteers Wanted For This Summer:

- ◆ Hosting visitors along trails on busy weekends, particularly in sensitive areas such as around the crane nest site or areas where the ducklings and goslings congregate.

If you are interested in helping, please leave your contact information at the office or email Kathleen at kathleen@reifelbirdsantuary.com.

Thanks very much, everyone!

Why be a Member?

As a Member, you receive the following benefits:

FREE admission to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary 365 days a year.

Quarterly issue of the BCWS publication "Marshnotes".

A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop.

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

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

Staff, maintain and expand facilities at the Sanctuary for the benefit of its visitors and members; provide interpretive and education programs, including guided tours for organized groups of all ages; contribute towards important scientific research on waterfowl to determine their life cycle needs for survival; and provide support for like-minded organizations who are working on waterfowl-related projects.

Enclosed is my cheque or VISA/Mastercard number for:

SINGLE Membership: **\$25**

FAMILY Membership: **\$50**

LIFE Membership: **\$500**

Donation (tax deductible)

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Please mail to **British Columbia Waterfowl Society**
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Telephone: 604 946 6980 Fax: 604 946 6982
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