

Marshnotes[®]



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
SPRING 2018**

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 and postal addresses marked for attention of Marshnotes Editor. Please include your telephone number or email and the Editor will contact you.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

July 15th, 2018

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Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan
Reception: Susan Norris
Biologist: Dan Dixon
Maintenance: David McClue
Part-time Assistants: Kristina Breit
Nicole Lamarche

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 years +): \$3
School Groups: Special discounts available; pre-booking is required.

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SPECIAL NOTICE

SUMMER CLOSURE OF THE TOWER AREA

The Observation Tower in West Field is scheduled for repair and painting this summer. It will require the construction of scaffolding, wrapping the structure, sandblasting of old paint, renewal of some of the metal components, and then repainting.

This process is lengthy, and visitors will not have access to this area from early May until sometime late July, so please plan for using other parts of the Sanctuary while the contractors are working on this project. Please be aware that there may also be some vehicle traffic on Sanctuary paths, but that staff will try to keep everyone informed.

We apologize for any inconvenience.



About Our Covers

Front Cover:

Northern Shoveller © Jim Martin

Back Cover:

Dance of the Herons @ Jens Preshaw

Editor's Note:

Over the winter, we can sometimes see over 200 Northern Shovellers sifting through the shallows and mudflats with their large spatulate bills, seeking out plankton and other small food items. There can also be as many as 100 Great Blue Herons some late winter days, either roosting in the shoreline trees of Fuller Slough or feeding in the shallows of the ponds and intertidal channels offshore.

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Kathleen Fry

Varri Raffan

Manager's Report

The first three months of 2018 saw 23,516 visitors, the highest number for the past few years. January visits were low (4187), but then we had just a few nice clear days before 26 days of rain set in, with some notable downpours on the last week of the month. February was typical, with cold frozen days then a few very wet days so visitor use was about average (6996). March visitor numbers were very high (11913), as by then we had a few breaks from the rain, and crowds off and on all through the schools' spring break period and the Easter long weekend. This March's total was almost double that of 2017, but only a little higher than 2016.

A couple of feature species popular with winter visitors were less abundant or predictable this year. There were only four Black-crowned Night-Herons roosting in their usual spot across from the Warming Hut. In mid-March, one left, and by the beginning of April, all had departed. This winter, Northern Saw-whet Owl sightings were also quite intermittent, particularly in February. There were only 18 sightings over the three months, and these were all of single sightings except for one day when two were seen in different locations. Half of the records were in March.

One of the things we work on at this time of year is the maintenance and replacement of various nest structures that are up all around the Sanctuary so that they are ready for the upcoming nesting season. I have left the tracking of these boxes to Dan Dixon, our biologist, and he reports that we now have about 50 Wood Duck boxes, 5 Barn Owl boxes (excluding the mini-barns out by the gate), and between 220 and 250 songbird boxes on site. The latter is not as definite a number because although we keep them numbered and track them on a spreadsheet, these smaller boxes have a shorter life span, get chewed by rats and squirrels, or get lost to the wilds when they fall off a tree. We are rarely able to find all the ones present when we do an annual inventory.

Wood Ducks are generally paired and choosing their woodpecker holes, tree cavities or nest boxes in late February but in cool wet spring like this year, it is sometimes not until April that they are settled and incubating, with young hatching in May sometime. The boxes are also popular shelters for other creatures like squirrels, and probably only 20 or so are used each year by the actual target species, the Wood Duck. Some are brand-new and just put up in this past few months. Samantha Wick of 1st Kirkland Scout Troop made and put up 6 excellent cedar Wood Duck nest boxes this spring as a service project as she works to earn her Chief Scout Award.

Although there are still a few thousand Lesser Snow Geese present around the Sanctuary in April, feeding



Samantha Wick and a duck box Photo: Becky Wick

on offshore marshes and the new grass growth in adjacent fields, this species should be gone by the end of the month on their way to arctic nesting areas on Wrangel Island, Russia. Every year, usually in January, a mid-winter count of the Snow Geese is done by plane, with observers counting all birds seen between the Fraser River estuary and the Skagit River estuary in Washington State. This count is used as an index to compare population numbers from year to year. Dr. Sean Boyd from Environment and Climate Change Canada, reports that the annual mid-winter count of the Fraser-Skagit subpopulation this January was in the range of 85,000 to 88,000 birds, with approximately 15 to 16 % young in the flocks.

Like the Lesser Snow Geese, many other waterfowl species have moved out this past month, as the Sanctuary mainly serves as their overwintering area, and they migrate in spring to nesting areas in the interior of further north. By May, our main remaining waterfowl species will be Canada Geese, Gadwall, Wood Duck and Mallard.

We are using the goose pair dubbed "Daffy and Dilly" as an indicator pair for the relative timing of incubation and hatching of most Mallards and Canada Geese this spring. This pair of Canada Geese decided to make a nest in the daffodils in the garden beside the Museum's front door. They may be the same pair that

tried this last year. The flowers and stems and leaves of the daffodils became a bit of a “tossed salad” nest with just one egg in it by Good Friday. Daffy, the gander, spent a few weeks attacking his reflection in the glass of the Museum front door while Dilly perfected her nest, laid a full complement of 7 eggs, covered it with down, and started incubation. Goose pairs in Southwest Marsh started a couple of weeks earlier than this pair, so we predict some hatching in the last week in April, but most in early May.

The Sandhill Cranes and their nest are usually a big draw for photographers every spring, as they have nested out on a very visible island just off the main trail to the tower since 2010. There have been thousands of photos taken of the pair as they have incubated and hatched their eggs and encouraged their chicks to leave this island for the first swim over to the trail to forage for food. This year, though, the pair has made a nest far away from prying eyes, off in the marsh to the north of the island. By the time Marshnotes is in the mail, we should have a good idea of how this new site has worked out if they emerge from the marsh with a chick. The pair disappeared off into this meadow together on Easter Monday. Since then, we have only seen either the male or the female out on the trails, never both together. Sometimes we have been able to spot a stationary crane head way out in the marsh, presumably the mate on incubation duty. Incubation is usually about 30 to 32 days, so hatching is predicted by the first weekend in May.

A typical Sandhill Crane nest is one in the marsh shallows, possibly on an old beaver lodge but more commonly on a constructed pad of reeds or wetland vegetation all piled up by the cranes into a nesting mound. Sometimes, the birds have to add more vegetation to adjust to material absorbing water over time. So, this year, it seems that our cranes may have opted for a “natural nest”, either because they really want to get away from the pair of geese that always compete for their usual island, or because there were too many people going past them on that main trail in March while they were deciding about nest sites. Or, perhaps the male hatched from a simple mound of vegetation in a marsh and has never understood why the “Mrs” liked that rocky exposed island anyway. Who knows!

There are a few items to note for this upcoming season. Please note the notice on page 3 about the Observation Tower being inaccessible to the public for a few months this summer starting early May. It was built in 1981, with much of the structure from metal recycled from the scaffolding used to install the large skylights in Lansdowne Mall in Richmond. In 2010, we replaced planks on the top deck and some of the wooden components like the top rails, but it is time to now strip all the peeling paint and clean up all the metal components.



Kristina Breit

Photo: Dan Dixon



Nicole Lamarche

Photo: Kathleen Fry

If you are interested in watching a hummingbird banding operation, contact me for the dates, as the researchers will be banding here every couple of weeks for the next few months.

Last but not least, after a very busy 2017, we have added a couple of hard-working people to our team on a part-time basis to create greater flexibility for projects and busy weekends. Nicole Lamarche is a BCIT student and is now helping in the Gift Shop. Kristina Breit has helped us with many trail maintenance projects over the past few years and is now on staff for a few days a week.

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

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Report on the 57th Annual General Meeting

The 57th Annual General Meeting took place on Tuesday April 17, 2018 in the Lecture Hall of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. BCWS President Jack Bates called the Meeting to order at 7:40 pm and welcomed everyone. He declared a quorum in attendance. Moira Moore acted as Secretary.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE 56th AGM: The Minutes of the 56th Annual General Meeting, held on Tuesday April 11, 2017 were approved. A full set of the minutes was not available however, a summary of the minutes was provided and a full set of the minutes will be sent to attendees upon request.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS: The financial statements for the year ending December 31, 2017 along with the Accountant's 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 2018: KPMG were appointed as the Society's Accountants for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2018, 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 2017, 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 2017.

The Chairman noted ongoing improvements and maintenance to the Sanctuary will be continued in 2018. The observation tower will be completely refurbished, replacing and expanding the metal steps and decking as required along with painting the entire structure. We are continuing to monitor bicycle and pedestrian access from the main road and the private dyke between the Sanctuary and the Westham Island Bridge. Signs are being posted and there will be a message in Marshnotes to remind visitors the use of drones at the Sanctuary is prohibited.

SANCTUARY MANAGER'S REPORT: Kathleen Fry reviewed the Manager's Report on the 2017 activities. The Report noted there are 2474 Members as of December 31, 2017 with the majority being family memberships. In total there were 85,856 visitors to the Sanctuary in 2017. May, was the busiest month with 9,808 visitors followed by October, with 8,980 visitors through the gate. There were 13 days with over 800 visitors, and professional traffic control personnel were required on 11 of those days. The visitor numbers only reflect the numbers through the gate and do not include the many visitors who stayed in the parking lot or picnic area to feed the ducks and/or use the washrooms.

School programs are doing well and continue to be enhanced by the funds provided by Nature Canada from Environment Canada's Connecting Canadians to Nature Fund. We continue to develop cost-effective and current programming about wetland and wildlife conservation and to increase opportunities to meet the ongoing interest of educators and Lower Mainland School districts.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: In accordance with the Society's Bylaws, three Directors were elected for a two year term by acclamation: Wayne Diakow, Jim Morrison and Gerry Oyen.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 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

Bird Highlights

January 2018, according to Environment Canada, was regarded as the 4th wettest January since record keeping started back in 1937. As expected with the wet month, attendance was lower by 45% from January 2017, but regardless of the wet weather and the lower number of visitors the variety of birds ended up being one of the highest January totals with 90 species recorded.

To help with the described locations, we have included a basic map on page 8.

Dec 31, 2017 – January 6, 2018

A Red-breasted Sapsucker, a member of the woodpecker family, was found pecking for insects in the coniferous trees on the Northeast Corner. As its name implies it will also be drilling shallow holes in the bark in order to drink the sap that oozes out. Being a colorful bird, with its red head, yellow belly and black and white wings, it certainly shows up well in the brown non leafed trees of winter. On January 1st a Swamp Sparrow was reported near the tower.

January 7 – January 13

On the 8th 1 Northern Saw-whet Owl was spotted half way along the East Dyke perched in an overhanging fir bough. Approximately 11 White-winged Crossbills made a re-appearance at the Northeast Corner on the 10th. A single American Bittern was spotted along the seaward dyke. Bitterns, having overall earth-toned colors, blend in very well with the surrounding marsh plants. Instead of flying off when approached they remain motionless mimicking the upright surrounding vegetation. They are even known to sway with the surrounding windblown reeds in order to remain camouflaged. The pair of Great Horned Owls is still roosting together high up in one of the fir trees just before the end of the East Dyke trail.



American Bittern

Photo: Pete van Ryk



Spotted Towhee

Photo: Kathleen Fry

January 14 – January 20

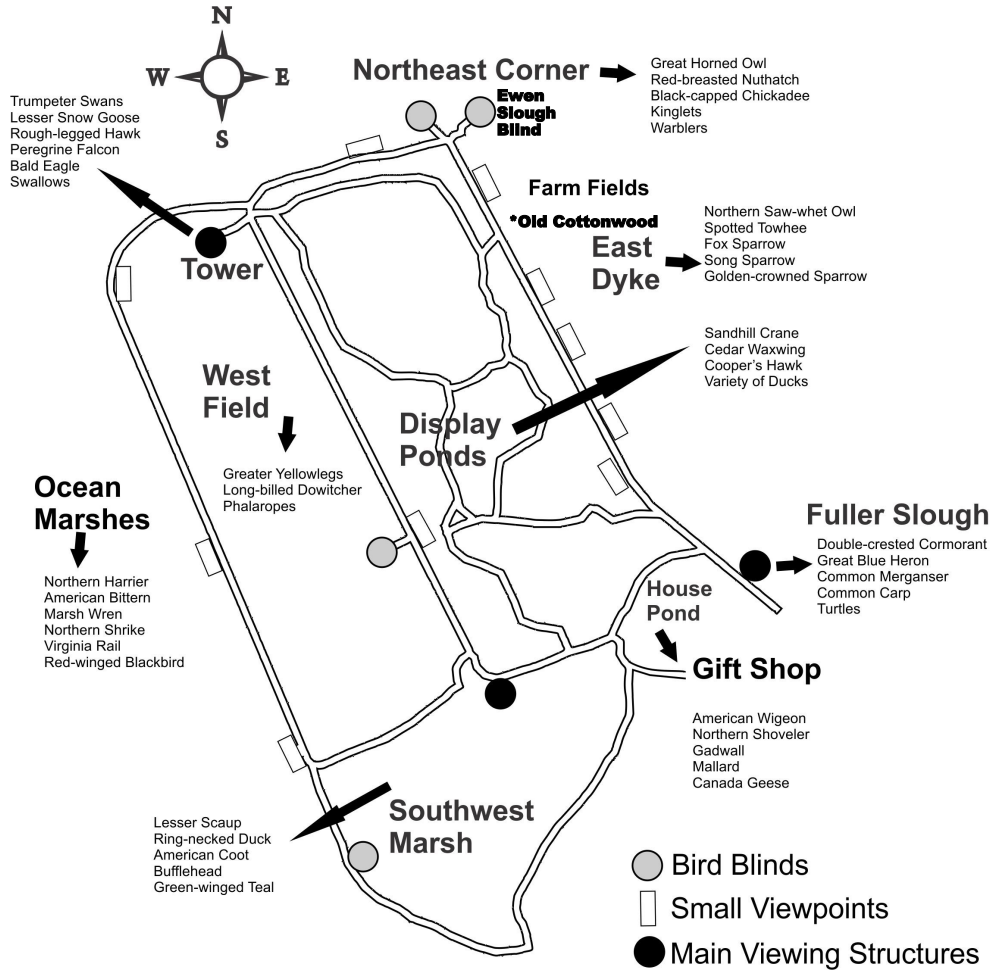
We still have our winter group of 4 Black-crowned Night-Herons present this week. On January 16th 2 Barn Swallows were spotted flying over the tower which makes them a very early sighting as they usually return around the middle of March or did they ever leave? On the 19th a Lincoln's Sparrow was observed scratching in the soil below the feeder by the wooden viewing platform. Another bird that searches for food by scratching in the soil like a barn yard chicken is the Spotted Towhee, and many have been reported throughout the Sanctuary this week. The Spotted Towhee, which is a bit smaller than an American Robin, has white spots on its wings, rufous colored sides, a pale belly, dark head and a red eye. A few other highlights in this week which had a total of 73 species were Merlin, Northern Shrike, Common Redpoll, Western Meadowlark and Pine Siskin.

January 21 – January 27

On the 25th another historic landmark came down in heavy winds. It was the old dead Cottonwood located near the end of the East Dyke opposite the trail down to the inner grassy pathways. It was the nest site for the Great Horned Owls in February 2002, when they successfully raised 3 owlets. Also on the 25th we had large flock of 100+ Common Redpolls with some feeding on the catkins hanging from alders, birch and willow trees of the Northeast Corner. A Hairy Woodpecker was spotted on the 26th. Throughout the week we had various sightings of Mew Gulls. They are smaller than the more common Glaucous-winged Gulls. In flight, the traits to help distinguish them from other gulls is their petite build, mostly white body, black wingtips with a large white spot at the tip and a small yellow beak. Mew Gulls mainly feed on insects, earthworms and crustaceans so they are more abundant over newly disked farm land and mudflats and not so often spotted over the Vancouver Landfill like the Glaucous-winged Gulls.

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

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Typical locations to find birds January to March

February is not known for much in the way of migrating birds. There is usually a bit of a lull before the spring migrants show up. Early nesters like Great Horned Owl, Barn Owl and Bald Eagle will be building their nests and laying eggs. February 2018 species count was 86.

January 28 – February 3

Viewing via a spotting scope from the Observation Tower paid off this week when a member came back with reports of Red-throated Loon, Common Loon and Horned Grebe. We now are noticing geese and ducks squabbling over future mates and nesting spots. An early spotting of a Yellow-rumped Warbler and a Hutton's Vireo were both located at the northeast corner. The Yellow-rumped Warblers are usually the first of the warblers to show up in the spring and the last to leave in the fall. Lots of American Robins have

been noticed along the entrance driveway picking up the last of any Hawthorne berries. Although the coloration and markings of both male and female American Robins are similar, the males are more intense, having a darker black head and a darker brick red breast especially when in breeding plumage.

February 4 – February 10

Four Sandhill Cranes have been with us over the winter, our resident pair and two visiting birds, but in this week we notice the non-resident pair starting to be absent for longer periods. The two Great Horned Owls are also absent now as they will have gone to establish a nest. The one Northern Saw-Whet Owl which has been somewhat dependable for viewing has not been seen recently at its East Dyke perch. This year was not a big year for Saw-Whet Owls not just at the Sanctuary but in other Lower Mainland

locations. However, it was a very good year back December 1995 when we were able to locate 10 of them. On the 4th 2 Brewer's Blackbirds were found around the Inner Display Ponds. Although a common blackbird to the area Brewer's Blackbirds are not often found at the Sanctuary. Feeding in the marshes and estuaries might not be as appealing as they prefer to feed on grain and insects of the surrounding farm fields. Look for them in with Red-winged Blackbirds and European Starlings. The Brewer's Blackbird male has a glossy black body and a striking pale yellow eye. Females are a dull brown overall with a dark eye. The first two Greater Yellowlegs were found in the West Field on the 9th. Even though February is a quiet month, on the whole this turned out to be a good week with 70 species being observed.

February 11 – February 17

A few Greater White-fronted Geese were reported on the 13th. On the 17th a Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk was found in the farm field off the East Dyke. Lots of Golden-crowned Sparrows were seen at feeders throughout the week. The males have a lovely golden yellow stripe down the center of their heads, which becomes vibrant in breeding plumage. From the list of 61 species for the week, the highlights were Northern Shrike, American Bittern and Peregrine Falcon.

February 18 – February 24

On the 18th 65 Great Blue Herons were perched along both sheltered banks of Fuller Slough. Another 18 were spotted in a protected channel off the North Dyke. February 20th and 21st was cold with ice on most inner ponds. Lots of Wood Ducks are now paired up and can be seen perched in trees checking out the newly serviced nest boxes. A few Northern Harriers, which are easily identified by the distinctive white rump patch on both male and female birds, along with their low slow flight are noticed this week as they hunt the marshes for Townsend's Voles.

March is the month when bird activity really picks up. We start to see the return of swallow species, Rufous Hummingbirds, Lesser Snow Geese and warblers. With trees producing new leaves in many shades of green, the lovely songs of many birds and the blooming daffodils (which my dad planted back in October 1989 and December 1990) it really gives the feeling that winter has past.

February 25 – March 3

After 3 weeks not being able to spot a Northern Saw-whet Owl, one was found on the 25th. Again the large flock of 100+ Common Redpolls were spotted flying over the farm fields off the Northeast Corner. On the 27th 6 Cedar Waxwings were seen by the Sign Kiosk at Fuller Slough. Cedar Waxwings are crested yellowish brown birds with yellow-tipped tails and black masks. The name "waxwing" comes from the waxy looking red tips on their wing feathers.



Northern Goshawk

Photo: Mark McAnnaly

March 4 – March 10

An immature Northern Goshawk was spotted over the Southwest Marsh on the 5th. On the 9th a Hermit Thrush was found foraging along one of the inner grassy trails. A shy bird mostly found in coniferous woodlands, it has a heavily spotted breast against a pale belly, with gray brown above, a rusty red tail and a complete white eye ring. In my opinion it has one of the loveliest songs of the forest. The first spring return of a Tree Swallow and Orange-crowned Warbler were on the 10th.

March 11 – March 17

On the 11th the first Violet-green Swallow and Savannah Sparrow showed up. On the cloudy wet morning of the 14th circling above the parking were larger numbers of Tree Swallows and Violet-green Swallows. When they finally all landed in the tree tops to preen I was able to count 96 birds in all. Two more Yellow-rumped Warblers showed up to join the first very early one that was spotted back in the week of January 28th to February 3rd. March 17th we spotted the first return of the Rufous Hummingbirds and had

(..... /continued on page 10)

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the last view of Short-eared Owls. This week, the resident pair of Sandhill Cranes seems to have been successful in chasing the other visiting pair out of the Sanctuary for the nesting season.

Visitors reported finding 3 different Bushtit nests all under different stages of construction. Once finished nests are about 10'-12' long and resemble a wool sock hanging down with a small circular opening at the top. On the left bank tight into the shore line of Fuller Slough, you will notice a dead tree which is half in and half out of the water. On sunny days this is a good spot to see turtles sunning themselves. On the 17th 8 turtles were spotted in a row along the fallen tree. Here at the Sanctuary we have 2 different species of turtles, the native "Western Painted Turtle" and the introduced "Red-eared Slider" which is unfortunately more plentiful and considered an invasive species.

March 18 – March 24

A very active week with 74 species observed. On the 22nd heading down to the bird blind in the Northeast Corner a Barred Owl was found. On the 24th along the West Dyke 1 Northern Shrike was spotted. On the same day 3 American Bitterns were located at the Southwest Corner. March and April American Bittern males start displaying to attract a female. This might have been 2 males vying for the attention of the

female. To see 1 American Bittern in the open for any length of time is rare but to see 3 Bitterns at once was quite a treat. Lots of photos were taken by visitors that day. Highlights for the week include: Northern Goshawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-breasted Merganser and Greater White-fronted Geese.

March 25 – March 31

Visitors are noticing what they think are weasels along the trails. These animals are Mink, and as waterfowl are now nesting, we see an increase in Mink roaming the trails checking for eggs in unattended nests. On the 31st 2 Hutton's Vireos were spotted building a nest above the trail heading to the Ewen Slough bird blind in the Northeast Corner. Hutton's Vireos are uncommon here, but there have been some previous nest records for this species along the driveway according to Mary Taitt. Hopefully they will be successful this year. As March ends, stay tuned for April as there will be more hatchings of a variety of baby birds and more warblers and shorebirds migrating north.

Text: Varri Raffan,
Gift Shop Manager



Bald Eagle Stand-off

Janice wrote "Reifel never ceases to amaze me as I had a fantastic Bald Eagle close encounter on Friday. This immature pair were fighting over a Ring-necked Duck kill and I was able to observe them interact as they squabbled over the prize; the mantling behaviour was fun to watch. By the end of it all there were only a few duck feathers left."

Photo: Janice White

The Volunteer Corner

Special thanks to:

- ◆ Our regular Sunday Bird Walk led mainly by Mary Taitt, and Istvan Orosi.
- ◆ Members Jim Martin, Emma Turgeon and David Bruce for helping visitors along trails.
- ◆ Justin Makonin, Justin Huang, Eric Rossicci, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed and filling bird feeders, and Ben Lambert for weekend help with many tasks
- ◆ Our winter newsletter mailout team of Jim Martin, Eric Rossicci, Su Langlois, Debbie Carr and David Bruce.
- ◆ Secondary students Isabella Tom and Iris Oo for bagging sunflower seeds.
- ◆ Nicole Lamarche, Kristina Breit, and Brian Self for their assistance with bird surveys.
- ◆ Brian Self for delivering his new Birding Class, rain or shine.
- ◆ Samantha Wick, who brought us 6 excellent wood duck boxes and helped install them.
- ◆ New volunteers Nikita Bhatti Advic and De Zaurinni for recently signing up to help with the museum and the garden.

Volunteers wanted for:

- ◆ Trail maintenance and work parties:
- ◆ Weekend hosting of visitors, particularly on Mother's Day and the May long weekend;
- ◆ Directing visitors and traffic during crane nesting season and while the Observation Tower is being refurbished;
- ◆ Helping share museum and gardening work;
- ◆ Bird surveys.

For more information, visit our website. www.reifelbirdsantuary.com and explore the Volunteer page. Please leave your name and contact information at our office 604-946-6980 or send me an email.

Kathleen (kathleen@reifelbirdsantuary.com.)

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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