

Marshnotes®



BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
Spring 2025

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

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

dedicated to the conservation and study of migratory waterfowl

Marshnotes:

Editor: Marissa Sasaki

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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

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George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary:

Prices: (effective September 1st, 2022)

Daily Admission:

Adults: \$8.00

Seniors: \$6.00 (65+ years)

Children: \$6.00 (2-14 years)

Bird seed: \$2.00/bag

Annual Admission:

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Individual: \$ 50.00

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Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan
Biologist: Marissa Sasaki
Education: Dani McRobbie
Maintenance: Phoenix Black
David Manning
Field Technicians: Kristina Breit
Kiera Fritsch

Hours of Operation:

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



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

Call for Photos for the 2026 Calendar

If you have some good photos of our Sanctuary's birds and would like to offer them for our annual calendar, please email or send them in. We are looking for a range of species that would represent bird life throughout the year.

Deadline for submissions:

August 31st

Criteria:

Horizontal photos only.

Minimum 4 MB size for good reproduction.

Max file size 8 MB.

Only photos taken at the Sanctuary.

Submit only 5 of your best please.

You can drop off these photos as 5 X 7 prints or email them to varri@reifelbirds sanctuary.com.



The 2025 Calendar has been a popular item in the Gift Shop.

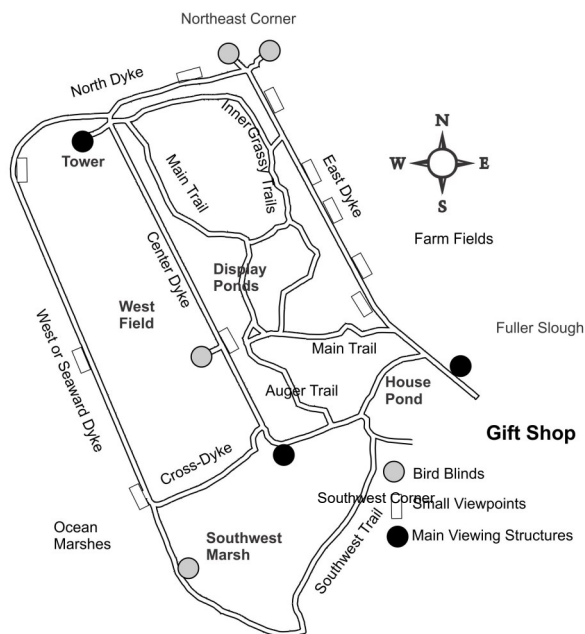
Sanctuary Locations Map

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

About Our Covers

Front Cover: Trumpeter Swan
© John Whitmore
Back Cover: American Coot
© Dan Parlee

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



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Varri Raffan
Varri Raffan
Evan Gogal
Kristina Breit



Male Bufflehead in flight

Photo: Dan Parlee



Male Green-winged Teal

Photo: Dan Parlee

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Bird Highlights

January 2025 ended with a total of 94 bird species.

December 29, 2024 – January 4, 2025

The Short-eared Owls were still being spotted hunting over the outer Southwest Marsh on most days throughout this week and even into February. Short-eared Owls, Snowy Owls and Northern Hawk Owls are classed as “diurnal” which means these species hunt through the day. They have a different type of eye from the “nocturnal” owls who see better in the dark. Only one Northern Saw-whet Owl is being found along the East Dyke. Back in 1996 we had an unusually high count of ten Northern Saw-whet Owls in one day. With 68 species observed this week the highlights were Ruddy Duck, Barred Owl, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon and American Pipits.

January 5 – January 11

A male Canvasback was located in Robertson Slough on the 9th. An interesting tidbit of the Canvasbacks is that they are named after waistcoats. In the old days when cloth was expensive, waistcoats were often backed with cheaper white canvas (which wouldn't show under the coat). The male Canvasback has a white back resembling that of a waistcoat. Also on the 9th in Robertson Slough a Eurasian (Common)

Teal was spotted. It is a subspecies of the Green-winged Teal and a rare visitor from Eurasia. When looking at Green-winged Teal you will see a white vertical shoulder bar but on Eurasian Green-winged Teal they have a white horizontal shoulder bar. Highlights for this week's list with a total of 79 species, were Belted Kingfisher, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Western Meadowlark, Evening Grosbeak and four species of owls.

January 12 – January 18

On the 14th, from the East Dyke looking over the farm fields, visitors reported two or three Barn Swallows. The American Bittern has been conveniently appearing around the signage that talks about them along the Southwest trail. Of the nine different diving duck species seen this week, the Bufflehead was the smallest. Males appear to have a puffy head with a large wedge of white on the head, similar to the male Hooded Merganser. Look for Buffleheads and other diving ducks in deeper waterways throughout the Sanctuary where they will be looking for small crustaceans and aquatic insects. If you come across a small group of Bufflehead feeding you'll see one of them will be acting as a sentry while others safely feed. Winter shorebird species, Black-bellied Plover, Greater Yellowlegs and Dunlin, all part of the plover family, are all still present Killdeer are also on this week's list. The double dark band on the chest of Killdeer distinguishes them from Plovers who only have one black band. Killdeer have a very loud repetitive call which sounds like "kill-deeah", "kill-deeah", "kill-deeah". When nesting or protecting young they will perform a distraction display. Adult birds will flutter on the ground as though crippled and utter piteous cries, while slowly moving away trying to lure predators away from the nest or young. Their Latin name "*Charadrius vociferous*" says it all.



Killdeer

Photo: Jim Martin

January 19 – February 1

Even though winters not finished with us yet, male Anna's Hummingbirds are already performing courtship displays on the 24th. These small and feisty birds can start nesting by the middle of February and will produce two to three broods per year. The Evening Grosbeak reappeared in a flock of American Robins that were feeding along the inner grassy trail on the 26th. The 29th a Hermit Thrush and Brown-headed Cowbird were found.



*Male Anna's Hummingbird mating display
Photo: John Whitmore*

The total bird species count for February 2025 was 91. Towards the end of the month we were already seeing Canada Geese paired up and staking out their nesting territory.

February 2 – February 8

With negative temperatures and frozen waterways, this two week reporting period had a low species count. Most of the diving ducks had moved out to the open waters of the Fraser River in search of food. Songbirds were happy to stick around the seed feeders which were kept topped up. Hummingbird feeders were also switched out frequently due to the nectar freezing up by noon. The shallow water in the grassy area along the Southwest trail where the American Bittern had been spotted was now frozen. Not such great conditions for the Bittern, but visitors were treated to great views as it had to come out from the cover of tall grass in search of food. On the 2nd, at the far end of Ewen Slough, which wasn't frozen, a female Barrow's Goldeneye was located. February 2nd, 5th and 7th the Evening Grosbeak is still feeding with Robins along the Inner Grassy Trail.

(...../continued page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

February 9 – February 15

With less people bird watching due to poor weather conditions, the list compiled for this week only amounted to 63 species. Black-capped Chickadees are plentiful and readily land on visitor's hands if there is black-oiled sunflower seeds offered. Red-winged Blackbirds seem to have learned from the Chickadees but not only landing on hands but on heads as well. Many Spotted Towhees are seen throughout the Sanctuary at this time of year. Look and listen for them at trail edges as they scratch in leaf litter in search of food. They have distinctive jump and kick motion thrusting both feet backwards in order to move leaf litter to reveal food. Only a couple of Cedar Waxwings were found mixed in with Purple Finches feeding along the Inner Grassy Trail. Cedar Waxwings are lovely looking birds with smooth plumage, seemingly never having a feather out of place. Some Waxwings will spend the winter in Southern B.C., but many will overwinter in southern Ontario, Quebec, and Maritime provinces. Some will travel farther to southern USA and Central America.

February 16 - February 22

Great Horned Owls have dropped from the weekly sightings list as nesting time for them has approached. Not sure where the nest is, but likely somewhere in the acres of forested land next door in the Canadian Wildlife Service property. Yellow-rumped Warblers are one of the first warblers to return for the spring. Typically they show up in the first two weeks of March so it was a surprise to locate one on February 20th. Our waterways are now clear of ice and are starting to see some of the diving ducks return.

February 23 – March 1

The first spring arrival of Tree Swallows happened in this sunny week. The sunshine seemed to bring out the happy songs of many songbirds in anticipation of warmer days. On the 23rd a lovely male Eurasian Wigeon was found in the House Pond and the female Canvasback reappeared in Robertson Slough later in the same day. March 1st a Northern Mockingbird was spotted at the Southwest corner of the Sanctuary. They are sporadically seen in southern BC in the winter but occur along southern Canada across to Nova Scotia.

March is a great month at the Sanctuary. Trees are starting to show new green growth and the early flowering Salmonberry is attracting the newly arrived Rufous Hummingbirds. Along with the bright yellow flowering daffodils, pleasant bird songs fill the air.

March 2025 recorded 93 bird species.

March 2 – March 8

March 4th saw the first return of Violet-green Swallows. March 7th the first male Rufous

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American Bittern

Photo: Jim Martin

Hummingbird was located at the feeder opposite the Gift Shop. Males tend to show up first to the breeding grounds to establish nesting territory. Greater White-fronted Geese also returned this week. Western Meadowlarks were spotted at the Southwest corner in the marsh outside the dyke. One Northern Saw-whet Owl still remains in the same roost spot at the north end of the East Dyke. Common Goldeneye, American Bittern and Merlin were also highlights from this week's list of 71 species.

March 9 – March 15

The first 12 Long-billed Dowitchers appeared on the 14th. After consistent sightings over the past couple of weeks, American Bittern has now disappeared from the Southwest Trail. Soon it will be nesting time and they will become very quiet and elusive as they raise their young in tall grasses of the marsh. As of the 13th, we couldn't find the Black-crowned Night Heron in its usual daytime roost. For a short time water was low in the channel below it, which might have made fishing less fruitful. Come the first week in April they will leave us and head to their nesting grounds. Not a lot of information provided as to where they nest nearby, but nests have been reported in eastern Washington. This week Ring-necked Pheasant, Short-eared Owl, Northern Shrike and Western Meadowlark were all located at the Southwest corner of the Sanctuary.

March 16 – March 22

Shorebirds and Warblers are now appearing. They will either be here to nest or just stopping by on their

northward migration. Female Rufous Hummingbirds have now joined the males and are quick to get under way building nests, with one already under construction along the East Dyke in a Holly bush. There was a noticeable increase of Tree and Violet-green Swallows this week. Male American Goldfinches are coming out of their dull winter plumage returning to the bright lemon yellow breeding plumage. Spring migration is now under way and will be full of activity until about the middle of May.

March 23 – March 29

The 23rd was the last sighting of Short-eared Owls. They start nesting anywhere from 3rd week of March forward, but not in trees. Their nests are shallow scrapes mostly located on the ground in open agricultural land, sparsely lined with grasses, leaves and sometime feathers. Unfortunately farm machinery often destroys their nests when spring disking starts. One more visit from the Black-crowned Night Heron on the 27th before leaving for the summer. Trumpeter Swans have now left our area heading to Yukon Territory, Alaska and Northern BC for breeding season. The first Lesser Yellowlegs and Western Sandpipers appeared on the 28th. After the 28th we were not able to locate any Northern Saw-whet Owls along the trails. They will not be returning until approximately the 3rd week of October. Variety of diving and dabbling ducks remains good but come the middle of April most of the wintering population will head back to where they were hatched to nest, leaving the resident ducks to raise their young. April, known as the nesting month at the Sanctuary, will become quieter as birds begin incubating or feeding young. In the last week of April, we should see the first hatch of Canada Geese and ducklings will be visible around middle of May to June.

Text: Varri Raffan
Giftshop Manager



Goose nesting at the museum Photo: Marissa Sasaki



"Owl see you next winter!"

Northern Saw-whet Owl

Photo: Dan Parlee

"Match the Birdie"

These are clues to the name of different birds. How many can you name? (Example: A delicious cookie– Oriole). Answer at the bottom of the page.

Questions:

- A. A sticky roll of paper
- B. Holiday feast
- C. Turned in toes
- D. Thieving
- E. His Eminence
- F. Peace
- G. Down the hatch
- H. Sad on a Monday morning
- I. Sarcastic
- J. Nine lives
- K. Marathoner
- L. How silly can you get?
- M. Beach musician
- N. Timer sculptor
- O. Rolled in a Las Vegas game

Text: Varri Raffan
Giftshop Manager

Answers:
A. Flycatcher, B. Turkey, C. Pigeon, D. Robin (robbing), E. cardinal, F. dove, G. swallow, H. bluebird, I. mockingbird, J. catbird, K. Roadrunner, L. cuckoo, M. sandpiper, N. woodpecker, O. bird of paradise (pair of dice)



Great-blue Herons in Fuller Slough

Photo: Evan Gogal

Manager's Report

Visitor numbers for January, February and March were slightly lower (13,840) compared to last year (14,442), likely due to the cold and wet weather during most of February and the rain throughout the last two weeks of March.

January started with beautiful weather after what seemed like never ending December rain. With the sun, the Northern Saw-whet Owl made its first debut of the year. Saw-whet owl sightings are the highest between January and March, with as many as five individuals seen in a day some years. This year only two were seen at a time on and off, with only one owl seen consistently on East Dike. The lonely Saw-whet stayed in relatively the same location on East Dike from January to mid-March. Some days it was seen holding a small rodent that it must of caught the night before. Mid-day snacking seemed to be a common occurrence with this little owl, as the rodent in its clutches were gone by the afternoon. Only about ten meters away from the Saw-whet, a pair of Great Horned Owls were roosting along East Dike in a Douglas-Fir tree for a short while, from January 4th until February 15th. Great Horned owls are one of the earliest nesting bird species and likely left our trails to start their nesting season elsewhere.

The rest of January stayed unseasonably dry, only recording 54.0 mm of rain when our average January rains are closer to 165 mm. This led to lots of sunny weekends but also some cold days. By January 15th the ponds were frozen over until mid-February. Frozen ponds meant less waterfowl in the sanctuary ponds until larger holes were made by several ducks crash landing on the thin ice. We also saw less snow geese on the foreshore this year in January as the mild winter allowed them to stay further inland, capitalizing on the vast amounts of farmland for foraging throughout the Fraser valley.

The end of January brought tragedy for our nesting pair of sandhill cranes. One of the colts, who would have been seven months old at the time, disappeared on January 31st. This young one seemed to not want to fly much for several months leading up to its disappearance, despite having the ability to do so. We suspect it was likely predated as a result of not taking to the air when a coyote or other predator made a surprise appearance in the field. Luckily, the second colt is still happy and healthy, running around the trails with mom and dad.

The beginning of February brought the first snowfall in the Sanctuary on February 2nd. The snow stayed for several days, and we finally saw a few large flocks of Snow Geese appear offshore. By mid-February, we started to get some very cold, wet days. Trail



Canada Goose on ice

Photo: John Whitmore

conditions got very muddy and slippery. The outer trails were closed for a week during this time for visitors' safety and to allow the grass to recover from the foot traffic during the really mucky days.

By late February we had our first Anna's Hummingbird nests. Like the Great Horned owls, Anna's Hummingbirds are early nesters. There have been reports of Annas Hummingbirds nests in the Lower Mainland as early as Christmas Eve! Anna's Hummingbirds make their nest out of light and soft materials such as Cattail seeds, moss, feathers and spider silk. The outside of the nest is then covered in lichens to camouflage the nests against the branches they are built on. Nests are only about 2.5 cm tall and 3.5 cm in diameter and are very hard to spot, usually only found by seeing the female hummingbird flying to the nest.

We were also greeted by our first bat of the year on February 26th. Like some other mammals, most bat species in BC hibernate. This little guy likely woke up early due to some warmer weather near the end of the month as we usually don't see many bats until later into the spring. All 15 species of bats found in BC have a diet consisting solely of insects, some eating half of their body weight in bugs each night. Our furry friend was sent off to Wildlife Rescue, as it seemed



Hummingbird on her nest

Photo: Kristina Breit

quite disoriented, to be cared for until more insects emerge in the spring to sustain their dietary needs.

March came in with temperatures in the low double digits. The warmer weather paired with a good mix of sun and rain meant we were starting to see our trailside vegetation come to life. Flower buds started appearing on many of our native shrubs like Salmonberry, Osoberry and Oregon Grape. On March 7th, we observed our first Rufus Hummingbirds coming to capitalize on the early flower blooms. Rufous hummingbirds travel thousands of kilometers North from central Mexico in the spring, some even going as far as Alaska. Male Rufus Hummingbirds often arrive before the females and are quite aggressive around flowers and feeders. They try to establish a territory before the females arrive to push out any other competing males so they can have their first pick of mates for the nesting season. You can often see them doing mating/ territorial displays where they fly high up into the air and drop down in a fast, arcing flight, accompanied by a loud, metallic sounding whining noise made by their extremely fast wing beats.



Rufous Hummingbird

Photo: Dan Parlee

(...../continued page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

In early March, one of our field technicians, Kristina, with the help of a few BCIT students revamped most of the songbird nesting boxes through the Sanctuary. Many old boxes were repaired or replaced, new number tags were installed, and metal guards were installed on the openings. These metal guards greatly reduce the amount of rat and squirrel invasion into the nesting boxes. The guards also make it harder for larger, invasive songbirds like House Sparrow to enter while still allowing in small, native cavity nesting birds like Tree Swallows, Black-capped Chickadees and Bewick's Wrens. The Sanctuary wide songbird box refresh is intended to increase the nesting success of our native songbirds as well as improve our ability to collect nesting data.

By mid-March, migration was in full swing. Many of our over wintering waterfowl species started to disappear as they moved North to the Arctic or East towards the prairie provinces for the nesting season. At the same time, many other spring migrants were starting to arrive here on the coast. We saw the arrival of all six of our native swallow species, with many Barn Swallows and Tree Swallows scoping out nesting spots at the Sanctuary for the year.

We also saw our first Canadian Goose nest in the flower bed at the Museum. Daffy and Dilly, as they have come to be known by staff, like to nest in the daffodils in the flower beds year after year. They laid



The museum goose nest

Photo: Evan Gogal

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Resident Sandhill Crane pair with "make-up"
Photo: Evan Gogal

two eggs on March 19th that were unfortunately predated overnight. However, the resilient pair did not give up and were sitting on a new nest with fresh eggs the next day.

By late March, the Sandhill Cranes were also gearing up for nesting season. They could be seen strutting around on the trails freshly stained in rusty mud from the foreshore and cattail marshes of the sanctuary. This staining ritual is an annual pair bonding exercise done by sandhill cranes. The staining is often accompanied by a series of bows, hops and dances that are all part of the yearly courtship rituals done by these fascinating birds. Even their remaining nine-month-old colt joined along for some of the fun in the mud, learning the behavior from mom and dad for when it's time for them to find a mate in a few years.

The last two weeks in March brought spring break. This is usually a very busy time of year here at the Sanctuary, bringing in lots of families looking for activities while the kids are out of school. Despite the Atmospheric River in the forecast for the entirety of spring break, we had several weekdays with a completely full parking lot as well as regularly busy weekends despite the rain.

Text: Evan Gogal
Sanctuary Manager

2025 Nest Box Maintenance

Between March 10 and March 15, 2025, we cleaned and maintained our songbird nestboxes. The main reason for the overhaul of nest box inventory was prompted by the enlargement of the entrance hole by rodents. However, since the last maintenance of them was in 2021, many boxes needed to be repaired or replaced. Additionally, most of the number tags on the boxes were faded and weathered, which made monitoring and recording of nesting activity more difficult.

During our maintenance, we documented and assessed 240 boxes. Nine of the boxes were only documented and not assessed due to their inaccessibility. Most of the boxes were cleaned for the upcoming nesting season. Nearly half of the boxes required to be replaced or repaired, and seventeen boxes were reinstalled. New tags were also installed on all accessible boxes. Metal guards were also attached around the entrance holes on most boxes to prevent rodents from chewing and entering boxes.

The most interesting part was determining the use of nest boxes. Fifty boxes had been used by rodents and about 144 were used by birds, and 31 boxes were not used at all. The remaining boxes were used either by mud wasps or yellow jackets. We determined that 92 boxes had been used by tree swallows, while 31 were used by House Sparrows. Twenty-four boxes had been used by Black-capped Chickadees, and for 38 boxes, species use could not be determined. It must be noted that sometimes nest boxes are used by both Tree Swallows and House Sparrows. Overall, the results were encouraging and the data supported most of our nestbox observations over the last years.

Moving forward we are planning on regular maintenance and monitoring the use of our boxes through the nesting season. With the new number tags installed we are hoping to have visitors contribute to our nestbox observations. So, if you see activity around one of our boxes make a note and let us know.

Text: Kristina Breit
Field Technician



Our new nest box

Photo: Kristina Briet

The Volunteer Corner

Special thanks to:

- ◆ Mary Taitt for leading our Sunday Bird Walk.
- ◆ Jim Martin and Brian Self for their year-round hosting of visitors on weekends.
- ◆ John Chandler, Janice White, and Ryan Sinclair for filling feeders and helping with trail maintenance during the week.
- ◆ Brian Self, Peter Candido, Ben Lambert, Janice White, Dirk Fleming, Sabine Jessen, Yousif Attia, Lelah Zimmerman, Jano Comas, and Braedan Hallam for helping with bi-weekly bird surveys.
- ◆ Margaret Gorham for hosting visitors at the Museum every Sunday.
- ◆ Jano Comas and Miranda Steward for helping with the songbird box maintenance.
- ◆ Our hard-working volunteer Directors.

Annual Admission Benefits

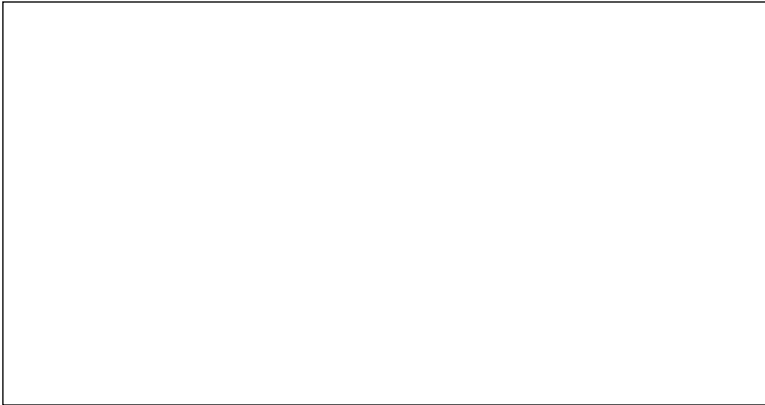
- FREE admission for a year to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary .
- Quarterly issue of the BCWS publication “Marshnotes”.
- A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop.
- Support one of British Columbia’s most respected conservation organizations.

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 supporters; 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.

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

5191 Robertson Road, Delta, British Columbia V4K 3N2



American Coot © Dan Parlee