

Marshnotes[®]



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
WINTER 2010**

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Managers of The George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary since 1963

~ *dedicated to the study and conservation of migratory waterfowl* ~

Marshnotes:

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Produced at Minerva House

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

MAY 3rd 2010

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Education Coordinator: Kathleen Fry

Staff:

Acting Sanctuary Manager: Kathleen Fry
Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan
Reception: Laura Jordison
Habitat Maintenance: Claire de la Salle

Hours of operation:	Sanctuary Gate:	9.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. (all year round)
	Gift Shop:	9.00 a.m. - Noon 1.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.
Admission:	Members:	Free
	Non-members:	Adults: \$4 Children (2-14 years) and Seniors (60+): \$2
School group tours:	Adults: \$2	Children (2-14 years) and Seniors (60+): \$1

The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible

School group tours by arrangement

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Top Birds of 2009

Total Species Count for 2009

182 species seen in the Sanctuary

JANUARY

Marbled Godwit
Thayer's Gull
Eurasian Wigeon

FEBRUARY

Ring-necked Duck

MARCH

Red-throated Loon

APRIL

Short-eared Owl
Barred Owl

MAY

Sora Rail
Townsend's Warbler
Baird's Sandpiper
Bohemian Waxwing

JUNE

Eastern Kingbird

JULY

Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Anna's Hummingbird

AUGUST

Hudsonian Godwit
Western Wood-Pee-wee
Stilt Sandpiper
Common Nighthawk

SEPTEMBER

Chipping Sparrow
Pileated Woodpecker
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

OCTOBER

Ruddy Duck
American Pipit
American Tree Sparrow

NOVEMBER

Canvasback Duck
Cliff Swallow

DECEMBER

Barred Owl
Evening Grosbeak

The Top Bird for 2009

Pileated Woodpecker

recorded Saturday, September 12th 2009
at the 21st Pig and Corn Roast



Jim Martin

Pileated Woodpecker

List compiled by Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager

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Manager's Report

Best wishes to all for a happy and healthy 2010! The fall 2009 period was very busy, as usual. Peak visitor days this fall were September 27th (553), October 11th (833) October 18th (544), October 24th (631), November 1st (841) and December 27th (722). Nearly a month of nice clear days from mid-September onwards brought beautiful fall colours to the trees, showy mushrooms, school classes nearly every day, at least 14 Sandhill Cranes daily, most of the Fraser-Skagit Lesser Snow Goose population, and an influx of winter songbirds such as waxwings, woodpeckers, and sparrows.



Poisonous *Amanita muscalina* mushrooms.



Sandhill Cranes, one with a transmitter antennae showing.



A blue phase adult Snow Goose (centre).



The odd hybrid goose (extreme left).

When the Snow Geese arrived, there were a few oddities in with them. Snow Geese have a blue phase, usually more common east of the Rockies, and we had at least three of these dusky birds this year in October. Greater White-fronted Geese, an Emperor Goose, Cackling (Canada) Geese and a slightly ungainly hybrid goose (probably a cross between Canada and Greylag) also travelled with Snow Goose flocks.

Although the Snow Geese are the primary draw for fall visitors, we should not take for granted that the birds have secure long-term habitat. Early in October, I had an opportunity to join Moira Lemon from the Canadian Wildlife Service for an expedition out onto the intertidal mudflats seaward of the Viewing Tower.

Moira was replacing a special temperature monitoring device buried in the mud (part of an Environment Canada long-term monitoring project). My own goal was to view the Snow Goose feeding areas to get a personal perspective on the gradual degradation of their feeding areas. Dr. Sean Boyd from CWS has studied changes in the plant community in this primary feeding area for the past two decades using a series of permanent plant study plots. Snow Geese dig up and eat the rhizomes of the bulrush *Scirpus americanus*, using their beaks to excavate holes in the mud during this process. Sean predicts that the edge of the bulrush community has eroded considerably over the years due to a combination of wave action, digging by the geese themselves, and possibly plant die off due to elevated sea levels.

From early October onwards, Snow Geese put on showy roadside displays on Westham Island farm fields and the fields of Alaksen National Wildlife Area (NWA). Based on the high number of young birds in the flock, the population is likely to be quite high again this year. The Sanctuary and the adjacent NWA are safe areas for the birds, but there is hunting on most farmland outside these areas. New visitors and members often don't realize there is a local Snow Goose hunting season until the sound of gunshots from these areas carries into the Sanctuary. Farmland plays an important role in sustaining the Snow Geese, regardless of hunting seasons, and most of these lands are privately owned commercial farms.

For many years, our Society has helped fund a winter "cover crop" program for farmland of Westham Island and nearby Ladner. Under this program, managed by the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust, farming and wildlife interests work together to ensure a grass cover is seeded for the winter after commercial farm crops are harvested in the fall. This grass crop provides soil benefits (added fibre and nutrients), and makes an important supplementary food source for grass-eating waterfowl such as Snow Geese, Trumpeter Swan, American Wigeon and Canada Geese.

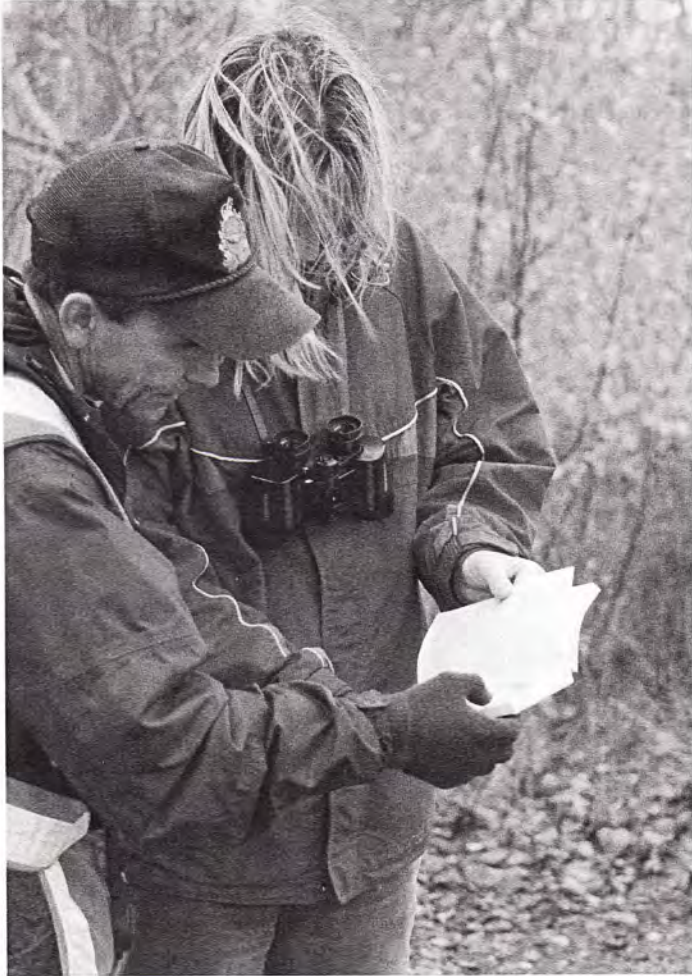
The Viewing Tower is barely visible along the skyline from the Snow Goose feeding areas.

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The Viewing Tower is barely visible along the skyline from the Snow Goose feeding areas.

The Volunteer Corner



Kathleen Fry

*Alan Russell helping a visitor with bird identification.
Alan has been an active BCWS member
and volunteer since 1995.*

A Special Thank You To...

- Angela Bedard and new volunteers Andrea Richardson and Trisha Lee for filling bird feeders.
- Mary Taitt for her unflagging support and leading of the Sunday Bird Walk these past months.
- All those who helped us host crowds on weekends, particularly Jude Grass (with a broken arm) and Alan Russell (with no glasses).
- Istvan Orosi for helping on weekends and also for finding a good home for our mushroom slides with the BC Mycological Society
- Jim Martin for his images and assistance with weekend crowds.
- All contributors to the bird record book for the year, and especially Brian Self for his consistent bird count data and record-keeping on eBird.
- Burton Taylor for his donation of a Nordman Fir tree (native to Russia).
- Justin Malkonin for bagging thousands of bags of seed this fall (as always).
- Ken Hall, Peter Ward and John Toochn for their new nest box study program.
- Roy Hamaguchi for his images and the Marshnotes "Mail-Out" Team who assist with the distribution of our magazine

Volunteers Needed For....

- Hosting visitors along trails on busy weekends from February to April. Leave your name, number and best dates available at the Sanctuary Office 604 946 6980.
- Opening the Museum on weekends. Same as above.
- Providing horticultural expertise to a proposed native plant program. Contact Kathleen at the Sanctuary Office to discuss.
- Assisting staff on Wednesday "trail work day" around the Sanctuary. Drop in on a Wednesday, bring your tools, gloves and raingear and ask for Claire. We are looking for helpers for a nest box maintenance program and the wiring of birch trees (against beavers) in the next few months.
- Sanctuary bird counts on a regular basis. Contact Kathleen at the Sanctuary Office 604 946 6980.

Text: Kathleen Fry, Acting Sanctuary Manager

Dr. W. Sean Boyd to speak at BCWS AGM

Sean has worked with colleagues and graduate students on a variety of migratory bird projects such as: the winter ecology and demographics of Snow Geese; winter and migration ecology of Brant Geese; abundance and distribution patterns of Trumpeter Swans; population demographics and behavior of Harlequin Ducks; habitat interactions and natal return rates of Barrow's Goldeneye and Bufflehead; interaction between shellfish aquaculture and wintering scoters; migration ecology of Pacific scoters; migration ecology and abundance of Eared Grebes; and at-sea foraging distributions of Cassin's Auklets.

Many of his projects are long-term in nature and involve the use and refinement of marking protocols, especially VHF and satellite radio-telemetry. Sean's research is necessarily multidisciplinary and international in scope. The objective is to provide scientific advice necessary to conserve migratory bird populations and their habitats in North America.

Sean became a Research Scientist in 1997 and an Adjunct Professor in the Biology Dept. of Simon Fraser University in 1998. He serves on advisory committees of graduate students affiliated with the Canadian Wildlife Service Chair of Wildlife Ecology at Simon Fraser University.

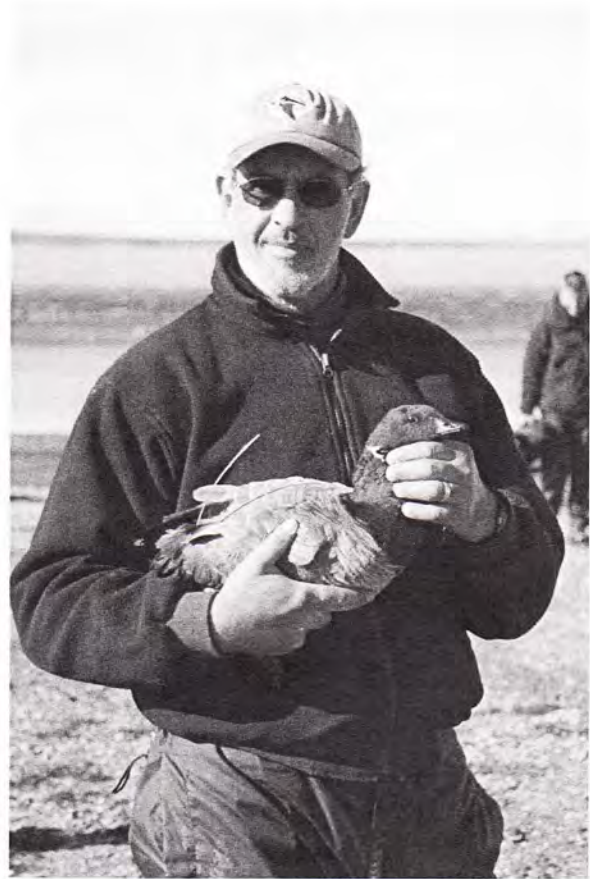


Image submitted by Dr. W. Sean Boyd

Dr. W. Sean Boyd with Brant Goose

BCWS Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event



Richard C. Beard

The BCWS Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event was held at Taverna Gorgona in Ladner on Wednesday, February 3rd 2010.

*From left to right:
Volunteer David Drew, Volunteer Jim Marsh,
BCWS President Jack Bates,
Volunteer Sylvia Drew,
Acting Sanctuary Manager Kathleen Fry.*

Notice to all Members

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

The Bylaws of the Society provide for the election of six (6) Directors by the Society membership in addition to the appointment of six (6) Directors from stakeholder groups.

The six elected Directors each serve a two year term, with three to be elected at each Annual General Meeting.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

will be held at

7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 13th 2010

in the Lecture Hall at

The George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary

5191 Robertson Road, Ladner, British Columbia

Speaker: Dr. W. Sean Boyd

“Recent increase in Wrangel Island Snow Goose population wintering on the Fraser and Skagit deltas: causes, implications, and management prescriptions”.

The Board of Directors would like to take this opportunity to advise the membership that three incumbent Directors

F. Wayne Diakow

James A. Morrison

Gerald O.S. Oyen

will be seeking re-election for a further term.

If you wish to nominate a candidate for election as a Director at the Annual General Meeting, please complete the nomination form which, in addition to the candidate's written consent, must include a written nomination by two Society members in good standing.

Nomination forms are available at the Sanctuary.

No member may nominate more than one candidate in any one year.

A family membership constitutes one vote at the meeting.

Please deliver the completed nomination form, by mail, fax or in person

by **4.00 p.m. Sunday, March 14th 2010** to

The Secretary, British Columbia Waterfowl Society,

5191 Robertson Road, Delta,

British Columbia, V4K 3N2

Fax: 604 946 6982

If there are any further nominations received on or before 4 pm. Sunday, March 14th 2010, a list of all candidates will be posted at the Sanctuary.

Sanctuary Highlights

OCTOBER October is one of the best months for viewing a large variety of northern waterfowl and Lesser Snow Geese which have migrated from the north to feed in the Fraser Delta. The total count for October bird species was 89, averaging 66 species each week.

October 3rd -10th The first winter sighting of nine Greater White-fronted Geese was recorded on October 3rd. Later in the same week two small flocks of geese, one with 40 birds and another with 60 geese, were reported. If you are scanning Canada Geese you might spot Greater White-fronted Geese amongst the flocks.



Greater White-fronted Geese

Jim Martin

On October 4th a "Cackling Goose" was seen with some Canada Geese. Cackling Goose is divided into four subspecies. Minima which breeds in southwestern Alaska is the smallest form, not much bigger than a Mallard. During this week we had the first report for the season of a Lesser Scaup. The Ring-necked Duck and the Pileated Woodpecker are still being reported in the area. A Northern Shrike also showed up this week. The Northern Shrike is classed as a songbird and preys on rodents, snakes, insects and other songbirds. At a glance this ten inch bird is gray and white with a black mask and a black hooked bill. Northern Shrikes often impale their prey on thorns such as those of hawthorn trees. The best place to look for these birds in the winter is along the outer grassy west dyke of the Sanctuary.

October 11th -17th Numbers of Black-crowned Night-Heron are growing with three (two adults and one juvenile)

seen on October 11th. Other birds seen on the 11th: two late sightings of Brown-headed Cowbird, a rarely seen American Tree Sparrow, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper seen on both the 11th and 12th and a Varied Thrush. Viewing from the tower with a spotting scope on a high tide, a Surf Scoter and a Common Loon were reported off the foreshore. Other birds of note for this week were Pectoral Sandpiper, Hooded Merganser, Pileated Woodpecker and a Ruddy Duck.

October 18th-24th Shorebird species dwindle at this time of year but we still had reports of Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Dunlin and a Wilson's Snipe. The Wilson's Snipe has similar proportions to the dowitcher with the long straight bill, it has beige stripes on the back and as with all long-billed sandpipers it is equipped with sensory organs at the tip of the bill to aid prey location.

October 25th-31st We sighted the first Bufflehead for the Fall during this week. The Ruddy Duck is still around and mostly being seen in the West Field. Pileated Woodpecker, still at the Sanctuary, was reported from the east dyke where all the chickadees frequently greet visitors that have offerings of sunflower seeds. On October 30th an adult American Tree Sparrow was seen on the outer dyke in the southwest corner. Other good sightings for this week were Turkey Vulture, Common Raven, Brown-headed Cowbird and, much to the

pleasure of some photographers, a Barn Owl.

NOVEMBER: November is a very active month for birds. Unfortunately, a lot of rain hindered human visitors. The Snow Geese are at their peak in November; when viewing the flocks you will notice a large number of young birds (the gray ones). The species count for November totaled 81 with the average per week of 67.

November 1st-7th On November 1st three Ruddy Ducks were seen in the West Field ponds. The Ruddy Duck is a small diving duck with a blue beak, an upturned tail and a large white cheek and chin patch. These ducks are not often seen at the Sanctuary. They spend their summers on the plains on freshwater lakes and sloughs. This duck, like the cowbird, is a parasitic nester often laying eggs in other ducks' nests especially those of the Redhead and Canvasback.

A Rough-legged Hawk was seen flying over the parking lot on November 7th; when flying this hawk is very pale underneath with black wrist marks on the underside of the wings and a black band at the tail tip. The feathering on the legs comes all the way down to the feet, thus the name rough-legged.

The Rough-legged Hawk is classed as a *buteo* rather than an *accipiter*. A *buteo* has large broad fingered wings and a short rounded tail. Other *buteos* are the Red-tailed Hawk, Swainson's Hawk and Ferruginous Hawk. Traits of the *accipiter* are the long tail and long rounded wings. Other *accipiters* are the Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk. Further birds of note for this week were Short-eared Owl, Ring-necked Duck and the building in numbers of Trumpeter Swan migrating from northern British Columbia.

November 8th-14th On the 8th, the Sunday morning birding group was lucky to spot a Barred Owl along the driveway in one of the cedar trees. The owl was very accommodating and stayed in that perch for most of the day allowing many visitors a good view. On the same day we had 24 Sandhill Crane and five Cliff Swallow. On November 10th a Pileated Woodpecker was again reported. Since this bird calls loudly as it flies you usually hear the bird before you see it. During this week we have noticed larger numbers of merganser, Bufflehead and Trumpeter Swan moving in from the north. A Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Shrike and a Eurasian Wigeon were other interesting sightings for the week.



Jim Martin

Northern Saw-whet Owl

November 15th-21st

The first reporting of a Northern Saw-whet Owl for the season was on the 18th. The owl was in a large evergreen tree just past Fullers Slough. These owls are a challenge to find as they like to tuck in on cedar boughs and in holly bushes. If you find a Northern Saw-whet Owl please don't move branches in order to get a better view; just use your eyes. They tuck in tightly because once they are out in the open they are often

harassed by other birds and even eaten by larger birds of prey. When photographing these and any other bird please avoid the use of flash. The Barred Owl is still being seen as is the Rough-legged Hawk, American Pipit and a Swamp Sparrow.

continued overleaf

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 issues 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 members and visitors (70,000+ visitors in 2009).
- 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: \$20
- FAMILY Membership: \$40
- LIFE Membership: \$500
- Donation: (tax deductible) \$ _____

- VISA
- Mastercard

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November 22nd-29th A Short-eared Owl was seen on November 22nd and 27th as it hunted over the marsh. Not a large owl, they are tawny in color with heavy streaks on the breast. These owls hunt through the day for rodents and insects. The Fraser River Delta is the main wintering area for owls in British Columbia with numbers peaking in January and February. The number of wintering owls is on the decline as we are losing more and more old field habitat due to land use changes, be it residential or agricultural. Another spot where you can see these owls hunting is at Brunswick Point which is located at the end of River Road past the Westham Island Bridge. On November 22nd we had a high count of Swamp Sparrows with three seen along the top north dyke, between the Viewing Tower and Ewen Slough. Other highlights were the Purple Finch on November 30th, Merlin, Barn Owl and Greater-white fronted Geese.

DECEMBER: December was a cold month with the inner ponds and sloughs frozen which pushed waterfowl out to find open water. The total species for December was 91 with 69 as an average per week.

November 29th-December 5th On November 29th a Hairy Woodpecker was seen foraging along the east dyke. This woodpecker looks almost exactly like the more common Downy Woodpecker but the Hairy is approximately two inches bigger. The Pileated Woodpecker is still being seen around the Sanctuary. On this same day we had three Cliff Swallow; a late sighting for them at this time of year.



Jim Martin

Snow Bunting

A Snow Bunting was noted on December 5th. Other highlights for this week were, Short-eared Owl, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, Rough-legged Hawk, Black-bellied Plover, Hermit Thrush, Hutton's Vireo, Evening Grosbeak, Red-throated Loon, Common Loon and Purple Finch. The Purple Finch is very like the House Finch except the male Purple Finch has a lot more red on its back and wings.

December 6th-December 12th We had the unusual sighting on one of our inner Sanctuary ponds of a young Trumpeter Swan feeding in the small amount of open water between the Gift Shop and the Warming Hut. On this same day standing out on the ice behind the Gift Shop watching all the local ducks and the swan involved in a feeding frenzy was a small flock of 30 Dunlin. Offshore a Surf Scoter was seen. From the Viewing Tower on a calm day with a high tide and using a spotting scope you will come across some species that you won't find inside the Sanctuary such as loon, grebe and shorebird species and even whales and sea lions at the right time of year. December 11th was the first report of a Barred Owl seen in the northeast corner of the Sanctuary. This owl looks similar to the Spotted Owl as both have black eyes. Most other owl species have yellow eyes. Other good sightings for this week were Turkey Vulture, Northern Shrike, Wilson's Snipe, Pine Siskin and a late in season sighting of Yellow-rumped Warbler.

December 13th-December 19th Sixty-three species were reported this week with the following as highlights; Ring-necked Duck, Rough-legged Hawk, Barred Owl, Wilson's Snipe, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Raven and Purple Finch.

December 20th-December 26th A Common Snipe was seen on December 20th. At a glance this bird looks something like a dowitcher especially with the long straight bill. The snipe has much more colouring on its back and, unlike the dowitchers, tends to be a loner. A flock of Black-bellied Plover was seen from the tower flying over the foreshore. This shorebird winters in southwest British Columbia as well as further south along the Pacific Coast. When driving out to the Sanctuary in the winter check to see the plovers feeding on earth worms in the local farm fields and marine invertebrates on the mudflats; the birds are usually accompanied by Dunlin. This week we also spotted a Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Ring-necked Duck and a Mourning Dove at the Entrance Gate.

December 2th- January 2nd 2010 The first sighting for the winter of a Red-breasted Merganser was recorded this week. Also a small flock of Greater White-fronted Geese was reported. The best place to find them is to scan within or near the flocks of Canada Geese. Other species reported this week were Barn Owl, Barred Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Virginia Rail, a Northern Shrike and a late in season sighting of a Lincoln's Sparrow. We still have ten Sandhill Crane with us which can usually be found along the outer dyke.

Text: Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager

Varri Raffan has worked at the Gift Shop for 24 years.

Manager's Report

continued from page four

November brought heavy rains, high winds around Remembrance Day (with associated fallen trees), many days of very high tides and several weeks watching water levels to ensure trails were not flooded. December was cold and clear mid-month and again around Christmas Day. During these periods, most of the ponds were frozen, with just a light dusting of snow added December 20th. Between Christmas and New Year's Day, there were some days of heavy fog, freezing to frost overnight. The colder weather concentrated most birds around the entrance or openings in the ice.

The birds of prey have increased, and seem to have favourite winter hunting areas now, with the Peregrine Falcon staking out the large snag, a Cooper's Hawk regularly scattering ducks and songbirds by the Gift Shop, and Barred Owls and Saw-whet Owls and other raptors keeping the birding crowds scanning all trees.

In early January, two Long-eared Owls finally made an appearance in the flooded back area behind the Manager's house, but not in time to be included in the Christmas Count or the 2009 Species List.

Randy Lorenz came out of retirement to help in the Gift Shop from April to October 2009 during our transitional period. Laura Jordison, a long-term BCWS member and Marshnotes "Mail-Out" Team volunteer, has now filled Randy's former position, and Randy and her husband Jerry are enjoying the winter in Mexico.

Here's hoping for a fine spring season!

Text and Images: Kathleen Fry, Acting Sanctuary Manager



Randy Lorenz with an "eager beaver".



Laura Jordison at the Gift Shop.

2009 Ladner Christmas Bird Count Results

The 2009 Ladner Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place on Sunday, December 27th. We finally got a day where the weather co-operated and thanks to the highest number of participants (84), both in teams and feeder watchers in many years, we got a good count. Victoria, who held their Count on December 16th, also had great weather and managed to get two more species than Ladner. Ladner's #2 position in British Columbia is still something to be proud of and our 140 species was around our average for the Count.

The Count did not have any really rare birds seen on the day, however, species that we missed in past years, due to snow or windy weather including Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Marbled Murrelet and Ancient Murrelet, were seen off Point Roberts this year. Other interesting sightings on the Count were the number of Anna's Hummingbird this year, not only in Ladner, but also White Rock and Vancouver.

An experienced team of 12 birders covered the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Westham Island and provided 88 species to the Count.

This year we also had access to the Alaksen Wildlife Area (CWS) which added species to the Count.

Some of the big misses at the Sanctuary for the day were the Long-eared Owl, and Bohemian Waxwing; but the Swamp Sparrow was seen within the Count period.

This year we also had wonderful media coverage prior to and following the Count. The *Delta Optimist* promoted the Count. When the feeder watcher and volunteer team's bird numbers had been tallied at the post-Count gathering both the *Delta Optimist* and *South Delta Leader* published summaries of our Count Day.

Delta Cable also did a studio interview with me which was run on their community program for a week around the Count period. The *Vancouver Province* reporter Brian Lewis wrote a story which appeared on the Count day, about the importance of CBCs with a focus on the Ladner Count showing how the loss of habitat can be reflected in the number of species seen and the number of birds recorded on the Count.

If anyone would like an electronic version of the 2009 Ladner CBC final tally for all areas please contact judegrass@shaw.ca

Thank you to the British Columbia Waterfowl Society for the use of the Lecture Hall for the post-Count gathering and to Kathleen Fry and Brian Self who assisted with set up and clean up of the building.

Text: Jude Grass, Ladner CBC Coordinator

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

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