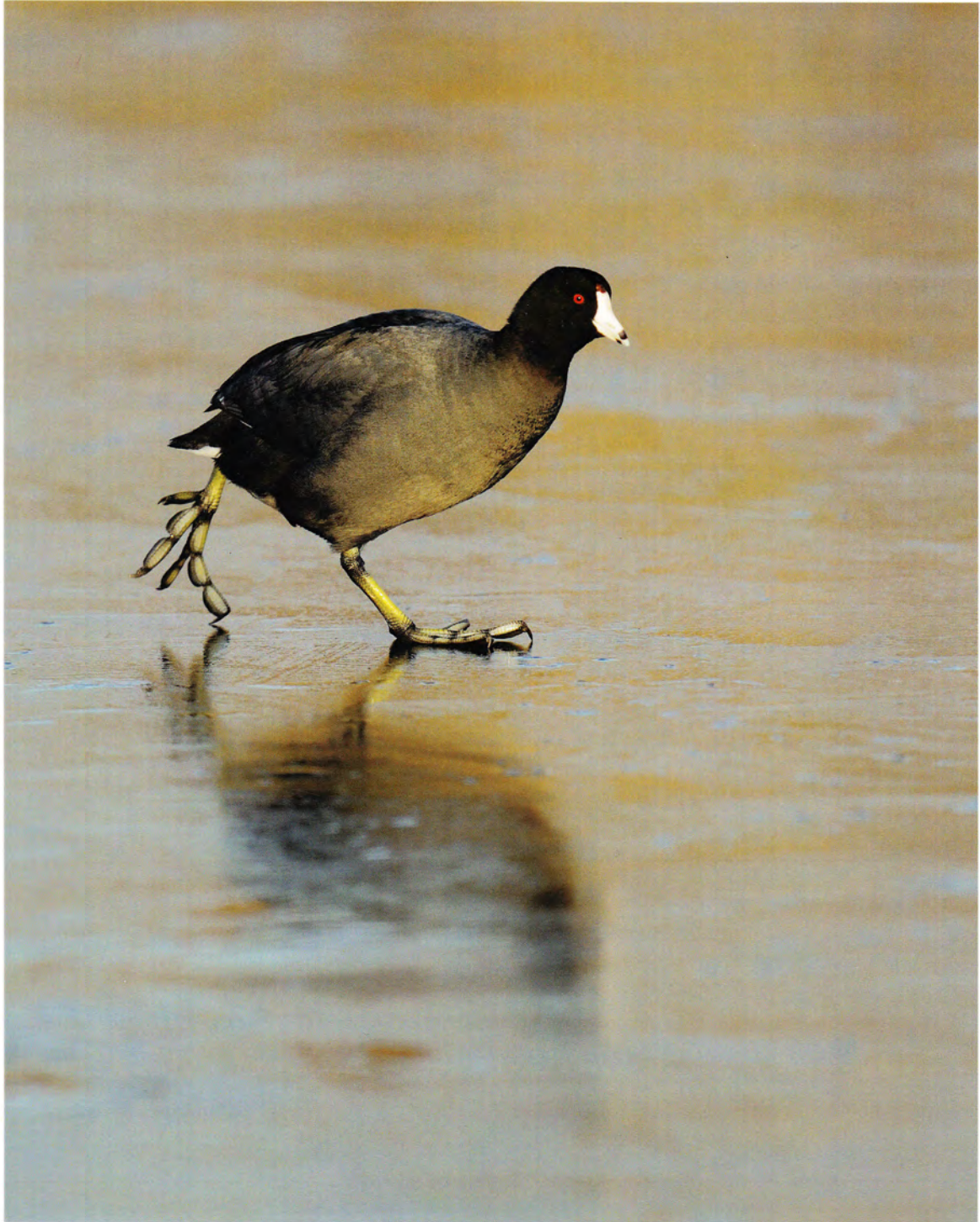


Marshnotes[®]



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
WINTER 2011**

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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**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE
OF MARSHNOTES
April 18th 2011**

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Kathleen Fry

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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: \$5.00 Children (2-14 years) and Seniors (60+): \$2.50
School group tours:	Adults: \$2.50	Children (2-14 years) and Seniors (60+): \$1.50
The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible		School group tours by arrangement

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are all registered trademarks of the British Columbia Waterfowl Society**

Top Birds of 2010

JANUARY

White-throated Sparrow
Redhead

FEBRUARY

Northern Goshawk
Pileated Woodpecker

MARCH

Red-breasted Sapsucker

APRIL

Eurasian Wigeon
Palm Warbler
Eurasian Collared-dove

MAY

Chipping Sparrow
Black-throated Gray Warbler
Olive-sided Flycatcher

JUNE

Yellow-headed Blackbird
Black Swift
Eastern Kingbird
Willet

JULY

Marbled Godwit

AUGUST

Purple Martin
Stilt Sandpiper
Vaux's Swift
Baird's Sandpiper

SEPTEMBER

Lincoln's Sparrow
Townsend's Warbler
Cassin's Vireo
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

OCTOBER

Western Meadowlark
Wood Sandpiper

NOVEMBER

Ruddy Duck
Gyrfalcon
Tropical Kingbird
Anna's Hummingbird

DECEMBER

Thayer's Gull
Evening Grosbeak
Bohemian Waxwing
Ruddy Duck

Bird of the Year 2010

Wood Sandpiper
(Tringa glareola)

Top Birds of 2010 list
compiled by Varri Raffan,
Gift Shop Manager

About Our Covers

Front Cover: American Coot © Jim Martin

Back Cover: Wood Sandpiper © Jim Martin

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Sanctuary Manager's Report

Fall 2010 was busy, with the Wood Sandpiper drawing keen birders during its brief appearance in mid-October, and the usual crowds enjoying views of the Lesser Snow Geese in fields during the latter part of the month and into November. A short period of snow in late November was followed by freezing temperatures, with visitor and duck numbers dropping and the Sanctuary's ponds frozen over for half of December. Media coverage of local Christmas Bird counts, a nearby Northern Hawk Owl and the presence of Northern Saw-whet Owls and Great Horned Owls along East Dyke resulted in a constant stream of visitors despite the cold weather over New Year's and into 2011.

Total visitor use for the last three months of 2010 was 18,000, with 1,040 people on the peak day of November 7th. The year 2011 is off to a good start, with over 3,400 visitors in just the first ten cold clear days.

The Sanctuary's school program was given a boost with many classes visiting courtesy of a grant received from HSBC Bank Canada for schools otherwise unable to afford bus costs. This fall, we provided several public talks in the Lecture Hall and advertised on the website and through Delta Cablevision. They included introductions to the migration of the Snow Geese, Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust and the Sanctuary's Bird of Prey species. These talks were well-received and were provided by myself, David Bradbeer and Al Grass. Check the website and Gift Shop postings for more upcoming talks.

The Bird of the Year, the Wood Sandpiper, drew in over 100 of our experienced birders and many others to document markings and identification when it finally could be clearly viewed on October 16th. The only two other records for this species for Canada were in the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1994 (Hamel and Hearne, 1994) and on Herchel Islands in the northern Yukon Territory (Eckhert, 1996). The year 2010 was a good year in general for shore-bird observations, with twenty-one species visiting the Sanctuary.

This fall, when the Lesser Snow Geese arrived from their northern breeding grounds in Wrangel Island, Russia, two things were noticed. The percentage of young in the flocks seemed low, possibly indicating some nest failure on the breeding grounds, and there were as many as five blue phase birds in the flocks seen in late October. "Blue phase" Lesser Snow Geese are a colour morph and have a noticeably dark bluish-brown body and white head. Generally, there are only one or two of these seen every few years.

The Snow Geese spent most of October feeding exclusively in potato fields across Delta, seeking out the unharvested buried potatoes, grasses and other foods. In late October and early November, the flocks moved to fields closer to the Sanctuary, providing excellent views for visitors. From mid-November onwards, they began roosting way out on the tidal marshes during the day.

Every January, an official count is done of all Lesser Snow Geese in the Fraser River Delta and the Skagit

River just south of the border in the State of Washington. Researcher Dr. Sean Boyd, of Environment Canada, flew over both deltas on December 17th and provided a preliminary total estimate of up to 70,000 birds, with all geese in the whole Fraser Delta (30-40,000 birds) offshore of the Sanctuary that day. Most of our geese are expected to remain in the Skagit River estuary for the late winter, returning to the Fraser Delta in March.

Over twenty Sandhill Cranes were roosting in the Sanctuary this fall prior to their migration southwards. Throughout October, the flocks were quite mobile, moving between tidal marshes, the ponds of the Sanctuary and a harvested corn field near the Westham Island bridge.

A few years ago, Hemmera Environmental Service Consultants placed a radio transmitter on a Sandhill Crane in Richmond to track local movements and migration patterns of cranes in the Fraser Delta. This well-marked bird was seen all fall with the large flocks on Westham Island and in the Sanctuary then disappeared by the end of November, along with several others. This component of the flock has probably migrated as far south as California, where the telemetry bird wintered last year.

The remaining core group of eleven birds consist of our resident pair and chick (colt), another pair and an older colt, plus five other migrants. This is not unusual, as for in recent years, up to six visiting cranes have spent the winter with our resident pair, only to be chased out of the area in the spring.

Throughout December and early January, our resident pair and colt have been doing courtship displays and acting aggressively towards other cranes, often chasing them from the house lawn and certain trail sections. It is possible that the territorial behaviour to other cranes during the non-breeding season is more pronounced if a pair has a young bird with them for the winter.

Visitors in late December may have noticed the extremely high tides. The highest tide of the year was on Boxing Day (16 ft.), a good foot over the usual high tide mark for the rest of the year. Birding on days with high tides of 14 ft. or more provide good opportunities to see species that normally roost in the high tide marshes (American Bittern, Short-eared Owl, Virginia Rail), as their high tide cover is flooded.

In late fall and early winter, the Sanctuary becomes the hunting ground of nine species of hawks and up to seven owls and this year was no exception.

In late December, our Northern Saw-whet Owl numbers increased from just a couple of birds to at least six individuals, most of which are using hollies and firs along East Dyke as daytime roosts. Barn Owl, Short-eared Owl and Long-eared Owl have been present all fall, but are hard to spot and often roost in areas well away from the trails. Two Great Horned Owls have begun to roost together along East Dyke. They may be considering the big cottonwood nest tree used in 2008 as a nest site again.

Speaking of owls, the Northern Hawk Owl has been present on Westham Island since December 2nd. This species is not generally seen on the south coast and is a diurnal bird, making it very active during the day. There are only three records in the Vancouver area in the past 30 years, so it has drawn hundreds of birders and photographers to watch it hunting in fields or perching in one of its favoured trees in private yards just down the road from the Sanctuary. One yard has had as many as seventy people some days milling around it looking for this bird, and we thank these neighbours for their tolerance.

Just a reminder that Westham Island roads are narrow rural roads, so parking needs to be appropriate and the wishes of private landowners respected.

It is interesting to note we have two Northern Hawk Owl specimens in our museum collection, one of which was collected in 1913 in the Cloverdale area and another in 1953 from Alkali Lake in the interior of BC.

Best wishes for happy birding in 2011.

References

Eckhart, C.D. 1996. Wood Sandpiper: a Yukon first at Herschel Islands. *Birders' Journal* 5(5): 247-251.

Hamel, P. and M. Hearne, 1994. A Wood Sandpiper at Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands - first record for Canada. *Birders' Journal* 6(3): 257-260.

Text: Kathleen Fry, Sanctuary Manager



Jim Martin

Northern Hawk Owl

The Volunteer Corner

A Special Thank You to the following Volunteers

- Istvan Orosi, Alan Russell, and Jim Martin for helping with visitor orientation along trails on busy weekends in the past few months.
- Brian Self for his assistance with above, as well as the school program and public walks and his shared bird records submitted for the Sanctuary through eBird.
- New volunteers Viveka Ohman and June Owens for helping with the school program and seed program respectively.
- Doug Fiddick and Dan Paquette for helping with trail maintenance this fall.
- Justin Malkonin, Eileen Axford and Eric Rossicci for their many hours spent bagging bird seed and filling bird feeders.
- Mary Taitt, Bill Topping, and Murray MacDonald for their regular assistance with the Sunday bird walk.
- Al and Jude Grass and David Bradbeer for their talks this fall about farming, wildlife and birds of prey.

- The Provincial Resource Program through Delta Secondary school for their assistance with the firewood and general maintenance of feeders and blinds.
- Ken Hall, Peter Ward, John Tootchin and the volunteers from the Delta Naturalists for the nest box program to fix up and monitor our duck and swallow boxes.
- The many birders who shared the Wood Sandpiper with Sanctuary visitors and alerted the birding community through an amazing system of text and telephone messages and on-line birding groups.
- The Marshnotes "mail-out" team.

Volunteers are needed for the following

- Members willing to host visitors in the Lecture Hall (Museum) and along trails during busy weekends this spring. Please leave a message for Kathleen at the Sanctuary Office 604 946 6980.

Text: Kathleen Fry, Sanctuary Manager

The Annual Cycle of Shorebird-Watching at the Sanctuary

Species	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Killdeer	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Black-bellied Plover	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*
Semipalmated Plover							*	*	*			
Greater Yellowlegs		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lesser Yellowlegs				*	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Solitary Sandpiper					*		*	*	*			
Stilt Sandpiper							*	*	*			
Marbled Godwit			*	*	*	*	*	*				
Hudsonian Godwit								*	*			
Long-billed Dowitcher	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Short-billed Dowitcher				*	*	*	*	*	*		*	
Wood Sandpiper										*		
Wilson's Snipe	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper									*	*		
Spotted Sandpiper						*	*	*	*	*		*
Red-necked Phalarope						*	*	*	*			
Wilson's Phalarope					*	*	*	*				
Pectoral Sandpiper					*		*	*	*	*		
Baird's Sandpiper					*			*	*			
Dunlin	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
Western Sandpiper				*	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Least Sandpiper				*	*		*	*	*	*		*
Semipalmated Sandpiper					*	*	*	*	*			

Monthly Occurrence of Shorebird Species (combined records from 2008-2010)

There was great excitement October 16th when the Bird of the Year 2010, the Wood Sandpiper, made its re-appearance by the Sanctuary's Viewing Tower after being briefly spotted the previous week. Before that, birders had been searching for it through flocks of dowitcher, brightly-coloured Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, several phalarope species, Stilt Sandpiper, and Marbled Godwit. The table above gives a general summary of the monthly occurrence of shorebird species, based on our general weekly species lists for the past three years. The Sanctuary's West Field (by the Viewing Tower) is the most consistent viewing area, with the light for observation and photography best from the tower in mornings and from the seaward dyke in afternoons. Although shorebirds move northwards through the Fraser in April and May, the birds are intently focussed on feeding and moving on, whereas the same species move more slowly southwards later in the summer, with August and September the times of greatest species diversity and likelihood of more long-term visits of species.

Western Sandpipers, Dunlin, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and Long-billed Dowitchers occur in the largest flocks. Thousands of Western Sandpipers and Dunlin swarm over mudflat feeding areas and perform synchronized aerial displays. The Western Sandpipers are spring and late summer migrants, moving northwards in April and re-appearing again between July to October. The slightly larger Dunlin is their winter equivalent, present from October to April in the delta. Large flocks of Long-billed Dowitchers start to build up in early fall by the tower, then depart during winter.

Both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs numbers also build from late summer into early fall when up to 1,000 of them can be spread across West Field.

Shorebird identification can be quite challenging, as many of the smaller species look very similar, and the same species can look quite different between observations spaced a few months apart. Western Sandpipers, for example, migrate northwards as adults in different stages of moulting into breeding plumage. On the way south, adult females then males migrate first followed in August and September by the juveniles (Moira Lemon, personal communication 2011). There are often unexpected non-breeders and stragglers present when the majority of the species migrate through the area. The diverse shorebird species pose an excellent challenge for those wishing to hone their observation skills, but investing in a good quality spotting scope makes it far more enjoyable.

References Lemon, Moira 2011. Canadian Wildlife Services. Personal communication.

Text: Kathleen Fry, Sanctuary Manager

Ladner Christmas Bird Count Number One in Canada, Again!

The Ladner BC/Washington Christmas Bird Count was held on Monday December 27th 2010 and it was a very successful count with 143 species seen on count day.

Two new species were added to the count – a Northern Hawk Owl and a Northern Mockingbird. Other notable species seen on count day that are not regularly seen (therefore needing a Rare Bird sighting form) included Spotted Sandpiper, White-throated Sparrow, & Harris's Sparrow.

Unfortunately the Yellow-breasted Chat which had been seen on the CWS property in Delta in early December was not seen.

We also recorded a seven species of owl day: Barn Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl and the Northern Hawk Owl.) Too bad there wasn't a Snowy Owl this year!

The Point Roberts Team did an excellent job of recording Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Marbled Murrelet and Ancient Murrelet – which are sometimes hard to get on count day.

Other interesting records for the day include a record high number of Eurasian Collared-dove with 178 seen. Last year (2009) Ladner CBC recorded 25. This species is rapidly expanding its range throughout British Columbia. Bald Eagles were very abundant again with a total of 1194 seen on the count. Westham Island, George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and CWS property recorded 390 birds followed by 260 at the Vancouver Landfill.

While the weather was cloudy, windy in the morning (a very high tide on Boundary Bay) and raining and windy in the afternoon a record number of birders in the field (over 100) and a number of feeder watchers had a great day of birding. The higher number of participants was due in part to the request for volunteers and feeder watchers in the Delta Optimist and South Delta Leader. They also ran excellent stories on the results of the count.

This year we also had our first count from the water with a team of kayakers covering the South Arm Marshes Wildlife Management Area along Fraser River between Richmond and Delta. This area has not been covered in the past other than by looking from the shore towards the island but missing the channels between the islands. The team recorded mostly waterfowl and some passerines and raptors.

Special thanks to the British Columbia Waterfowl Society for use of the Lecture Hall for the post count get together; and for the assistance of Kathleen Fry, Varri Rafan, and Laura Jordison regarding logistics.

Text: Jude Grass.
Ladner BC/Washington CBC Coordinator

Special Request

The Sanctuary has a wheelchair which we provide sometimes to visitors, but it is aging and becoming difficult to repair.

Please contact Varri at the Sanctuary Office (604 946 6980) if you have a possible replacement .

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 12th 2011

in the Lecture Hall at

The George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary

5191 Robertson Road, Ladner, British Columbia

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

Douglas B. Ransome

Barney W. Reifel

Kenneth I. Thompson

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 13th 2011** 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 13th 2011, a list of all candidates will be posted at the Sanctuary

Sanctuary Highlights

Thank you to all who take the time to input their sightings into our Bird Sightings Log-book on the Gift Shop deck. We appreciate this help in compiling the Sanctuary records

OCTOBER: is one of the peak months for viewing birds as they migrate south. We still had the tail end of the shorebird migration and were starting to see a lot more waterfowl, Lesser Snow Geese and birds of prey. The total count for this month was 90 species.

October 3rd—October 9th

October 3rd was our first report for the fall of a single Swamp Sparrow spotted along the North Dyke between the Viewing Tower and Ewen Slough. A late sighting of a Yellow Warbler was also recorded on this day. On October 5th two Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, five Virginia Rails and a Tropical Kingbird were recorded. The Tropical Kingbird was seen flying south along the west seaward dyke. This bird is rarely seen along the Pacific Coast and winters around the Mexican border. On October 7th a Steller's Jay was seen at the Sanctuary. You have probably noticed the absence of Steller's Jays on your visits to the Sanctuary and wondered why, with the amount of

trees and surrounding habitat, it does not seem attractive to this species. Wildlife Rescue Association released a rehabilitated Horned Grebe at the Sanctuary and it was seen for a couple of days after. Greater White-fronted Geese, American Tree Sparrow, Cinnamon Teal, Great Horned Owl and Gyrfalcon were some of the other unusual reports for this week with 67 species.

October 10th—October 16th

The species count for this week was 72. We had another release from Wildlife Rescue Association this week. It was a Western Grebe which unfortunately did not survive. The numbers of Lesser Snow Geese grew over this period. Mixed in with the Snow Geese was a very dark one called "Blue Phase" Snow Goose which had a dark body, darker than the gray body of a juvenile Lesser Snow Goose.

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 issue of the BCWS publication "Marshnotes".
- A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop (please show your membership card at time of purchase).
- 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 (70,000 visitors in 2010).
- 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 need for survival.
- Provide support for like-minded organizations who are working in waterfowl-related projects.

Enclosed is my cheque or VISA/Mastercard number for:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| SINGLE Membership: | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$25 |
| FAMILY Membership: | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$50 |
| LIFE Membership: | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$500 |
| Donation (tax deductible) | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

VISA Mastercard VISA or Mastercard # _____ Expiry Date: _____

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

Address: _____ Postal Code: _____

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

Telephone: 604 946 6980 Facsimile: 604 946 6982

Website: www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com

The big highlight for the year at the Sanctuary was the sighting of a Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) on October 10th. It was a first for the Sanctuary and a third sighting for Canada. We had a lot of visitors wanting to see this bird. It was seen with yellowlegs in the marsh by the Viewing Tower. At that time of year it should have been on its way to Africa and parts of southern Asia to spend the winter (please see Manager's Report on page 4) for further details on this rare bird). On October 12th we had a report of a hummingbird near the East Dyke; this was probably an Anna's Hummingbird as this species over-winters throughout much of the Lower Mainland. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was still being seen in the area. On October 16th we had another sighting of the Wood Sandpiper. A Ruddy Duck was spotted in the Southwest Marsh. This small stiff-tailed duck with a blue beak mainly migrates at night. It winters along the west coast. Hermit Thrush, Northern Shrike, Merlin, Black-bellied Plovers and a late sighting of a Northern Rough-winged Swallow were other birds of note during this week.

October 17th—October 23rd

With hunting season open we saw more Ring-necked Pheasants which are reared and brought to Westham Island to be released by the Westham Island Gun Club. On one morning during this week approximately 24 pheasants gathered around the front gate of the Sanctuary. A Western Meadowlark was seen flying over the Sanctuary. In winter you can find small flocks of these birds along roadsides around agricultural land. I usually see four or five of them along the east side of 34th Street (turn right off Westham Island Bridge then left on 34th St.) This area is also good for viewing Trumpeter Swan during mid-November to mid-March. We have noticed quite a few different sightings of Northern Shrike this fall. October is the time we start to see more of the diving ducks (Greater and Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead and Hooded Merganser) arrive. We were also lucky this week to have spotted two Barred Owls, one Great Horned Owl and two Northern Saw-whet Owls. The sighting list for this week numbered 71 species.

October 24th—October 30th

On October 24th we had an odd sighting of a Chukar on the driveway. These birds originally introduced from Asia are usually found in the Interior or in the States. We found out later that the Chukar had been included in the Westham Island Gun Club's release of Ring-necked Pheasants. Trumpeter Swan numbers grew and they could be seen feeding in potato fields on Westham Island. On October 24th two Great Horned Owls were seen. When you drive along the Sanctuary's driveway remember to glance at the cedar trees because you might be lucky to see one there. On October 25th the Ruddy Duck was seen again and on October 26th a Rough-legged Hawk was spotted flying over. This hawk has quite a pale body with dark patches on the wrist section under its wings and a dark band along the edge of the tail. Also on October 26th the first report of the year for the Sanctuary of a Northern Saw-whet Owl was recorded in the northeast corner. On October 29th one Evening Grosbeak was recorded which rounded our weekly list to 66 species.

NOVEMBER: is the best month to view the many species migrating southward for the winter. This month is also the peak time for viewing the largest number of Lesser Snow Geese. The total species count for this month was 89.

October 31st—November 6th

During this week we had 13 species of birds of prey (hawks, falcons, owls and eagles). Five of those species were owls which were seen most days. The East Dyke (the very right trail where the chickadees are) seems to be the best location to see owl species. This East Dyke trail also has a lot of feeders for songbirds such as White-crowned Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Black-capped Chickadee and House Sparrow being some of the more plentiful species.

On the ground below the feeders and along the trails you will see Spotted Towhee foraging through leaves for seeds and insects. These birds are a bit stockier than sparrows and have a black hooded head, a red eye, white spots on the wing and rufous colored sides (the old name was Rufous-sided Towhee). Other highlights on this week's list of 76 species were the Northern Shrike, Black-bellied Plover and Wilson's Snipe.

November 7th—November 13th

On November 7th we had a late sighting of an Osprey. This species, which subsists solely on fish, has generally left the area by mid-October on their way south to the West Indies and northern parts of Peru, Argentina and Paraguay. A Chestnut-backed Chickadee was seen feeding with other songbirds on November 9th. This chickadee has a nice chestnut-brown back and sides and is smaller than the Black-capped Chickadee. We don't see many in our area but if you travel to the Gulf Islands or Vancouver Island they are about the only chickadee you can find.

During this week we had our last report of a Yellow-rumped Warbler. These warblers are the first to show up in the spring and the last leave in the winter. A Ross's Goose was found amongst the Lesser Snow Geese. It takes a bit of patience and time to scan large flocks of Lesser Snow Geese to find maybe only one Ross's Goose. This goose is very similar to a Lesser Snow Goose but is about a third smaller and has a short stubby beak which has no black "grinning patch" on the side of the bill. It also has a higher pitched squeaky honk.

There were still high counts of Long-billed Dowitcher feeding around the Viewing Tower. An immature Northern Goshawk was reported hunting dowitcher. A couple of Peregrine Falcons were seen in the same area also hunting the shorebirds. This week's sightings list totaled 79 species.

November 14th—November 20th

With the Long-billed Dowitchers at a high count of approximately 2450 we are still seeing the Northern Goshawk and Peregrine Falcons hunting in the area. Seventeen species of waterfowl and 12 species of birds of prey were all present during this week which combined with all the other songbirds made our list for the week 74 species.

November 21st—November 27th

The first sighting for the fall of a Red-breasted Merganser was reported in this week. All three species (Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser and Red-breasted Merganser) were present during this week. These ducks can be seen diving in our sloughs for their food which consists mostly of fish but sometimes includes crustaceans and aquatic insects. On November 25th eight Bohemian Waxwings, with a flock of Cedar Waxwings, were spotted feeding on Hawthorne berries. Although we can spot Cedar Waxwing throughout the entire year (they are most abundant in summer) the Bohemian Waxwing is mostly seen in the winter. This week's list numbered 72 species.

November 28th—December 4th

On November 28th a pair of Evening Grosbeaks was spotted feeding at the feeder near the aluminum bike rack. Also on the 28th a Short-eared Owl was seen hunting along the western foreshore. These owls hunt both day and at night. On November 30th a Northern Shrike was reported. A small flock of Greater White-fronted Geese was still showing up around the Sanctuary. Barn Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Merlin, Thayer's Gull, American Bittern and Virginia Rail were some of the other 71 species reported this week. Just a note to document the Northern Hawk Owl that showed up in the 2400 block of Westham Island Road on December 2nd. This diurnal owl (active through the day) is an unusual sighting for this far down the coast as it is primarily a northern species seen mostly above the 56N latitude. The owl was still being seen in the same location at the time of writing six weeks later.

DECEMBER: brought some cold snowy weather during the third week. With freezing temperatures for a few days in a row the inner ponds and some sloughs froze up forcing a lot of the waterfowl out into open water to feed. The cooler temperatures also sent the Sandhill Cranes to the front entrance looking for people who had grain handouts. December is a good month to view birds of prey. This month had a total count of 89 species.

December 5th—December 11th

On December 5th a male Canvasback was reported. During this week we started to notice a pair of Great Horned Owls showing up along the East Dyke trail near where they nested three years ago. Great Horned Owls nest early in the year, some as early as mid-February and into the third week of March. Incubation is normally 30-32 days. The young fledge in approximately 35 days after hatching. Perhaps we will be lucky to have the pair nest again at the Sanctuary.

Black-crowned Night-Herons now numbered five birds. They were seen in their usual daytime roost opposite the Warming Hut. Viewing is much easier now that the leaves are off the trees. On December 6th Bohemian Waxwings were reported again along with a Northern Shrike and a Hermit Thrush. On December 8th a Hutton's Vireo was seen. At a quick glance this bird resembles a Ruby-crowned Kinglet but the vireo is slightly larger and has only a partial white eye-ring and doesn't twitch its wings like a kinglet. During this week a total of 68 species was recorded.

December 12th—December 18th

The Great Horned Owls were still being spotted near the end of the East Dyke. On December 13th a Merlin was seen. We had a high count of five Northern Saw-whet Owls on the 15th. Bald Eagles were abundant now. The pair at the Westham Island Bridge frequented the old nest site and started to prepare the nest to lay their eggs. Laying can occur as early as mid-February but is usually late March/early April, incubation is 34-36 days and fledging 70-98 days. The Bald Eagle became the United States of America's national emblem in 1782 because of its fierce demeanor. This species can live up to 40 years in the wild and even longer in captivity. The species list for this week totaled 70 with the following as some of the highlights - Red-breasted Sapsucker, Canvasback, Gyrfalcon and Ruddy Duck.

December 19th—December 25th

Large numbers of Lesser Snow Geese left our area and headed to the Skagit Valley, Washington. The geese will be back our way around mid-March until about mid-April when they leave for their nesting grounds on Wrangel Island in Russia. Eleven Sandhill Cranes were seen on most days. This number has been steady for the past while and we expect the cranes may over-winter at the Sanctuary. This week had a few days of cold temperatures bringing ice to some of the inner ponds thus pushing the waterfowl out to open water. We still managed to record 18 different species of waterfowl ending with a total of 69 species for the week.

December 26th—January 2nd 2011

On Sunday, December 26th five American Bitterns were seen with five Black-crowned Night-Herons, two Virginia Rails, one female Ruddy Duck, five Northern Saw-whet Owls and 1,000 Lesser Snow Geese. On December 31st, six Killdeer were spotted. The week's list numbered 65 species. Species of note included, Hermit Thrush, Lincoln's Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow and Canvasback.

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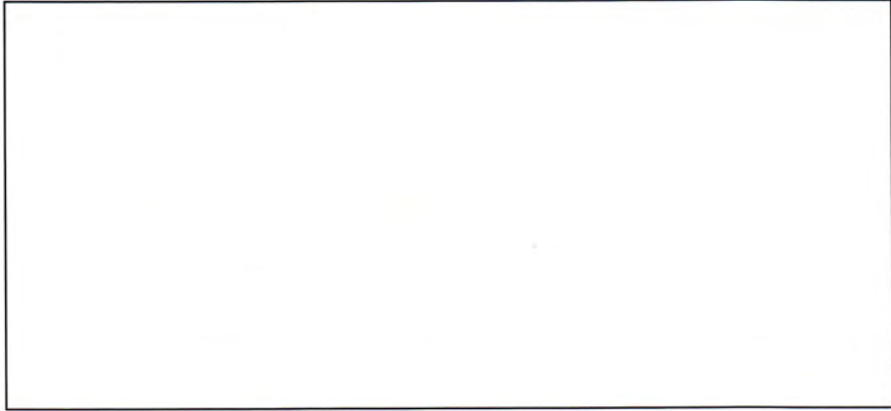
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As a new year begins some of you will be starting all over again with a new species list for 2011. Happy New Year to you all. Enjoy your time spent at the Sanctuary and feel free to ask us any questions on something you have encountered on your walk.

Text: Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager

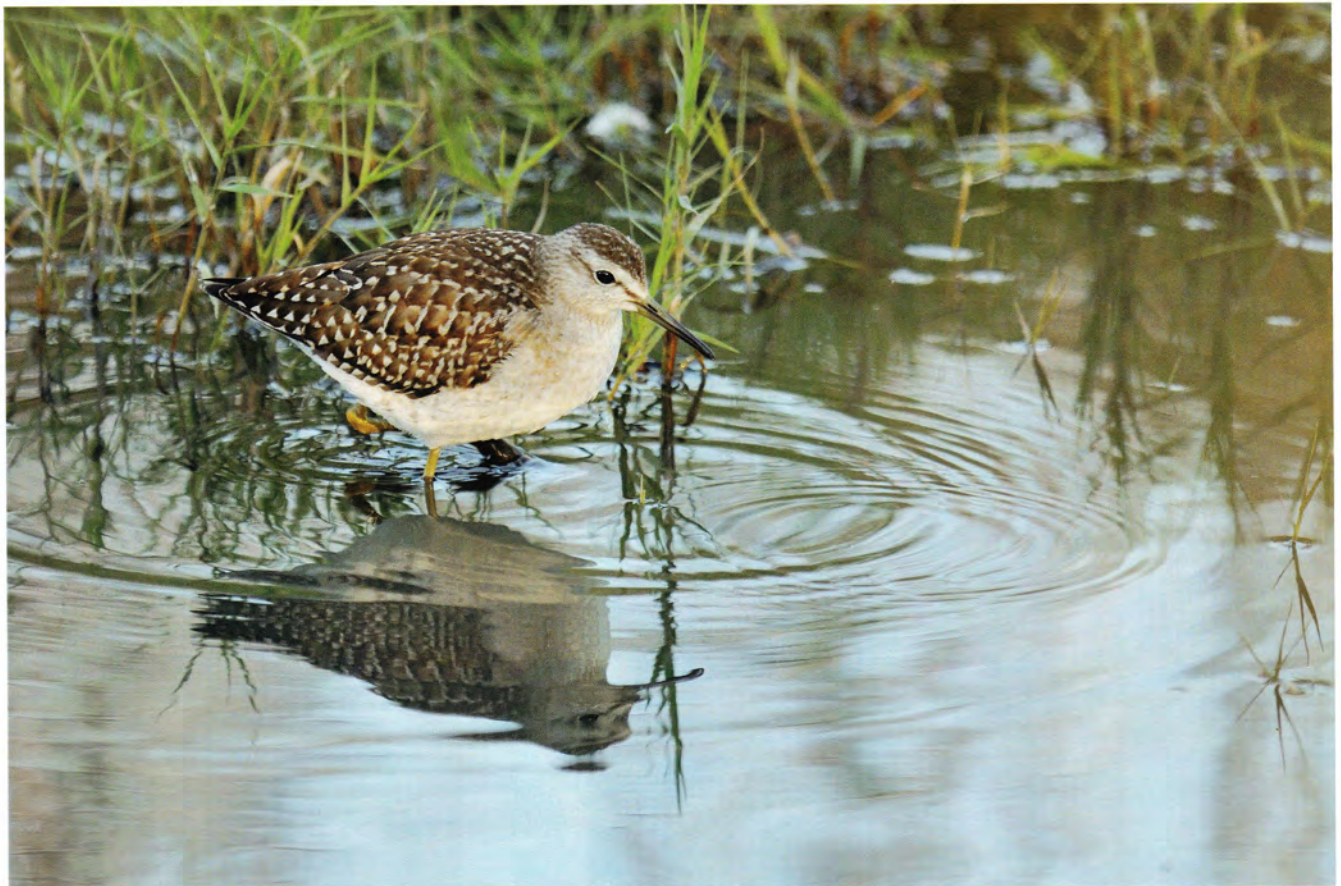
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