

Marshnotes[®]



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
WINTER 2016**

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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Circulation: 2,500.

Published four times a year.

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE
OF MARSHNOTES

April 15th, 2016

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Robert Butler

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Sanctuary Manager: Kathleen Fry
Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan
Reception: Laura Jordison
Biologist: Dan Dixon
Maintenance: David McClue

Hours of Operation: 9:00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. every day. The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible.

Admission: Members: Free
Non-Members: Adults: \$5 Children (2-14 yrs) and Seniors (60 yrs +): \$3
School Groups: Special discounts available; pre-booking is required.

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Top Birds of the Sanctuary in the Year 2015

2015 Bird of the Year: Great Gray Owl



Great Gray Owl Photo: Jim Martin

Total Species Observed In 2015: **183**

Monthly Species Highlights

January Harris's Sparrow	February Great Gray Owl	March Brant
April Long-Eared Owl	May American White Pelican	June Green Heron
July Baird's Sandpiper	August Northern Waterthrush	September White-faced Ibis
October Great Egret	November Townsend's Warbler	December Parasitic Jaeger

Text: Varri Raffan,
Gift Shop Manager

About Our Covers:

Front Cover: Barred Owl © Jim Martin

Back Cover: American Bittern © Bert Sharp

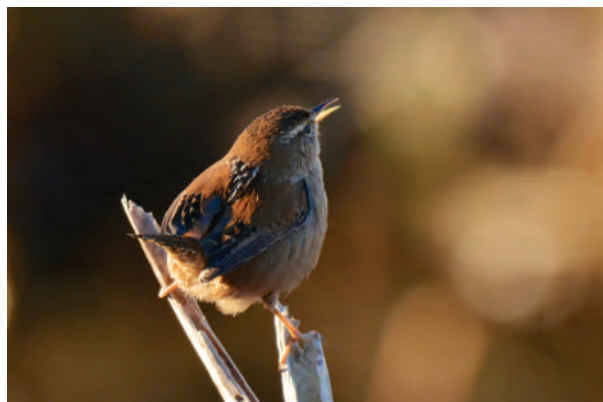
A Note From The Editor:

The most useful photos for Marshnotes are those featuring something in the three months covered by that edition. The best approach is to send thumbnails or reduced images or links to posted images. See page 2 for my email and the next deadline. Kathleen Fry

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Manager's Report



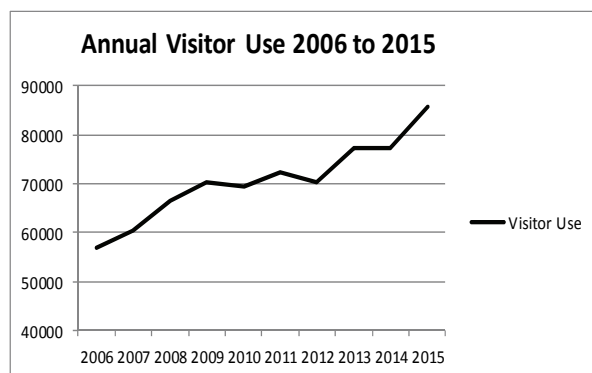
Marsh Wren

Photo: Ken Young

Happy New Year! From October 1st to the end of the year, the Sanctuary had over 20,500 visitors, just marginally higher than last year at this time. Late fall and early winter visitor use tends to be dictated by the weather, with hordes of visitors coming on sunny days but an empty parking lot on those wet stormy days.

Members might be interested to know that in the past 10 years, annual visitor use has been increasing steadily, and in 2015 we had a total of 85,850 visitor days, up nearly 9,000 people from last year. With this growth comes more visitors who are likely unfamiliar with the Sanctuary, and a greater need for traffic control attendants and trailside volunteers, particularly on long weekends.

Our website has just been revised to better reflect the needs of first-time visitors and search engine criteria. If you visit www.reifelbirds sanctuary.com, you will see a new look to the pages, but also additional pages such as the “Kids and Nature” page that we are developing in the next few months to help families with children to optimize their visit.



The first half of October had some beautiful sunny days, with many visitors out to see the Lesser Snow Geese in the fields around the Sanctuary and out in the offshore marshes. We were able to pick out a few of the blue phase of this species in flocks flying over the parking lot. These birds nest on Wrangel Island, Russia, and it seems to have been a successful nesting season on this arctic island based on the number of grey-coloured young seen in family groups feeding in Westham Island fields. In mid-winter, when most of the grassy farm fields are quite waterlogged, these geese spend a fair bit of time out on the offshore marshes instead, then depart to spend most of January and February at the Skagit River Estuary just south of the Canada/USA border. The official count done on December 22nd showed 81-82,000 geese between the Fraser and Skagit River Estuaries and 26-27% young.

The winter rains began in earnest at the end of the October and well into late-November, except for Remembrance Day, which dawned clear and beautiful and drew a whopping 1383 visitors. November storms always seem to bring big flocks of migrant waterfowl such as American Wigeon and Trumpeter Swans south into the Fraser River Estuary, along with some of the diving ducks such as Buffleheads and Hooded Mergansers. The latter make some very odd growling noises during their courtship displays, leading some visitors to wonder if large furry animals were nearby.

November also brought the Black-crowned Night-Herons back to their usual roost site across from the Warming Hut. They are usually settled into this gully by September, but the dead fish event in late August might have caused them to temporarily relocate until the waterways looked normal again later in the fall. We have had 4 Adults, one second-year (or sub-adult) bird and one juvenile for the winter so far.

An extra Sandhill Crane also arrived late November to boost our winter flock to 10 birds, even though the other 9 clearly did not want to accept it. In mid-November, we found this bird hiding out on the deck of the house. Months later, now, it still avoids the others and tends to retreat to the back yard of the house or to the nearby pile of topsoil when uncertain of its welcome.

Temperatures dropped to below freezing in late November and in the first few days of December, then it rained non-stop for a few weeks. More than half of December visitor use was between Christmas and New Year's Day when the days were mostly cold and clear except for the unfortunate soggy day of the Christmas Bird Count.

During the past few months, some eroded shorelines along the main path through the center of the pond system have been repaired but most of our time has been spent managing water levels.

As soon as the fall rains set in, a problem became apparent at our water control along the North Dyke. The control normally drains excess rainwater out of the Sanctuary so that trails do not flood, but it was not draining properly. Visitors may have wondered about the tools, noisy pumps and mud-covered people in waders exploring the control from time to time. At one point, the path to the tower was flooded by a few inches of water, so a very large pump was brought in for a few days. The beavers have not helped drainage issues by piling mud, sticks and debris every night on the control, so there is now a stucco wire cage around it to keep them away. Ducks Unlimited Canada will be repairing the pipe this summer, but we will be keeping a smaller pump going in the meantime. We thank you for your patience.

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PLEASE DO NOT PET THE BIRDS

It is that time of year again when we seem to have to remind visitors to avoid harming the birds by “playing” with them.

We ask people not to chase, pet, grab or otherwise handle birds, as those activities are regarded as wildlife harassment and many birds also get injured. Note that it is also illegal to disturb eggs, nests or nesting birds.

Thank you for your cooperation. The full set of rules is posted at the Gift Shop and on our website.

Ladner Christmas Bird Count 2015

The Ladner BC/Washington Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Sunday December 27, with 134 species seen on count day plus two species in count period. The 134 species seen will not make Ladner the # 1 count in BC and in Canada, as Victoria registered 143 species on their count on December 19th. Weather played a very important role in the species total as the day started out with rain which turned to a snow and rain mixture in the afternoon. The conclusion was that the birder’s had trouble finding the birds which had, smartly, decided to hunker down in the various shrubs and hedgerow and would not come out for any reason. In addition we were faced with very high tides throughout the day which made counting waterbirds in Boundary Bay and Tsawwassen difficult and which forced many of the shorebirds up into the farm fields.

Highlights included two new species for the Ladner CBC, a Whimbrel and a small flock of Pectoral Sandpipers. Other notable sightings included 1360 Bald Eagles, many of which were counted at the Vancouver Landfill along with many thousands of Glaucous-winged Gulls. Again this year we recorded 6 owl species, with Barn Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl all seen, but no Snowy Owls. The Point Roberts Team did an excellent job of recording the Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, Marbled Murrelets and Ancient Murrelets which are sometimes hard to get on count day. The number of wintering Anna’s Hummingbirds was 62, which was half the number we had last year but given the weather not surprising.

The two teams which covered the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, the CWS Alaksen property, and the rest of Westham Island both did a great job of recording a total 106 species. Mary Taitt’s team for Reifel and Westham Island recorded 91 species. Pablo Jost lead the Alaksen team who recorded 65 species. The two teams combined had 14 people out counting birds throughout the day. Many thanks to Delta Optimist’s Sandor Gyarmati, who provided great coverage both before and after the count. Special thanks to the BC Waterfowl Society for use of the Lecture Hall for the post count tally and dinner, and to Kathleen and Varri for their help with logistics. A donation was made from the Ladner CBC to the BCWS for use of the building. If anyone would like a copy of the final tally of species, by area, please contact me.

Jude Grass
Ladner BC/Washington CBC Coordinator
judegrass@shaw.ca

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, 2016

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

Wayne Diakow
Jim Morrison
Gerry 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 12th, 2016

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 by the deadline, a list of all candidates will be posted at the Sanctuary.

In Memoriam



John Bowles

Life Member John Bowles, a British Columbia Waterfowl Society Director since 1994, passed away suddenly on December 2, 2015 at age 70.

He was a Director of Ducks Unlimited Canada and served as DUC's nominee to the BCWS's Board of Directors.

Active in his community, John also served on the boards of numerous other charitable organizations including the Pacific Salmon Foundation and the Koerner Foundation. For many years John was an active volunteer with the Canadian Diabetes Association, serving as National President from 1982-84 and for which he was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2013.

John devoted most of his professional career as a CA servicing companies in the mining industry until his retirement from PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2006. In 2003 he was awarded a Fellowship in the Canadian Institute of Mining and was named the Mining Person of the Year by the BC Mining Association in 2006.

He was also awarded a Fellowship (FCA) by the Institute of Chartered Accountants for his service to his profession and also his community service which brought honour to the profession.

John's wise counsel and dedication to the BCWS and the Sanctuary will be greatly missed. He is survived by his wife Judy and their son Jeb.

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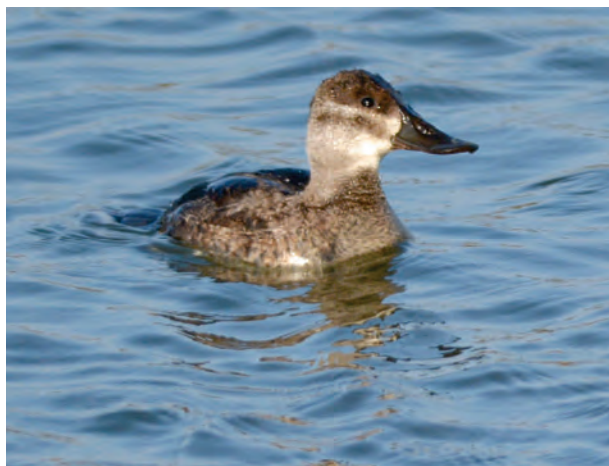
Spring is just around the corner and some of our bird species are showing signs of nesting soon or at least claiming mates and territories. The Great Horned Owl pair has been sharing the same roost branch along East dyke for most of January, and the pair of Bald Eagles has been doing the same atop the big Douglas Fir at Fuller Slough. A few Canada Geese have moved in recently and are eyeing nest islands, and on sunny days, lots of duck courtship has been happening out in the ponds. Wood Ducks are noisily crowding around one another and are often perched together partway up trees near the nest boxes.

The Sandhill Cranes are turning back into wild cranes after spending the past month begging for food. All 10 have all been strutting about and claiming

territories, and they are starting to show a little feather staining. If you watch them come out of a muddy area with their chest, shoulders and wing feathers looking a bit sticky, they have been applying mud and brackish water to their feathers. The iron in our substrates turns their body feathers a rusty colour over several months of "make-up" application. In this next month or so, the resident pair is likely to start to try chase the younger birds out of the Sanctuary every day, so we encourage visitors to watch these antics rather than try feed them or get in their way during the expected chase scenes.

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

Bird Highlights



Female Ruddy Duck

Photo: Ken Young

October 2015 had an average of 77 species each week with a total of 107 species for the month. This month varieties of warblers and shorebirds are declining but the waterfowl and sparrows species are on the rise.

September 27- October 3

On the 27th a Red-breasted Sapsucker was seen along the East Dyke. With their long bristled tongues they are able to extract sap from trees. Large numbers (100+) of Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen this week. On the 30th a House Wren was found. This is a very non-descript wren with very fine wing bars, and is found only a few times in August and September as it is forages in hedgerows for insects. A female Ruddy Duck was seen October 1st on Fuller's Slough, feeding with 2 Pied-billed Grebes. A single Western Meadowlark was also seen on the 1st at the southwest corner. In this week other birds of note were Vaux's Swift, Osprey and Hairy Woodpecker.

October 4 – October 10

After the first arrival of a handful of Lesser Snow Geese on September 22nd, there was a big increase this week, with approximately 10,000 birds now present with a lot of juveniles in the population. The Great Egret is still showing up mostly in the afternoon hours in the Southwest Marsh. We had a report of a juvenile Stilt Sandpiper on the 4th and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper on the 5th, both in the West Field. On the 8th a Short-eared Owl was observed with a Northern Harrier hot on its tail. flying along the outer marsh. Also on the 8th was the first report of a Northern Saw-whet Owl which was found at the beginning of the East Dyke. A

Redhead, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wilson's Snipe and Merlin were some other highlights in this week.

October 11 – October 17

On the 11th 2 White-throated Sparrows were seen. In the Northeast corner. Usually found in with Golden-crowned Sparrows and White-crowned Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows are most likely to be seen between September and December. The adult birds have a bright white throat patch, thus the name, with a yellow spot between beak and eyes. Younger birds have a grayer throat patch and not so brightly colored heads. Two Rough-legged Hawks and 2 Northern Shrike (1adult and 1 juvenile) were viewed flying along the outer grassy seaward dyke. A Barred Owl, Cackling Goose, Eurasian Wigeon and Pine Siskin were other good reports for this week.

October 18 – October 24

In addition to Canada and Snow Geese, we also have Cackling Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese present. A single Wilson's Snipe was found on the 18th. On the 22nd at the Warming Hut, I found a dead White-throated Sparrow, an unfortunate result from a window kill. Even with alert decals and transfers applied to the windows these casualties still happen. The first pair of Bufflehead showed up on the 23rd. A fly over of American Pipits were seen this week. The best time to observe Pipits at the Sanctuary (if you are lucky) is from September to December as they migrate through from their Arctic breeding grounds to Southeastern USA and Guatemala.



Black-crowned Night-Heron Photo: Peter Candido

A pair of Great Horned Owls have found a favorite perching tree which is 5 or 6 trees back from the end of the East Dyke on the right quite high up and tight to the trunk. These 2 are more than likely a mated pair and will be setting up a nest sight by early February. Maybe we will be lucky and have repeat of February 2008 when they nested in the Sanctuary property. This week turned out to be a very good birding week, with a total of 82 species reported.

October 25 - October 31

Nine Ring-necked Ducks were found on the 28th in the center display ponds. A juvenile Northern Shrike was spotted along the west dyke. Good numbers of Pine Siskins are being noticed this week as they fly together in a ball of swirling motion. We are now starting to see more Double-crested Cormorants, Northern Harriers, Northern Flickers and Cedar Waxwings. Some other highlights included Wilson's Snipe, Peregrine Falcon, Sora and Rough-legged Hawk.



Ring-necked Duck Photo: Pascale Charland

November had a total of 92 species being observed. One of those had been absent from our sightings list since back in October 2002 when it was last observed.

November 1 – November 7

A couple of Chestnut-backed Chickadees have joined Black-capped Chickadees, Red-winged Blackbirds and Red-breasted Nuthatches along the East Dyke where they gladly take the black-oiled sunflower seeds offered by visitors. Eleven species of birds of prey were present this week. November to the end of February is the best time for viewing hawks, owls and eagles

November 8 – November 14

Trumpeter Swans are now being seen and will be viewable until about the third week of March in the farm fields of Westham Island and Ladner dining on

unharvested potatoes and in grain fields. On the 8th we were able to find 6 Black-crowned Night Herons, 4 adult, 1 sub adult and 1 first year bird. Along the driveway large numbers of American Robins, Northern Flickers and a few Varied Thrushes are feeding on abundant ripened Hawthorne berries. Also on the 8th an Evening Grosbeak was seen as it flew over the Gift Shop. We don't see a lot of these berry eating grosbeaks but October, November and December are your best bet. Two male and one female Eurasian Wigeon have been reported. The male has a very red-brown head with a cream crown. The female Eurasian Wigeon is very similar to the female American Wigeon but she will have a rusty tinge to her head.

November 15 – November 21

On the 19th we had a report of a Townsend's Warbler spotted near Fuller Slough by the information panels. Normally by the middle of October the Townsend's Warblers have left our area heading as far south as Nicaragua for the winter. Usually the last warbler to leave our area is the Yellow-rumped Warbler and is normally the first warbler to show up in March. On the 21st a member spotted a Parasitic Jaeger flying out along the west marsh. Jaeger in German means "hunter". This agile and fast flying parasitic hunter is notorious for snatching food from other seabirds. When Jaegers migrate they tend to stay further out from the shoreline so it is lucky to actually see a Jaeger. The last recorded sighting of a Parasitic Jaeger at the Sanctuary was October 2002. We now have 6 Black-crowned Night-Herons. The Short-eared Owl, Brewer's Blackbird, American Bittern, Sora, Hermit Thrush and Rough-legged Hawk were some of the highlights for the week.

November 22 – November 28

On the North Dyke 4 Common Redpoll were spotted. These small seed eating finches have a rosy red cap, black chin and a pink breast. Females are similar but lack the pink breast. They are often spotted in among flocks of Pine Siskins. Hooded Mergansers and Common Mergansers are plentiful in the sloughs. Then we had a dip in temperature and the sloughs and ponds froze up forcing the Mergansers and other diving ducks out to the open flowing Fraser River. On the House Pond, behind the Gift shop, 9 Greater Yellowlegs and 19 Long-billed Dowitchers were standing on the ice looking rather cold and out of place. From the Tower looking out in to the tidal marsh you could see Black-bellied Plovers feeding on the unfrozen mudflats. These 3 species of shorebirds along with the Dunlin are shorebirds that you can see over the winter in our area.

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Western Meadowlark and Bohemian Waxwing were notable birds for this week, which ended with only 50 species.

December ended with a cool and sunny week with ice on the ponds and sloughs. Species count for the month was 85 with an average of 72 species per week.

November 29 – December 12

This two week stretch had very similar weekly lists, both with 72 species being recorded. On the 10th staff found a Long-eared Owl in the restricted access area of flooded thickets off Southwest Marsh, making a total of five owls to be seen this week. A Lincoln's Sparrow was spotted as it was searching for seeds and insects in the underbrush. They are slightly built and resemble Song Sparrows. On June 4, 1833 this sparrow was discovered and named for Thomas Lincoln who was accompanying John James Audubon on a trip from Maine to Quebec. On the outer grassy seaward dyke an American Bittern was spotted. This area seems to be the best place to get a glimpse of these elusive birds.

December 13 – December 19

A single male Canvasback was seen in the inner display ponds on the 14th. A few Common Redpolls are still being spotted along the center dyke. Tundra Swans were heard as they flew over the Sanctuary. Their high pitched call is quite different from that of the trumpeting sound of Trumpeter Swans. The adult Tundra Swan has a yellow spot in front of the eye which is very hard to see in the field. The easiest way to distinguish the two species is by their calls.

December 20 – December 26

We now are seeing an adult and juvenile Northern Shrike along the seaward dyke. Approximately the size of an American Robin, adult Northern Shrikes are grey and black with a black mask through the eyes and a very hooked beak. The juvenile birds have a browner tinge and light barring on the under parts. Most sightings of Northern Shrike tend to be on the outer seaward dyke where there are a lot of Hawthorn trees. They hunt for songbirds and mice and when they capture their prey they will often pierce it onto a thorn of a Hawthorn tree or wedge it in branches until they are ready to eat it. The Northern Shrike has also been called the "butcher bird". Coincidentally in this week a member came across a dead Bohemian Waxwing hanging in a tree near the end of the East Dyke. We weren't sure if it was a future meal for a Shrike or for a Northern Saw Whet Owl as they will also stash

their prey for later.

December 27 – January 2

We have found 3 Northern Saw Whet Owls this week. Most sightings, are along the East and North Dykes in fir trees, blackberry bushes and holly bushes. The latter serve as good protection for them against predators. A flock of 30 to 40 Common Redpolls were observed on the 28th. With freezing temperatures in this last week of December we were diligent in swapping out the frozen hummingbird nectar for fresh supplies each morning for the hearty Anna's Hummingbirds that are still present.

Text: Varri Raffan
Gift Shop Manager

One Hit Wonders

On the back pages of our new Reifel Migratory Bird Checklist you will notice a category named "accidental and casual species". These are birds that are hardly ever found here. The following list consists of those species that have only been spotted once.

Spotted Redshank	October 1970
Temminck's Stint	September 1982
Philadelphia Warbler	November 1986
Prairie Falcon	January 1989
White-tailed Kite	April 1995
Red-necked Stint	June 1997
Ash-throated Flycatcher	September 1999
Rock Sandpiper	November 1999
American Dipper	July 2001
Red Phalarope	September 2002
Green-tailed Towhee	September 2002
Prothonotary Warbler	October 2002
Rusty Blackbird	October 2003
Yellow-breasted Chat	May 2005
Tennessee Warbler	August 2005
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	September 2006
Gray Catbird	May 2007
Wood Sandpiper	October 2010
Magnolia Warbler	April 2011
Great Gray Owl	February 2015
White-faced Ibis	September 2015

Text: Varri Raffan
Gift Shop Manager

The Volunteer Corner

Special Thanks To:

- ◆ Our regular Sunday birding team of Mary Taitt and Brian Self, as well as Jim Martin, Istvan Orosi, Emma Turgeon, and David Bruce for helping host visitors along the trails.
- ◆ Bill Topping for hosting visitors in the Museum on Sunday mornings.
- ◆ Justin Malkonin, Eric Rossicci, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed and filling bird feeders.
- ◆ Our fall newsletter mailout team of David Bruce, Laura Jordison, Emma Turgeon and Jim Martin.
- ◆ The team of Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick for all the garden work and for cleaning all the Warming Hut windows.
- ◆ Kristina Breit, Ivy Whitehorne, Stacey Hilton, and Sebastian Godbout for helping with bird inventories.
- ◆ The Canucks Live to Give staff volunteers who helped resurface our trails in November.
- ◆ Kristina Breit for her help with the shoreline reconstructions in October.

Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities:

- ◆ If anyone is able to volunteer their time to walk the trails or help new visitors to learn about the Sanctuary and our birds, the help would be most appreciated on the following dates:

Feb 5– 8 (Family Day Long Weekend)

Feb 27 (Natureblitz event)

March 12-13, 19-20 (Spring Break)

Mar 25-28 (Easter Weekend)

The needs for the days above will depend on the weather forecast.

For more information or to confirm volunteer times for these opportunities, please phone our office 604-946-6980 or 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)

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 Fax: 604 946 6982
Website: www.reifelbirdsantuary.com

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

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