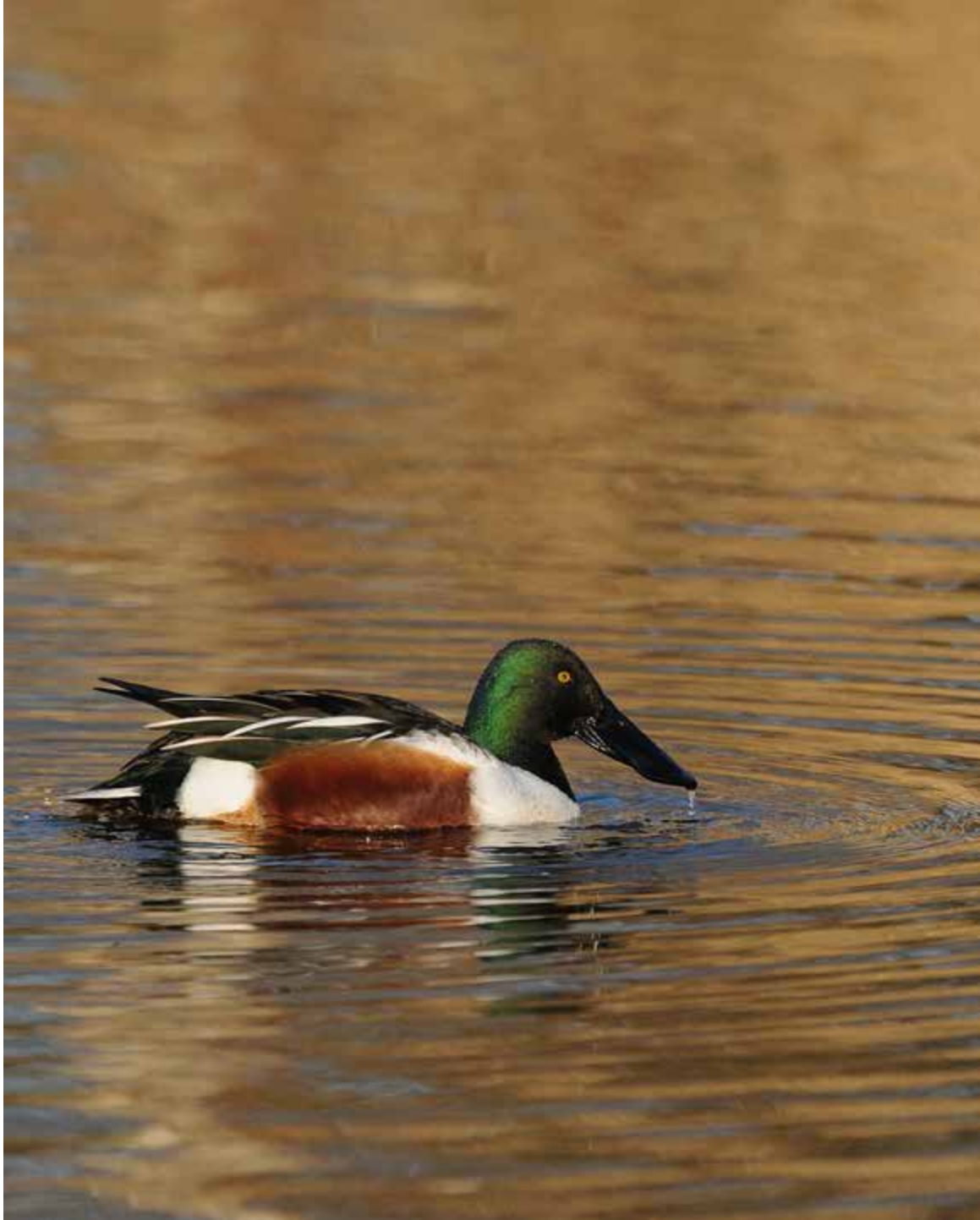


Marshnotes®



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
WINTER 2017**

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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**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

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

April 15th, 2017

Executive:

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Outreach: George C. Reifel

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Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan
Reception: Susan Norris
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 2016

<i>January</i>	<i>February</i>	<i>March</i>
Mourning Dove	Sora	Surf Scoter
<i>April</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>
Purple Martin	Yellow-headed Blackbird	Western Wood Peewee
<i>July</i>	<i>August</i>	<i>September</i>
White-faced Ibis	Green Heron	Black-throated Gray Warbler
<i>October</i>	<i>November</i>	<i>December</i>
Parasitic Jaeger	Barn Swallow	Red-breasted Sapsucker

Bird of the Year: White-faced Ibis



Photo: Melissa Hafting

Total 2016 Species: 165

A Note From The Editor

Note that the most useful photos for Marshnotes are those featuring birds of 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

About Our Covers

Front Cover: Northern Shoveler © Jim Martin

Back Cover: Bald Eagle on Ice © Jim Martin

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Bird Highlights

October 2016 had a total of 98 species. As summer passes, the numbers of sandpipers, warblers and swallows will dwindle. With fall approaching the numbers of ducks, geese and swans will rise.

October 2 – October 8

There are now 3 Black-crowned Night Herons back on their usual branches across from the Warming Hut. One Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was found in Southwest Marsh on the 5th. On the 7th 2 Greater White-fronted Geese were also seen in the Southwest Marsh. On the 8th, the following birds were all seen: 1 American Bittern, 1 Rough-legged Hawk, 2 Hermit Thrush and 8 Western Meadowlarks. The Rough-legged Hawk would have spent the summer hunting lemmings in the Arctic tundra and will now spend the winter in southern Canada and into the United States hunting small rodents. Rough-legged refers to the feathering that extends down its legs.

October 9 – October 15

On the 9th, 35 Black-bellied Plovers were seen offshore and both a Barred Owl and a Pacific Wren seen along the driveway. The Pacific Wren, formerly named Winter Wren, is the smallest wren out of the four species of wrens on our checklist. Sporting a stubby tail, dark barring on belly and an overall brown color, these wrens are very energetic as they forage at ground level for small creatures. For such a small bird the Pacific Wren has a very loud and long song.

In the mix of ducks you might notice one that has a very large spoon-like bill. Both sexes of the Northern Shoveler have large bills which have comb like structures along the sides to strain out food from the water. They work together performing a synchronized circling that creates a vortex bringing food up to the surface. The weekly list ended with 77 species.

October 16 – October 22

More and more Snow Geese are showing up now. On the 19th we had sightings of a Turkey Vulture, an American Bittern and a Short-eared Owl. A Parasitic Jaeger was spotted on the 21st being harassed by a couple of gulls as it flew along the outer marsh. This is an unusual sighting as they tend to stay much further offshore. One was seen last year in November in the same area. The first Bufflehead sighting for this fall was on the 21st. American Goldfinch are still present but they look very different in their winter plumage. Summertime the males are a cheerful lemon yellow with a black cap. Females in summer are more



Black-crowned Night-Heron Photo: Bert Sharp

olive colored with a tinge of yellow on the rump. In winter the males lose the bright yellow body and black cap, resembling the coloring of females. You might see them at your bird feeders especially if you have Thistle or Niger seed in the mix.

October 23 – October 29

Siskins were present this week, after a long absence since February. The Pine Siskin, in the Finch family, is another bird that will show up at your feeder for Thistle and Niger seed. Roughly the same size as the American Goldfinch, Siskins are heavily striped with yellow wing and tail markings. The first fall Northern Saw-whet Owl was seen on October 23rd, perched in the Willow tree near the picnic area. In some years, they have been seen as early as the first week of October. The next sighting was on the 28th along the East Dyke. Northern Saw-Whet Owls will be around the Sanctuary until March. The next day a Short-eared Owl was spotted hunting out in the marsh. These owls are one of the few that do hunt during the day, and are *diurnal* rather than *nocturnal*. Some other birds from this week's list included Canvasback, Turkey Vulture, Ring-billed Gull, Merlin, American Pipit and Western Meadowlark.

In November, the numbers of Lesser Snow Geese peaked. This year, flocks were feeding in unusual locations across Delta. One reason could be that some of the usual fields were planted early with winter cover crops that provide fall foraging for them. By the time the geese arrived, crops were well established and plants were not so young and juicy. The geese may have gone looking for more tender grasses. Another reason could be that there is obviously more fields to feed on than just Westham Island. November 2016 ended with a total of 91 species being observed.

...../ continued on page 6

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 11th, 2017

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

Ken 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 12th, 2017

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.

(Continued from page 4)

October 30 – November 5

A single Ruddy Duck was reported on the 30th in Robertson Slough. There are many Northern Flickers present now. These woodpeckers like to feed on insects, berries, seeds and suet cakes in the winter. In flight, an orangey red flash from under the wings and a white rump patch are noticeable. On November 2nd both Sora and Virginia Rails were found. The last report for us of any Barn Swallows was in early September, so we were surprised when one was seen flying over the farm field off the East Dyke on the 4th. We have had winter reports of up to 5 Barn Swallows before. It is not a bird you expect to see at this time of year. Another bird that is not usually seen in November was a Blue-winged Teal spotted in the Southwest Marsh. Blue-winged Teal are mostly seen April to mid-September. Hermit Thrush, Canvasback and American Pipits were other highlights for this week that ended with 82 species.

November 6 – November 12

From this week's list of 76 species, 15 are seed eaters and take advantage of the 6 feeding stations along Sanctuary trails. Further into winter, suet cakes will be offered. We can still see a good number of Anna's Hummingbirds at their 3 feeders. Usually a male can be found in the surrounding shrubbery guarding the feeder, and chasing off any visiting hummingbirds. Hummingbirds are quite feisty for their size. Larger numbers of Buffleheads are now turning up. The males of these small diving ducks are mostly white with a glossy purple to black head and back. The females are dark grayish brown with a white oval marking below the eye.

November 13 – November 19

We are now seeing up to 5 Barn Swallows. With not so many flying bugs to choose from at this time of year it makes me wonder how they manage. On the 6th 2 Northern Saw-whet Owls were spotted, with one in the usual northeast corner and the second in the big Fir tree near the Tower. On the 18th we had 4 Black-crowned Night-Herons. The first Trumpeter Swan and Tundra Swan were both sighted in this week. To see them in flight it is nearly impossible to tell them apart. To hear them call is the best way to differentiate the two. The Trumpeter Swan sounds like a trumpet, while the Tundra Swan, formerly known as a Whistling Swan, has more of a high pitched *Woo Ho* sound. Its previous name of Whistling Swan referred to the sound made by the air passing through their powerful wings in flight.



Common Merganser

Photo: Robbin Whitbread

November 20 – November 26

A male Common Merganser, the first sighting for the winter, showed up on Robertson Slough. The best places to see them and other diving ducks are the old river channels (Robertson, Ewen and Fuller Slough). There are now 5 Black-crowned Night-Herons. On the 24th, after a short absence, we started to see good size flocks of Lesser Snow Geese return to feed on Westham Island. A few Northern Harriers have been spotted flying low over the marshes and hovering in search of voles and other small rodents. When in flight both the male and female have a distinctive white rump patch on the top of the tail. Females are rusty brown while the male is a silver gray. Northern Harrier was previously known as a Marsh Hawk.

November 27 – December 3

Gyrfalcons are often reported at this time of year locally, but we haven't seen one at the Sanctuary since November 2010. However, the Sunday bird walk was lucky to spot one as it flew over the fields off the East Dyke. Gyrfalcons at a glance are much like Peregrine Falcon by shape but their tail is longer, wings are not so pointed and the body is broader. Owls this week included Barn, Barred, Short-eared, Long-eared, Northern Saw-whet and Great Horned Owls. Winter is the best time to locate owls. A bird that I am asked to ID frequently is the American Coot, usually seen mixed in with the ducks. It is not in the duck family but in with Rails and Gallinules. Coots have a charcoal gray body, a chicken like white beak and greenish lobed toes.

The last week of December is your last chance to add another species to your annual bird list. As for the sightings list we keep at the Sanctuary for December 2016 it ended with 92 species recorded.

December 4 – December 10

At the end of this week, nearly all of our waterways were frozen. We were still able to spot 3 Belted Kingfishers working the small open areas. Females can be recognized by the rusty breast band. Three Red-breasted Sapsuckers were located along the East Dyke. These woodpeckers stand out well in the dreary brown colors of winter with their red heads and breasts. Both sexes have the same plumage. On the 8th along the Center Dyke a Bohemian Waxwing was spotted mixed in with Cedar Waxwings and American Robins. They were all intent in feeding on the ample Hawthorne berries and Pacific Crabapples. Bohemian Waxwings when compared with Cedar Waxwings are a bit larger, have a grayer body and copper colored feathers under the tail. December, January and February are the best months to find a few Bohemian Waxwings at the Sanctuary. For shorebirds, although not many, we still have Greater Yellowlegs, and Long-billed Dowitchers in the Southwest Marsh and one lonely Dunlin standing on the ice in House Pond.

December 11 – December 17

The 3 Red-breasted Sapsuckers are still popping up in a variety of spots. On the 13th at the north end of the West Dyke a Swamp Sparrow was found. This sparrow is a nemesis for birders and photographers alike. Swamp Sparrows are usually well hidden in the grasses of the estuary and their song is about the only way to know they are there. We are now up to 17 Sandhill Cranes. This week they could be viewed most days at the front entrance and parking lot enjoying treats of grain provided for them by staff. With water still ice encrusted, most of the diving ducks have moved out to open waters of the intertidal foreshore. Other highlights were 1 Redhead spotted near the tower, 1 Rough-legged Hawk seen as it flew over the inner trails and 1 well camouflaged Long-eared Owl found in the thickets at the very Southwest corner of the Sanctuary. Six Black-crowned Night-Herons are now present.

December 18 – December 24

In September we thought we were seeing a lot of American Robins, but this week and into the next week large flocks of around 100-150 birds filled the skies. Some of these birds have more than likely showed up from the cooler interior. One of the smallest North American birds is the Golden-crowned Kinglet. The males have a small orange crown and the females have a yellow crown. Both sexes have olive colored bodies and 2 white wing bars. Usually you can hear their high pitched song of “see, see, see” before you see them in the trees dining on insects. Lesser Snow Geese are now migrating further south

into Washington. Around the middle of March, they will start their northern migration back through the Fraser Delta eventually heading to nesting grounds on Wrangel Island Russia. On the 24th a Northern Shrike was found along the outer dyke with dead Townsend’s Vole nearby, likely to be the Shrikes next meal.



Northern Shrike

Photo: Robbin Whitbread

December 25 – December 31

Mew, Glaucous-winged, Ring-billed and California Gulls were all seen this week. A White-throated Sparrow has once again showed up by the Gift Shop on the 28th. Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks were both present this week. They are hard to tell apart if they are not seen together for comparison. Both have same coloration and long tails, but the Sharp-shinned Hawks tail has a slight notch at the tip. Cooper’s Hawks are larger with head and neck proportionately larger than the Sharp-shinned Hawk. Juvenile birds of both species have brown streaked breasts and yellow eyes. Adult plumage of both species has a rusty barred breast and red eyes. Both of these hawks are very agile hunters and are the ones you will see in your backyards hunting songbirds. Happy Birding in 2017.

Text: Varri Raffan,
Gift Shop Manager

Manager's Report

Happy New Year! Although we were very busy on Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Remembrance Day, visitor totals came to 16,336 people in the last 3 months of 2016, down from 2015 (20,436) and 2014 (18,391). Weather always plays an important role in visitor use at this time of year. In October, there were wind storms, plus a mere 3 days in the whole month when it wasn't raining. November weather was highly variable, and most of December had unusually cold days, some snow days from the 9th onwards, and sub-zero temperatures overnight, with many of our ponds frozen over.

In spite of this, the school program calendar was booked every day of fall and early winter right up to early December. In between weather events and school classes, we sometimes had to clean up after the beavers. One night they chewed through nearly all of the mature trunks of some Red-osier Dogwood shrubs that have grown for decades on one side of Center Dyke. These large shrubs were all entwined together in the canopy above, so when the beavers cut them down, none of them really became accessible to eat as the stems remained suspended a couple of feet above the ground. After a blustery windy night we found all of it had collapsed like a wall across the trail.

Out on the North Dyke, the fencing project at the outlet area now has a small viewing deck that extends out over the shoulder of the dyke to allow visitors more wide open views over Ewen Slough seaward into the Strait of Georgia. The deck is already proving popular, and we also plan to repair the chain link fencing between the new deck and the northeast corner at the junction of North Dyke and East Dyke. Environment and Climate Change Canada (formerly Environment Canada) will be reimbursing us for the expenditures involved in the fencing and deck as part of the Connecting Canadians to Nature initiative.

In 2017, early spring maintenance is likely to focus on laying down gravel to rehabilitate our somewhat muddy trails, and carrying out our annual duck nest box maintenance in preparation of the Wood Duck nesting season. Visitors may have noticed that the Wood Ducks are all actively into courtship displays and that some are already up in trees checking out the boxes. Although they are in active pair formation mode, and are claiming territories, it might be late March before they start incubating eggs.

Maintenance this summer will focus on providing erosion protection for a few areas of shoreline, and on repairing or replacing structures along the West (seaward) Dyke, as many of these are over 25 years old now.

..... /continued on page 10



North Dyke fencing and deck

Photo: Dan Dixon

In Memory of Mr. Crane



It is with great sadness that we watched our resident male Sandhill Crane die peacefully on January 16th, 2017, looking out over the pond and listening to a gang of familiar Sandhill Cranes outside the window. “Mr. Crane” was well known to staff and the public, having lived most of his adult life at the Sanctuary, stalking amongst our visitors.

He was a robust healthy bird until very recently, constantly present beside his mate, and the dominant bird in any gathering of more than one crane. Even during fall night roosts here of up to 60 other cranes, he could be seen amongst them at daybreak, doing his various displays and rounding them all up until they decided to relocate for the day. This winter, though, from December 21st onwards, he had been keeping off by himself, and went into a slow decline.

He may have been injured in fights with other cranes this past month, as he had a recent scab on his scalp and was also favouring his left foot. Cranes usually sort out their differences through posturing and very ritualized gestures, but that month, we witnessed a lot of physical contact in the air, with violent pecking and raking of one another with their long legs, with a couple of birds tangled in mid-flight.

He was probably about 27 years old when he died. He was an adult bird when he arrived here in 1992 to join the imprinted Sandhill Crane living then in the yard next to the Gift Shop. We assume from this timeline that he probably hatched circa 1990. His distinctive facial markings have made him easy to spot amongst other cranes, as he lacked all white feathering of the mask typically under the chin and up on cheeks.

There seems to be little known about cranes in the wild as they move into old age. A study of the Rocky Mountain population of Greater Sandhill Cranes

(Drewein, Brown & Clegg, 2010) assessed longevity based on band records and visual sightings, and found several individuals had lived at least to age 35 and 37.

Our Mr. Crane has some offspring out there, although he got off to a slow start, nesting unsuccessfully with the imprinted crane from 1993 to 1997. In August 1997, a wild female entered the mix, and by May 2000, he and his new mate nested out in Southwest Marsh, and they produced young every year until 2006 when the female died. The colts from 2000, 2001 and 2005 from this pair all lived to adulthood. After the death of this first wild female mate in 2006, he took up with a young bird. When they finally settled on what we now call “Crane Island” in the center of the Sanctuary’s pond system, they raised one young in 2010 and again in 2011, and these two birds have remained in the vicinity of the Sanctuary during their adolescent years. The pair was unsuccessful in raising any other young to adult size after that, although we had great hopes for the 2016 colt until it disappeared at 2.5 months of age.

Young from their previous nesting years and other local young have been present year-round here, and “Mr. and Mrs.” have been role models for these 8 or 9 young cranes. The latter are now all mature enough to be looking for nests sites and mates. They seem to learn by mimicking, and have copied behaviors designed to intimidate other cranes, get the best food, achieve that glorious stained effect, build a nest, and keep predators and intruders at bay.

Now that this dominant bird is no longer here, we will have to wait to see which of these younger birds takes over the Sanctuary territory. On January 19th, the front lawn by Gift Shop turned into a display area, with all of the young adult cranes separating into displaying pairs emitting low growling noises and striding slowly with their necks extended, heads held high, and tails erect. It was quite a show, but I will miss “Mr. Crane”.

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

References:

Drewein, R., Brown, W.M., & Clegg, K.R. 2010
Longevity Records of Rocky Mountain Greater
Sandhill Cranes Banded During 1969-1987 in Idaho,
Montana, Utah and Wyoming.
2010 North American Crane Workshop Proceedings,
University of Nebraska

A Word About Owl Sightings

This is the season to see owls. Our visitors are always keen to learn about these nocturnal birds and to see them along our trails. *We have a protocol for owl sightings, though, and for the degree of detail given out about certain sightings.* If we know an owl is can be seen from the public trails without disturbing it, we are more than happy to ensure that visitors know about it. If there is an owl that is in a vulnerable position or in an area closed to the public, or if the bird is a species that is prone to flushing when discovered, we tend to merely record its presence, and we keep sightings discreet.

Barn Owls tend to keep to areas that are closed to the public, such as the flooded woodlot to the east of Southwest Marsh, and Long-eared Owls were also roosting in there this fall. The latter were seen November 12th, 13th & 16th (2), 17th (1), December 1st (1), 8th (2), 14th (1) and 28th (1). Every time the latter were seen, they flushed. The day before the Christmas Bird count, we found the wing of one of the Long-eared Owls, much to our dismay. It was interesting to note that Short-eared Owls were in the woodlot with the Long-eared Owls on November 11th & 12th and December 1st & 8th, as well as a Barred Owl and Great Horned Owl some days.

In past years, Great Horned Owls have roosted together on East Dyke in December and January, with one bird then absent from February onwards, presumably sitting on a nest nearby. This year, they might have started a bit earlier in the year, with pair sightings starting early November into December, with only lone birds seen since December 5th .

This doesn't seem to be a big year for Northern Saw-whet Owls, as so far there has been usually just one or two birds spotted on a given day.

(Continued from page 8)

There are always some interesting things going on in mid-winter at the Sanctuary. Sandhill Crane numbers dropped from December's high of 17 down to our usual gang of 6 or 8 who are now sorting out a new pecking order. Bald Eagles in all sorts of plumage seem to be fascinated with the carp that died when our ponds froze over. They can see the fish through the ice, but can't get at them, so there are some pretty funny photos out there of these otherwise dignified birds clawing and biting the ice, or tippy-toeing across



Great Horned Owl

Photo: Dennis Nelsen

The 2016 Ladner Christmas Bird Count

The report for the Ladner Christmas Bird Count is still being finalized, but Jude Grass reports that a species total of 136 is likely. Although it was not an extreme winter day on count day itself, the day before was a bit grim and bird populations were a bit subdued the next day. The final report will be provided for the next edition of Marshnotes.

the ice just on the tips of their talons towards a pale spot shimmering below the surface. Most of this past month, we have been watching a Northern Flicker make a nice neat entrance hole on the side of a House Pond duck box. Was there something wrong with the existing hole on the other side? Do Flickers crave the sunlight? Anyways, happy birding in 2017!

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

The Volunteer Corner

Special Thanks To:

- ◆ Our regular Sunday birding team of Mary Taitt, Brian Self, and Istvan Orosi, as well as Jim Martin, Emma Turgeon, and David Bruce for helping host visitors along the trails.
- ◆ Justin Malkonin, Eric Rossicci, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed and filling bird feeders.
- ◆ Our fall newsletter mailout team of David Bruce, Su Langlois, Vera Maceluch, and Jim Martin.
- ◆ The team of Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick for all the garden work.
- ◆ Ivy Whitehorne, Kristina Breit, Alicia Elgert, and Nicole Lamarche who have continued to help with bird inventories, and new volunteers Jessica Weiss and Aari Umedali.
- ◆ The Canucks Live to Give volunteer staff that came out to help resurface some of our trails on November 10th.

Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities:

- ◆ Trail maintenance
- ◆ Weekend hosting of visitors.
- ◆ Regular bird surveys
- ◆ Gardening in the front entrance

For more information, visit our website.
www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com/volunteers.html

To confirm interest and to verify dates and times for opportunities, please phone our office 604-946-6980 or send me an email.

Kathleen (kathleen@reifelbirdsanctuary.com.)

Why be a Member?

As a Member, you receive the following benefits:

FREE admission to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary 365 days a year.

Quarterly issue of the BCWS publication "Marshnotes".

A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop.

Membership in one of British Columbia's most respected conservation organizations.

With your support, the British Columbia Waterfowl Society is able to:

Staff, maintain and expand facilities at the Sanctuary for the benefit of its visitors and members; provide interpretive and education programs, including guided tours for organized groups of all ages; contribute towards important scientific research on waterfowl to determine their life cycle needs for survival; and provide support for like-minded organizations who are working on waterfowl-related projects.

Enclosed is my cheque or VISA/Mastercard number for:

SINGLE Membership: **\$25**

FAMILY Membership: **\$50**

LIFE Membership: **\$500**

Donation (tax deductible)

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Address: _____

Postal Code _____

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

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