

Marshnotes[®]



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
WINTER 2018**

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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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 or email and the Editor will contact you.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

April 15th, 2018

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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 years +): \$3

School Groups: Special discounts available; pre-booking is required.

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Top Birds of the Sanctuary in 2017

Monthly Species Highlights

January Gyr Falcon	February Barn Swallow	March Long-eared Owl
April Townsend's Solitaire	May Nashville Warbler	June Marbled Godwit
July Baird's Sandpiper	August Redhead	September Curlew Sandpiper
October Clay-coloured Sparrow	November Snowy Owl	December White-winged Crossbills

Total 2017 Bird Species: 166

2017 Bird of the Year: Curlew Sandpiper



Curlew Sandpiper

Photo: Devon Yu

About Our Covers

Front Cover: *Long-tailed Duck*

© *Jim Martin*

Back Cover: *Snowy Owl*

© *Lou Lehmann*

Editor's Note:

Both of our cover photos in this issue are of birds that are in the Fraser River Delta over the winter, but not usually seen right in the Sanctuary. The Long-tailed Duck, for example can sometimes be seen offshore in big groups ("rafts") feeding in the much deeper water of the Strait of Georgia, and Snowy Owls are mostly seen at Boundary Bay.

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Bird Highlights

October 2017 had a total count of 97 species, with an average of 75 species per week.

October 1 – October 7

Lesser Snow Geese numbers are now building with approximately 5000 being seen from the Observation Tower. High counts of 12 Ring-necked Ducks were recorded on the 3rd. Also on the 3rd a Red-breasted Sapsucker was found along the North Dyke. On the 7th roughly 100 American Pipits were spotted in the farm field off the East Dyke. Pipits are hardy birds that nest in the Arctic alpine tundra. In the winter you can spot them in southern coastal British Columbia and further south in to Mexican and El Salvador. The best areas to look for them are in cultivated fields, grassy fields or pastures. In the afternoon of the 3rd a Ruff and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were both found in the West Field. On the 7th a Horned Grebe was seen in the waterway parallel to the Center Dyke along with a Canvasback in Ewan Slough and a Spotted Sandpiper working the shoreline of Ewan Slough.

October 8 – October 14

All 3 Great Horned Owls were seen on the 11th at the Northeast corner. Some years we've had a total of 4 birds, 2 adults and 2 juveniles, but this year looks like they only had 1 young owlet to raise. The first fall sighting of Western Meadowlarks was on the 13th. The majority of Meadowlark sightings occur at the high marsh at the south end of the Sanctuary. At this time we had other first fall returns of Greater Scaup, Northern Shrike and Rough-legged Hawk.

October 15 – October 21

After over 30 years working at the Sanctuary, I had a first. It wasn't a visitor coming to the Gift Shop but a Beaver. I've seen them before in the sloughs, but on the 15th I looked out the back door of the Gift Shop and there it was on the deck. After figuring it couldn't get to the water through the plexiglass, it back-tracked off the deck and headed down the slope between the Gift Shop and the Warming Hut and into the water. Later that same day it came ashore behind the Gift Shop and slowly walked up and over the front lawn to the apple trees where it happily began eating the wind-falls. He or she kept up these afternoon visits to the apple trees for a few days. It's quite unusual to see a beaver active during the day, but we did notice it had a fresh-looking scar on the side of its head which might have been a previous injury and left it a bit confused. Or it was just happy to have a change from tough bark and to find a bunch of soft tasty apples? Back to the bird highlights. On the 15th an American Bittern and a Black and White Warbler were found. On the 16th a Northern Saw-whet Owl was spotted. Other notables for the week were Sora, Wilson's Snipe, Mew Gull, Pine Siskin, Northern Shrike and Hairy Woodpecker.

October 22 – October 28

After a lengthy absence, our resident Sandhill Cranes were back on the front lawn on the 22nd. They have been out foraging with others in the local farm fields. Two Hutton's Vireos were found along the East Dyke on the 26th. A single Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was seen on the 27th. On the 28th we had an unusual sighting of a Long-tailed Duck in House Pond. These diving ducks are generally found on open seas but with the



A visiting Beaver enjoying the apples.

Photo: Dan Dixon

overnight fog lasting into the early morning it could have lost its bearings and landed in the House Pond. We had another out of the ordinary sighting of a Clay-colored Sparrow on the 28th along the West Dyke near the Observation Tower. Last time we had one present at the Sanctuary was back on August 31, 2015. Both times it has been reported from the same stretch of outer dyke.

November 2017 had 99 species recorded for the month.

October 29 – November 4

A visitor on the 29th had the rare pleasure of spotting the White-winged Crossbills as they flew above the Sign Kiosk by Fuller Slough. This is a new species for the Sanctuary Checklist. These birds are usually found in boreal forests among spruce and larch trees. As the name indicates, they have 2 large white wing bars on the wings and crossed mandibles. Crossbills probe with their specialized beaks between the scales of seed cones, then insert their tongues to lift out the seeds. Although conifer seeds are their primary food source they also dine on berries, insects and other seeds. Red Crossbills are more commonly found at this time of year mixed in with flocks of Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls.

On November 1st and 2nd a Townsend's Solitaire was spotted in the vicinity of the Observation Tower. November 3rd saw the first return of Trumpeter Swans. On the 4th, 3 American Bitterns were seen in the Southwest Marsh. With high tides they were more than likely ousted from the marsh up to higher ground. One Common Goldeneye, three Horned Grebes, one Long-tailed Duck, one Wilson's Snipe and a Hermit Thrush were other birds worth mentioning for this week that had a total of 81 species.

November 5 – November 11

On the 5th viewing far out in the marsh a Snowy Owl was discovered perched on a log. The next morning it was seen again, this time perched on the roof of the Southwest Marsh bird blind on the outer dyke. (See back cover).

Throughout the week we also had a Short-eared Owl hunting over the marsh and the Great Horned Owl was also present in its usual perch at the Northeast corner. One Northern Saw-Whet Owl was found in a crab apple tree near the end of the East Dyke. From now until the beginning of March is the best time to find owls. All birds of prey are most abundant in the winter. A Eurasian Wigeon, a Canvasback and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were all found on the 11th.



White-winged Crossbills

Photo: Janice White

The first fall sighting of Common Mergansers happened this week. Since mergansers are diving ducks that eat mainly fish the best places to spot them are the deeper waters of Robertson Slough along the driveway, Fuller Slough and Ewen Slough off the Northeast corner.

November 12 – November 18

We now have 2 Short-eared Owls hunting the marshes offshore. Most reports from visitors mention that the owls also have a Northern Harrier in hot pursuit hoping to scoop a meal. On the morning of the 17th something had changed in the view out the back shop window. What was missing was the large dead snag or "Peregrine perch". Strong winds had brought it down overnight. This iconic landmark was the preferred perch or vantage point spot for many species besides the Peregrine Falcon. Filling out the week's list were 2 Swamp Sparrows on the 16th, 4 Western Meadowlarks on the 17th, 3 Snow Buntings and 4 Black-crowned Night-Herons on the 18th.

November 19 – November 25

The morning of November 19th started off with 10 Sandhill Cranes on the front lawn of the house. All were busy digging in the soil in search of tasty morsels. On the 20th a Red-breasted Sapsucker was discovered at the tower. The last winter sighting of a Sora was this week. They will be spending the winter in the southern United States and into Peru. A small flock of Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins were located at the tree tops around the inner bays of

(...../continued on page 6)

(continued from page 5)

Display Ponds. At the front gate on the 24th I noticed a Red-tailed Hawk perched on a fence post. What made me look twice was the white disc that was attached to its right wing. I couldn't make out the number on the wing tag before it flew away, but after doing a bit of research I found that since October 2010, Red-tailed Hawks and other birds of prey have been part of a wing tagging program at Vancouver Airport. They band, tag and remove the hawks to areas beyond Chilliwack. In the winter a lot of hawks use the grasslands surrounding the airport for hunting, and they often have collisions with aircraft so relocating these birds helps save their lives as well.

November 26 – December 2

As usual, at this time of year the songbirds are busy at the feeders, with the House Sparrow being the most common. In 1850, eight pairs of House Sparrows, (*Passer domesticus*) which means small active bird of the house, were released from England into Brooklyn. It seemed like a good idea at the time but they are now considered an invasive species as they compete with native birds for nest sites and food sources. Another introduced bird common at feeders is the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). In 1890 Eugene Schieffelin released European Starlings in Central Park, New York, from England. He wanted to introduce all birds mentioned in the plays of William Shakespeare to North America. Starlings were also possibly released to help control canker worms infesting trees.

December 2017 ended with the same total bird count as that of December 2016 which was 92 species, averaging 72 species per week.

December 3 – December 9

December 3rd the White-winged Crossbills were seen again. They were seen among a flock of Red Crossbills and Common Redpolls. A female Ruddy Duck was found in the Southwest Marsh on the 9th. Here at the Sanctuary the best time to spot them is between September and February. However we only get 1 or 2 of these small diving ducks each year if we are lucky. The females have a brownish gray colored body with a noticeable dark line through white cheeks. The males have solid white cheeks, blue beaks, and stiff upright tails and as their name reflects the body is ruddy in color. Common Goldeneye, Northern Shrike and Hairy Woodpecker were the other highlights in this week.

December 10 – December 16

That Ruddy Duck is still being seen in the Southwest Marsh. Six other species of diving ducks are now present. With legs set far back on their bodies, diving ducks make good swimmers and divers. You won't see them walking upright on land because they can't. Again the best areas to spot diving ducks are Ewen Slough and Fuller Slough also in the channel of water looking west from the Viewing Platform. The small flock of approximately 10 or 11 White-winged Crossbills are noticed on the 10th. The Barred Owl showed up in a birch tree near the Center Dyke bird blind. Red-tailed Hawks one of the more commonly spotted hawk in our area also having one of the most diverse color phases or morphs in their plumage. They also have as many as 8 different sub-species. On the 10th the Harlan's variation, which has an overall rich brown color and is mostly found in Alaska and the Yukon, was spotted behind the Gift Shop.

December 17 – December 23

With 75 species recorded in this week, here were the highlights; Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Belted Kingfisher, Barn Owl, Barred Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Great Horned Owl, Northern Shrike, American Pipit, Lincoln's Sparrow, Western Meadowlark and Common Redpolls. Note that sightings of a couple of the owl species were by staff during checks in quiet non-public out of bound areas.

December 24 – December 30

With the cooler temperatures and frozen water ways bird sightings were fewer with only 62 species this week. Most of the diving ducks moved out to the open Fraser River and surrounding estuary. Large numbers of Trumpeter Swans were feeding in the river marshes, as the left over potatoes they like to eat were frozen in the farm fields. Lesser Snow Geese are now heading south to Skagit Valley Washington. I am not sure if it is the same Peregrine Falcon that previously used the "Peregrine Perch" but we have a Peregrine Falcon that on most mornings using a new tree half way along the driveway as a perch from which to hunt.

This ends the 2017 Bird Highlights. We look forward to seeing you on your next visit, and if there are any questions as to what has been seen or where to find certain species, feel free to ask myself or Susan when you pass by the Gift Shop.

Text: Varri Raffan
Gift Shop Manager

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 17th, 2018

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 18th, 2018

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.

Manager's Report

A total of 18,784 visitors passed through the entrance gates in the last three months of 2017, a few thousand more than in 2016 and 2015 for the same time of year. Apart from very heavy rain on the 12 and 18th, October was nice and busy nearly every weekend, whereas in November and December, the winter weather began in earnest, giving us a good look at how our new roofs performed in pouring rain, sleet and snow and combinations of the above.

In October, in addition to the usual visitors watching Snow Geese, we had many birders looking for fall highlights such as the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Cackling Geese, Ruff, owls, as well as our charming apple-eating beaver visitor.

The grant from Nature Canada made it possible for us to provide free busing and programs to 16 school classes from inner city schools between September and the end of the year, and more classes are expected up to the end of March. A teacher workshop (Project Wild) was held October 20th, and 20 teachers turned out to learn about different activity-based ways to teach about wildlife and their habitats.

In mid-November, when the skyline snag across from the Gift Shop fell, we had to go make sure that the younger Grand Fir growing nearby was doing well, as the snag was also a Grand Fir, and reached high up above the surrounding Douglas Firs.



The skyline snag before it broke. Photo: Kathleen Fry



Sapsucker and its "sap wells" Photo: Kathleen Fry

We find ourselves looking at our trees a lot more in winter than in the rest of the year, and not just because we are looking for owls. In winter, high winds break off branches or even whole trees and strip off needles, Beavers nibble off branches, and decimate scenic stands of our Paper Birches, Hawthornes and Pacific Crabapple trees. High water levels drown roots, and start the process of rot at ground level.

As our bigger trees get older, some of the wildlife use changes. In previous summers we have been lucky enough to observe a couple of pairs of very secretive Brown Creepers constructing nests under the loose bark of some dying trees. The larger woodpeckers have made various excavations through the bark and into the heart of many trees, paving the way for many smaller cavity nesters to take advantage of the holes for their own uses. This winter, a Red-breasted Sapsucker was present off and on, and one of our visitors pointed out that the bird had made quite the series of holes or "sap wells" in one of the cedar trees down the driveway. Although the bird is not very distinct in the picture above, you can see the grid of small holes on the tree trunk. Sap wells are usually short little drilled holes laid out in a grid, and when the tree sap is then accessible, it is not just the sapsucker that benefits. Anna's Hummingbirds are known to make good use of these sources of sap throughout the winter!

December was particularly inclement with our ponds frozen over at the beginning and end of the month, and torrential rains about a week before Christmas. On December 2nd, a juvenile Sandhill Crane was delivered here by Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society in the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island. The bird was caught at the Campbell River Airport, and the rehabilitation facility then looked for a place to release it where there were other cranes. We cautiously released it in with some of our regular winter crane flock a few days later, and it seemed to be accepted and was feeding and bedding down in the marshes at night with them. On the 17th, though, it looked mighty bedraggled and was shivering and hanging off by itself in the pouring rain and was found dead the next morning. Cranes really need their parents for the first 11 months or so for winter survival training!

Through the last months of the year, maintenance has focussed on making sure trails and views are clear, water levels are reasonable, beavers are allowed to eat enough to survive but are kept away from favourite trees, and just plain fixing things in general. Happy New Year, and all the best for 2018!

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



Juvenile Sandhill Crane Photo: Kathleen Fry

Sharing Bird Sightings and Photos of the Sanctuary

If you would like to share your sightings or photos with us, here is a summary of procedures we use.

We keep a *weekly species list* and try to keep tabs on the locations of interesting birds so that we can share this with visitors. The list is posted by the Gift Shop door, and is compiled from observations starting from the Sunday morning walk and added to over the week from our regular surveys and from verbal or written reports from staff and visitors. We keep a Bird Record Log Book on the back deck of the Gift Shop for visitor contributions. If you see something uncommon and do not have time to write it down there, you can also let us know on your way out so we can tell others where to look. At the end of the week, on Saturday, the list is posted.

eBird records are where we look to see if anything interesting was seen and not necessarily reported directly to us. The Sanctuary is a “Hotspot” in www.ebird.ca, and we know that many birders contribute and store their bird data there when they have been here for a visit. We submit records there too, but admittedly not in a very timely manner.

Many thanks to Melissa Hafting for letting us know whenever something here has been reported to *Rare Bird* hotlines. Sometimes we know about it only a few minutes after someone has excitedly reported it on-line. The joys of modern technology and the informal birding network! Sometimes, we miss a notice and are amazed at the number of cars waiting at our front gate first thing in the morning!

When it comes to sharing photos or offering them for Sanctuary projects such as the annual calendar or the newsletter, just remember they are generally large files, so try to minimize what comes our way over our limited internet service. If you have a website where your photos are already on line, just send a link to that page. If you are a member of Flickr and have posted them on www.flickr.com, we will see them if you share the photo with the Flickr group called Marshnotes. If you just want to share a special photo with us, you can email us at bcws@reifelbirds sanctuary.com, but try to downsize the photo to under 5 MB before sending it.

Thanks so much, folks!

The Volunteer Corner

Special thanks to:

- ◆ Our regular Sunday Bird Walk team of Mary Taitt, and Istvan Orosi.
- ◆ Members Jim Martin, Kristina Breit, Emma Turgeon and David Bruce for helping visitors along trails.
- ◆ Justin Makonin, Eric Rossicci, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed and filling bird feeders, and Ben Lambert for weekend help.
- ◆ Our fall newsletter mailout team of Jim Martin, Eric Rossicci and Eileen Axford.
- ◆ New volunteer Harmeet Virdee and her mother Harpreet for helping bag seed and other tasks.
- ◆ Ivy Whitehorne, Jessica Weiss, Nicole Lamarche, Kristina Breit, and Brian Self for their assistance with bird surveys.
- ◆ Kristina Breit and Justin Huang for their regular weekly volunteer time on projects.

Volunteers needed:

- ◆ Trail maintenance and work parties;
- ◆ Weekend hosting of visitors;
- ◆ Museum host for Sunday mornings;
- ◆ Gardening work parties;
- ◆ Bird surveys.

For more information, ask at the Gift Shop or visit our website. www.reifelbirdsantuary.com and explore the Volunteer page.

Please leave your name and contact information at our office 604-946-6980 or send me an email.

Kathleen (kathleen@reifelbirdsantuary.com.)

Dirt, and More Dirt!

Canucks staff came here November 7th for a volunteer work party to spread surfacing materials along the outer dyke as part of their Live to Give Program. Many thanks, folks, for all the hard work that day!



The Canucks volunteers at work and at the end of the day with staff Dan Dixon (2nd from the left). Photo: Kathleen Fry

A Sad Note

Many members will probably remember our volunteer Bill Topping, a retired school teacher, who hosted visitors in the Museum on Sundays for many years. Recently, he gave up driving and was unable to continue this, and we were sad to hear of his passing in late October.



Retiring from Gardening

The “Garden Ladies” Barbara Warrick, Irene Banack, and Arlie Darby are now “retiring” from their job gardening here. Ladies, we thank you for all your years of hard work and dedication that have made our front gardens such colourful spots for our visitors (and hummingbirds) to enjoy!



**A Special
Thank You**
TO
3 YR OLD
EMILY SHAEFFERS
FOR
DONATING HER
BIRTHDAY FUNDS
TO THE SANCTUARY

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 # _____

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Address: _____

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

Telephone: 604 946 6980 Fax: 604 946 6982

Website: www.reifelbirds sanctuary.com

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