

British Columbia/ Yukon Region

JACK BOWLING

Yukon endured record heat and lack of rain through the period, with rivers swollen by high-elevation snowmelt. Farther south the weather was typically more variable. June was cool and wet except for a sunny, warm week around the solstice. July started wet but soon became hot and dry in all areas as a massive ridge of high pressure dominated the western part of the continent. Frequent lightning in June in Yukon and later in July farther south sparked many forest fires.

Although a few compilers were at a loss to report anything noteworthy, upward trends in numbers and/or nestings of recently displaced and newly established species in several areas brought a "good news" feel to this season. May it always be so.

Abbreviations: B.C. (*British Columbia*); D.C. (*Dawson Creek*); N.W.T. (*Northwest Territories*); Ok. (*Okanagan*); Ok. L. (*Okanagan L.*); Ok. Valley (*Okanagan Valley*); P.G.

(*Prince George*); Q.C.I. (*Queen Charlotte Islands*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Vic. (*Victoria*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

Loons to Ibises

Yukon's first Pied-billed Grebes on Rat L. in s. Yukon bred successfully, with one young seen with the adults in early July (DvW). Testimony to the fluid nature of Eared Grebe nesting colonies in the Peace R. country of n.e. B.C. included a colony of 96 nests at McQueen Slough near D.C., June 23 (SK, LL, MPh), the first nesting at this site in 6 years, and 928 nests on Boundary L., e. of Fort St. John June 28 (NK) vs. a count of approximately 100 nests in 1992 (CS, *vide* NK). Under intense development pressure, many species formerly common in the Ok. Valley have succumbed to habitat loss. Encouraging, then, were breeding Eared Grebes—two adults and three chicks—near Kelowna July 19 (CC), and two adults and one young near Vernon July 25 (CS). A W. Grebe on McLeod L., 160 km n. of P.G., June 30 (NK) furnished the first summer record for the area.

Pelagic surveys of offshore waters from w.c. Van. I. north to Dixon Entrance June 25–July 1 (KM) tallied the following tubenoses: 78 Black-footed Albatross, 26 N. Fulmar, one Flesh-footed Shearwater, one Buller's Shearwater, 3462 Sooty Shearwater, 240 Short-tailed Shearwater, 224 Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, and 225 Leach's Storm-Petrel. A great deal of work needs to be done

to determine the seasonal distribution vs. age structure and foraging strategies of these species along the B.C. coast.

Herons to Waterfowl

An Am. Bittern, an increasingly rare species in s. B.C., was seen flying over a damp meadow near Salmon Arm June 23 (CS). British Columbia's most urban Great Blue Heron colony near downtown Vernon managed around 25 active nests (CS), of which at least 4 had five young each! Two Trumpeter Swans were appropriately observed at Swan L., n. of Whse., June 21 (HG), providing a first local summer record. A cygnet Trumpeter managed to escape the attack of a Northern Pike on Murray L., 150 km e. of Mayo, Yukon July 2 (GK, LK)! An eclipse ♂ or imm. Tufted Duck seen

at the Iona I. settling ponds near Van., July 31 (JM, †JW) was out of season. A ♀ Harlequin Duck with eight young were seen 20 km e. of Kelowna on Mission Cr., July 14 (m.ob.), a rare Ok. Valley breeding record. A ♀ Hooded Merganser with 12 tiny young near Vernon June 5 (CS) provided one of very few nesting records for the n. Ok. Valley during the last decade. A pair of Ruddy Ducks with six ducklings at Viaduct Flats, Saanich, were seen near Victoria June 16 (MC), furnishing the first breeding record for Van. I. since the 1940s.

Vultures to Cranes

An ad. Turkey Vulture passed by the front of a car 50 km w. of P.G., June 19 (LLe), furnishing an expected first for the local checklist given recent sightings of this species farther west around Smithers. A light-morph Broad-winged Hawk sighted 50 km n.w. of P.G., July 14 (CF, DTY, DW) provided the 2nd summer season and the first July record for the area, and supports the theory of potential local breeding. A pair of Swainson's Hawks successfully raised one young from a nest near the military camp at Vernon, fledging in late July (CS). This species has become less common in the n. Ok. the past decade. Two ad. and one imm. Am. Kestrels were present at a clearcut at the 3000 foot level, an unexpected location, near Sechelt July 16 (TG), providing the first breeding record for the Sunshine Coast. A ♀ Gyrfalcon at a nest with no apparent young was seen along the Dempster Hwy June 23 (RDM). Two ad. and two imm. Prairie Falcons were seen on a bluff w. of Williams L., July 13 (BD), close to a historical nesting site.

A Virginia Rail was heard at Vama Vama marsh 40 km e. of Prince George June 23 (CA, JB) and was seen there the next day, furnishing a first local record. Soras were heard at 3 separate locations throughout s. Yukon in June, with two young seen at the marsh edge of Swan L., n. of Whse., July 8 (HG), providing the first confirmed local breeding record. American Coots seem to be spreading northwestward in Yukon. Two adults were at Pelly Crossing June 17 (NK), while adults with two young were at Rat L., s. of Whse., July 6 (CE, PS). A Sandhill Crane paid a surprise visit to Swan L., s. Yukon, June 24 (HG).

Shorebirds

American Avocets apparently nested near the Glenmore landfill in Kelowna (*vide* NK), with three females and one male at nearby Robert L., July 22 (CC), and five there again July 17 (CC, DB, GW). Greater Yellowlegs were noted as fairly common along the Liard R. in s.e. Yukon. One adult with two independent young near the confluence of the



Meister and Liard Rivers July 27 (CE, PS) was the closest "near proof" yet of this species breeding in the territory. A Whimbrel flying N over the sagebrush flats of Chopaka near the Washington state border June 4 (m.ob.) was a rare inland find and stretches the end of the interior spring migration window by a couple of weeks. A Marbled Godwit made a rare summer stopover at Oak Bay, Victoria July 24 & 25 (BH, JG). Numbers of southbound W. Sandpipers from interior B.C. areas remained disturbingly low, a trend first noted in 1992. Reports of one at Prince George July 10 (DTy) and two at Kelowna July 22 (CC) were representative. Unfortunately, this trend also seems to be spreading to the coast, where the biggest flock of Westerns reported was 2000 at Iona I. settling ponds July 9 (JDe), a pale fraction of previous peak counts. Kelowna's first Short-billed Dowitcher was in with a flock of six of its longer-billed cousins at Robert L., July 22 (CC) and stayed through the end of the period. Straying far inland from its usual offshore migration corridor, an ad. ♀ **Red Phalarope** was photographed at Cranberry Marsh, Valemount June 18 (ph. JmB), providing one of only a handful of interior records.

Gulls to Woodpeckers

The earliest report of Heermann's Gulls from s. Van. I. was of >200 off Otter Pt., Sooke July 20 (WM). Ring-billed Gull numbers continued to grow on e. Van. I., with small flocks reported from most estuaries. The largest flock was >120 adults on the Royston log sort July 13 (BMS), an early date. Considering the first Ring-billed in this area showed up only 5 years ago, one has to wonder when the first breeding colony on Van. I. will be discovered. The first wave of Caspian Terns invaded the s. coast June 5, with seven birds at Port Renfrew, Van. I. (KS), and 34 off the Roberts Bank Jetty on the mainland the same day (MPL). Peak count at the jetty was 38 adults, 13 immatures July 25 (RJC).



A female Red Phalarope was seen at Cranberry Marsh, Valemount June 18. Photograph by Jim Bolding.

British Columbia's southernmost breeding Arctic Tern colony at Stewart at the head of Portland Canal is still holding its own with four adults there July 1 (CC, DTy, DW).

Common Murres were noted several times in Georgia Strait, with one off Pt. Roberts June 17 (JI); flocks of six in mid-strait were moving northward July 21 & 22 (RS), likely all non-breeders. Noteworthy was a calling Marbled Murrelet over Ruckle Park, Saltspring I., July 24 (DFE, m.ob.) at 10:15 p.m. during an evening owling.

SA A freshly killed Yellow-billed Cuckoo was found along the banks of Mission Cr., Kelowna July 27 (FJ). The bird was sequestered promptly in a local freezer awaiting expert diagnosis of age/sex. Coming upon the heels of July 1992's sighting of this species across the shores of nearby Ok. L., one wonders if these are stragglers from e. of the Rockies or northward from the small California population.

One ad. and two imm. Barred Owls on Portland I., June 26 (DFE, m.ob.) provided the first breeding record for the Gulf Is. An ad. Great Gray Owl at a nest with three fledging young near Watson L. in mid-June (CE, PS) furnished one of very few nesting records for Yukon. A single Great Gray was spotted e. of Kelowna June 30 (m.ob.). This species may be increasing slowly in the Ok. Valley. Common Nighthawk numbers were down in the n. Ok., with Siddle seeing only three birds through the reporting period. However, numbers were judged to be normal in P.G., with 5-6 pairs in the downtown area (m.ob.). High count of nighthawks from s. Van. I. was of 20-25 birds over Marigold district, Saanich June 11 (*vide* BW). For the 2nd consecutive year, 2-3 pairs of White-throated Swifts were seen frequenting a cliff face along Kalamalka L. near Vernon June 5 (CS), likely a very small and previously unknown n. Ok. nesting "colony."

A tantalizing report of an ad. ♂ **Williamson's Sapsucker** from Cypress P.P. on the North Shore Mts. near Van., July 21 (DF) awaits further documentation. If accepted, this would provide the first record for the coast. Two Three-toed Woodpeckers, a scarce and localized resident of c. Van. I., were seen at Battleship L., Strathcona P.P., July 26 (JA). A Black-backed Woodpecker was feeding a recently fledged young male at Swan L., s. Yukon June 24 (HG), the first breeding evidence for the area.

Flycatchers to Thrushes

Two Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were heard near Watson L. in s.e. Yukon June 18, with several others heard within 250 km n.w. of

this site July 1-2 (CE, PS), an apparent range expansion. The **Least Flycatchers** which had moved into Colony Farm, e. of Van., over the past decade were finally caught in the act, with a male seen at a nest July 12 (AJ). This furnished the first breeding record for the coast. The range of Dusky Flycatcher in Yukon was extended eastward with singing birds at treeline near Rancheria June 22 (CE, PS), and northward with more singing males e. of Mayo July 3 (GK, LK). The **Western Kingbirds** of Colony Farm returned June 4, were found at a nest July 8 (KI, MPr), and were feeding one young July 17 (LC), furnishing the first nesting record for the Vancouver area. It was also a banner year for Westerns around s. Van. I., with single birds seen at 6 locations June 4-18 (m.ob.). Single E. Kingbirds strayed W to Mt. Tuam on Saltspring I., June 10 (NJ, LKa), and N to the Meister R. delta in s.e. Yukon July 29 (ph. CE, PS), where very rare. The P.G. checklist area's first nesting E. Kingbirds were discovered near Shell L., July 12 (ELF). Eurasian Skylarks with young were seen at the Vic. airport during July (BB). A large flock of 950 Bank Swallows was seen over Robert L., Kelowna July 17 (CC, DB, GW).

SA The wishes of many birders came true when 2 pairs of **Purple Martins** were discovered nesting in pilings at **Maplewood Flats in N. Van., June 25 (KB)**, the first local nesting since 1966. Young were being fed by June 29 (TP et al.). **Martins were also seen using nest boxes along the coast of s.e. Van. I., at Cowichan Bay, Esquimalt Harbour, Victoria Harbour, and Ladysmith Harbour during the period (m.ob.); the high count was 23 over Cowichan Bay July 1 (DM). Conditions are apparently conducive for a welcome population increase of this beautiful bird along the s. coast.**

The known range of Mt. Chickadee was pushed N some 300 km with the discovery of a single bird near Murray L., e. of Mayo, Yukon July 3 (Gk, LK). The mysterious Rock Wren of Pink Mt. at Mile 135 of the Alaska Hwy was once again spotted singing lustily June 28 (CC, DTy, DW) from his outlier habitat of vertical rock bluffs. Winter Wrens are supposedly accidental in Yukon. Surprising then was an ad. male in full song discovered along the Meister R. in s.e. Yukon June 12 (CE, PS) and seen throughout the month in the same area. The bird was seen carrying nest material, but no 2nd bird was confirmed. A compelling description of an ad. ♂ **Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher** on Bowen I. in Howe Sound, n. of Van., June 12 (SSS) is before the

records committee. Pending acceptance, this would provide the 2nd record for B.C.

A Townsend's Solitaire was spotted in the full glare of the midnight sun at Dome Hill near Dawson City, Yukon June 23 (RDM), n.w. of its usual range. Two more Solitaires at a high-elevation clearcut on the Sunshine Coast July 16 (TG) may have been breeding, although evidence is lacking. A pair of Gray Catbirds was found nesting along the Pitt L. Nature Trail n.e. of Van., July 10 (VF), one of few local breeding records. A singing ♂ **Brown Thrasher** seen near D.C., June 20 (SK, LL, †MPH) was an overshoot from its normal Alberta range.

Vireos to Fringillids

The 2nd confirmed record of Solitary Vireo for the Yukon was of a singing bird near the confluence of the Meister and Liard reservoirs June 13 (CE, PS). A wandering ♂ **Northern Parula**, B.C.'s first, sang from Lombardy Poplars along the edge of Quilchena Golf Course, Richmond during daylight June 24 (MTo, ph. STo, m.ob.), but was gone the next day. Magnolia Warblers, first discovered in s.e. Yukon in 1993, were found to be quite common in riparian areas along the Liard R. through the period (CE, PS). A male carrying food was seen near Tom Cr., July 13 (HG). An ad. ♂ Cape May Warbler was discovered on Bear Mt. near D.C., June 26 (CC, SK, LL, MPH, DTy, DW), a first for the local area. The ♂ Hermit Warbler discovered near Toad L. in c. Van. I. this past May was last seen in the same area June 20 (VC, D&MI, BMS). The Am. Redstart, previously regarded as rare in Yukon, was perhaps the most common warbler in riparian areas along the Liard R. in s.e. Yukon in June (CE, PS).

A ♂ Rose-breasted Grosbeak, providing the 3rd record for Vic., was seen in the Beaver/Elk L. area June 5-12 (m.ob.). Another ♂ Rose-breasted—killed in a window crash at Shelley 15 km e. of P.G., June 8 (BN)—furnished the first local record. The bird had been accompanied by an apparent female for about a week previous to its death (*fide* NK). **Lazuli Buntings** were noted from 3 s. coast locations during the period: near the Sechelt Airport (TG), at the Colony Farm e. of Van. (m.ob.), and at the Premier St. landfill in N. Van. (m.ob.). First-time breeding was confirmed at both the Sechelt location (TG) and at Colony Farm (SM), and was suspected at the landfill site. Yukon's first **Lark Sparrow** was flushed from shrubs along the Liard R. in s.e. Yukon July 15 (ph. CE, PS). An ad. **Black-throated Sparrow** was singing atop Mt. Tolmie, Vic., June 16 (KT), providing the area's first confirmed record. Another Black-throated, the Ok. Vly's 2nd, was seen on the Vernon Com-

monage July 3 (MC, PG). A ♂ and ♀ **Brambling** held over at a Masset, Q.C.I. feeder (P&PP) until the end of July! A pair of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches with one young was seen on Viking Ridge 90 km e. of P.G., July 14 (LL), furnishing a first confirmed local nesting record.

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