

# british columbia–yukon region



## JACK BOWLING

It was another wet one for British Columbia as a procession of slow-moving and powerful “cold low” pressure systems moved in from the Pacific. The northeast fared the worst, with Fort Nelson’s monthly rainfall totaling 300% of normal in June, and almost 200% in July. Vancouver Airport recorded its wettest July ever. Most of the Yukon, save for the extreme south, was far enough north to escape the

heavier rains. Temperatures as a whole were near normal or slightly above.

While some may think that a rainy summer has only negative impacts on birds, the real story may be more complex. Although some first broods suffered from the cold and wet, the lush vegetation and higher water tables may have helped other species expand into new territory. Thanks to an increased number of surveys, a few holes in observer coverage were filled in this year, with often surprising results. As for rarities,

the Blue Rock Thrush in interior British Columbia, a potential first for North America away from Alaska, was the farthest off course.

**Abbreviations:** a.t. (audiotaped); BBS (Breeding Bird Survey); B.C. (British Columbia); Delkatla (Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary, Masset, Q.C.I.); Iona (Iona I., n.w. Richmond, at the mouth of the Fraser R.); Ok. L. (Okanagan L.); Ok. Vly (Okanagan Valley); NWT (Northwest Territories); P.G. (Prince George); p.v. (pending verification by responsible Bird Records Committee); STP (Sewage Treatment Plant/Ponds); Van. (Vancouver); Van. I. (Vancouver I.); Vic. (Victoria); v.t. (videotaped); Whse. (Whitehorse).

## LOONS TO RAILS

Only a vagrant to inside waters, a Sooty Shearwater seen in Georgia Strait off the Iona Jetty June 8 (RTo) was a surprise. A Buller’s Shearwater 180 km w. of the mouth of Juan de Fuca Strait July 15 (BT) was in B.C. waters early. Two locations along the B.C./Alberta border recorded their first confirmed Am. White Pelicans. Six were seen in typical high circling flight above Mt. Robson P.P. June 1 (NK, GR, MVB), and a flock of 10 appeared over Boundary L., e. of Fort St. John, July 2 (RRH, GSD, SyR, CS); likely wanderers from farther east in both cases. The four or more Am. Bitterns at Stone Cr. Marsh, w. of Vanderhoof, c. B.C., June 19 (PH, MH) constituted a good find of this furtive species.

Possibly the southernmost Trumpeter Swan breeding record for the Region, 2 adults and two small cygnets were on Muskeg L., 40 km n.e. of Tumbler Ridge, n.e. B.C., July 10 (CH). Two Oldsquaw, usually noted only during migration in s. Yukon, were observed at the unlikely date of July 2 at Swan L. near Whse. (JG, HG). The now famous young male **Common Eider** which overwintered in the Van. area reappeared off the Iona Jetty in early July and was present through month’s end (m.ob., †MPR).

Fifty-one Bald Eagles, six adults and 46 immatures, at Corkscrew Cr., s. of Vanderhoof, June 15 (BCFO) were feeding on

spawning suckers. This is a large inland congregation for any season. A Cooper's and a Broad-winged Hawk were great finds in the P.G. area June 14 (BCFO). A Ministry of Environment census of N. Goshawks in the Ft. Nelson Lowlands of n.e. B.C. in June found no active nests and had only 3 responses to tape playback (SNB, PSh, VP, JS). Whether this was a poor breeding year or related to timing will hopefully be clarified by further research. The elusive Broad-winged Hawks of Boundary L., n.e. B.C., were unusually cooperative, revealing themselves several times. Single birds were seen June 16 (BCFO), July 2 (RRH, SyR), and July 25 (SGC, LRR). Also, Yukon's first-ever **Broad-winged Hawk** was observed along the La Biche R. in the s.e. corner of the Territory June 15 (†CE). A Swainson's Hawk on Sea I., n. of Van. Airport, July 11 provided Van's first record and possibly the first in July for a coastal area. It was last seen drifting E along the Fraser R. (MKM).

A Golden Eagle near Sechelt, Sunshine Coast, June 8 (DoB) provided a rare record for the area. Two Peregrine Falcons flushed from the underside of the Eagle R. Bridge just n. of Eagle Plains, Dempster Hwy, Yukon, June 18 (RDM). An imm. Peregrine

**SA** Hugh Jennings of Bellevue, WA, came up to Eliguk L. along the e. side of B.C.'s Tweedsmuir P.P. in June to do a little fishing. What he learned there is worth relating: "About 7–10 days before I arrived at Eliguk L. on June 10, a piece of grassy muskeg broke away from the shoreline on a windy day and drifted onto the dock at the lodge. It was about 10 ft. sq. and had a nest with two Com. Loon eggs. The adults were on the lake a short distance away. A couple of men hooked an anchor into the wayward grass island and tried to tow it up the shoreline. This didn't work very well so they proceeded to push it instead. The loons swam a little distance ahead of them. After pushing it about 200 yards, the loons by their actions of swimming toward the shore indicated that they seemed to want the nest left at the base of a large rock where protective trees provided some shade. The grass island was tethered to the trees to hold it in place. It took only about 20 minutes after the men backed off before one of the loons hopped back on the nest..." The eggs hatched June 25 and the nestlings were still alive when Hugh left June 29.

at Swan. L. near Whse. July 5 (CE, HG, BM, LB, PS) constituted a rare summer record for the s. Yukon. A Gyrfalcon nest just n. of Windy Pass along the Dempster Hwy contained two young June 13 (RDM); the male falcon was seen transferring a ptarmigan aerially to the female, who then carried it to the nest.

Researchers stumbled upon two–three **Yellow Rails** 30 km e. of Chetwynd, n.e. B.C., during surveys for bats June 3–July 13 (p.v., a.t. †MAS, AdV, SWG, CM, BH) in typical wet grass habitat. These are the westernmost observations yet in the Region of this extremely local species. Perhaps it is responding positively to the higher water levels of the past couple of summers in the northeast. A Virginia Rail was heard at Moose Marsh, Mt. Robson P.P., May 31 (SK, LL, J&C McGhee), the first for the park.

## SHOREBIRDS TO WOODPECKERS

Jason Weir of Kelowna made the local breeding Am. Avocets at the Glenmore Landfill his pet project. He documented the 19 nests and 85–90 eggs laid in May, and the hatching of the chicks through June. This is the largest avocet breeding colony yet recorded in the Region. A late entry from the previous season, a pair of territorial Greater Yellowlegs frequented Delkatla through May (MH, PH, AD). There are no breeding records for the Q.C.I., and no nest was found in this instance. A Willet at Giscome, e. of P.G., June 3 (DG, SK, LL, MPh, SPH) was only the 2nd for the local checklist area. An ad. Spotted Sandpiper with two chicks on a gravel bar at the Yakoun R. near Port Clements July 9 provided a rare breeding record for the Q.C.I. The seven Long-billed Curlews at Vanderhoof June 15 (BCFO) constituted the largest flock on record for the area, strong confirmation of its recent surge into c. B.C. A Surfbird atop Mt. Goldenside, km 72 Dempster Hwy, July 17 (LS) had the observer "crying and jumping;" any Yukon sighting of this species is noteworthy, especially near potential breeding grounds.

A beach shorebird census on the n.e. Q.C.I. Aug. 1 (PH, MH) turned up a high 4899 Sanderlings. Single juv. Semipalmated Sandpipers were at Delkatla July 1 and at Sandspit Aug. 1 (MH, PH), the first sightings on the Q.C.I. in 3 years. The southern sweep of W. Sandpipers appears to have been displaced somewhat east this season. While the ad. male Western at Boundary L., n.e. B.C., July 8 (GSD, CS) provided a good record for a location well-removed from the coast, it apparently defined only the pe-

riphery of the main push. Consider the 5000 tallied at Yakoun Estuary, Q.C.I., July 9 (PH), the largest number the observer has ever seen on the Queen Charlottes. Usually large flocks of this peep make landfall farther south along the coast, as did the 7000–8000 at Iona STP July 2 (MPr).

A **Red-necked Stint** at Reifel June 19 (p.v., †JI), the 3rd earliest for the Region, was in a flock of W. Sandpipers. An apparent **Long-toed Stint** showed up at Sandspit, Q.C.I., July 1 (p.v., MH, †PH), a potential first for the archipelago. The observers recognized the difficulty of differentiating this species from Least Sandpiper in the detailed notes.

The 1500 Franklin's Gulls, almost all adults, at the Fort St. John N. STP July 6 (GSD, RRH, SyR, CS) constituted one of the largest flocks on record for summer. Usually the big flocks in the Peace have thinned out by then. One–two **Little Gulls** at Iona STP June 1 (RTo, m.ob.) were possibly the ones seen earlier in the spring in Georgia Strait. The Whse. area experienced several first larid records for the season: a 2nd-summer California Gull June 23, and an ad. Ring-billed and a first-summer California June 24 (CE). An ad. **Lesser Black-backed Gull** first discovered in Whse. July 2 (ph. †CE, †PS, ph. †HG) was relocated July 23–25 (CE), perhaps the Yukon's first. **Slaty-backed Gulls** wandered E and S during the period, unusual in summer. An immaculate adult was a surprise at Inuvik, NWT, June 15 (RDM), while a 2nd-summer bird at Whse. July 30 (ph. †CE, †PS) established a first documented record for the Yukon. Perhaps part of the same movement which brought the bird to Whse., an ad. Slaty-backed at Rose Spit on Aug. 1 (†PH, MH), provided a first record for the Q.C.I.

Two sub-ad. W. Gulls were on the e. side of Gwaii Haanas N.P. Reserve May 26–27 (AD). The only other sighting on record for Moresby I., Q.C.I., is for the winter period. Way n. of its established range was a Glaucous-winged Gull at Inuvik, NWT, June 16 (RDM). Casual during summer in the Whse. area, two first-summer Glaucous Gulls were present there through July (ph. CE, HG).

The first-ever nests of **Black-legged Kittiwake** in B.C. were discovered on Holland Rock in Chatham Sound off Prince Rupert June 23 (DC, LG, †PH, B. Hart, MH). Three nests were there June 23, one containing a single egg. That egg produced a chick by July 22, at which time the other 2 nests held one egg each. Lingered late was

a Sabine's Gull at Pitt L., n.e. of Van., June 1 (HNM, †JAM, PSp, BSp). Caspian Terns were once again widely reported. Some notable inland records included one at Nulki L., Vanderhoof, June 19 (CA, ABu, MBu, NK); two adults at Kelsall L., Haines Rd., n.w. B.C., June 22 (ADM); and an adult at Swan L. July 5 (†CE, †PS, HG, BM), Yukon's 2nd in as many years. On the coast, five were at Qualicum Beach June 20 (DGC), two were at China Cr., s.w. of Port Alberni, July 2 (DGC), and one adult was observed at Skonun Pt., Masset, Q.C.I., July 7 (MH, PH). The core of the Region's Caspian population remains concentrated along the Robert's Bank Jetty, s. of the mouth of the Fraser R., where 135 were tallied July 5 (DS). A Pigeon Guillemot was observed at 48°26'N, 126°04'W off s. Van. I., July 16 (BT), far offshore for the season.

Northern Hawk Owls are rarely seen in summer in the N. Peace area of n.e. B.C.; noteworthy was the one at an old burn at km 213 of the Alaska Hwy July 4 (GSD, SyR). A survey of the Boundary/Okanagan/Nicola Forest Districts in the s. B.C. interior turned up about 50 Flammulated Owls in 11 drainages in June (RJC, BBo). The Okanagan Falls P.P. campsite in the S. Ok. is famous for its large Com. Nighthawk congregations; at least 100 were there hawking low along the Ok. R. after 10 p.m. July 6 (DS). Just before the nighthawks showed up, at least 50 White-throated Swifts fed on the rising insects. Twelve Black Swifts were at Perry Canyon near Tumbler Ridge June 23–24 (CH) for the 3rd consecutive year; breeding is suspected.

Although long suspected of being the bird behind several of the "ruby-throated" hummingbird sightings in s. B.C. over the past few decades, it was not until a male **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** showed up at a Princeton feeder July 10–11 (p.v., †JH) that one had ever been documented. The call to observers went out right away in hopes of independent confirmation but, alas, the bird proved elusive.

A male Red-naped Sapsucker was feeding young at a hemlock snag nest at the Chateau Whistler Golf Course July 16 (ph. BMG), the closest to the coast that breeding activity has been observed. A Three-toed Woodpecker at Tetrahedron P.P. June 28 (DoB), although rare on the Sunshine Coast, was at a location where this species had been seen previously.

#### FLYCATCHERS TO PIPITS

A single Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Yukon's

rarest empid, was singing at the Beaver R. in the s.e. corner of the Territory June 4 (CE). Providing an area first record was the Yellow-bellied on the lower slopes of Mt. Spieker, w. of Tumbler Ridge, June 24 (CH). Hammond's Flycatchers may be more common in the e. foothills of the Rockies in n.e. B.C. than previously thought. Two were near Kinuseo Falls, Monkman P.P., June 28 (CH), and another two were in Tumbler Ridge July 27 (CH). Much the same could be said for Dusky Flycatchers: One was detected on Mt. Spieker June 24 (CH). Pacific-slope Flycatchers, an irregular component of n.e. B.C.'s Peace River district avifauna, were found in 3 locations July 3–9 (GSD, RRH, SyR, CS). A **Black Phoebe**, the Region's 3rd, surprised the observer at Iona July 10 (†MPPr). The bird, apparently in either juvenal or Basic 1 plumage, stayed through the next day, allowing many people to see and photograph it. After a couple of years of teaser sightings, E. Phoebes were finally confirmed as breeding in the Yukon with the discovery of a nest with four young at the La Biche R. Bridge June 24 (MGI). Another was singing at midnight June 21 near Watson L. (CE, PS), the first local record. A **Say's Phoebe** building a nest at Tuktoyaktuk, NWT, June 15 (RDM) provided some of the northernmost breeding evidence for the species. Yukon E. Kingbird sightings included one well n. of its normal range at Gravel L., Klondike Hwy, June 10 (RDM), and another along the lower La Biche R. June 12 (CE, PS). A **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** astounded a strolling birder out with the dog and the neighbour's kid at McBride, c.e. B.C., July 13 (p.v., †E. Stanley). The bird was perched on a fence line as usual, but was gone by the time she returned with more people. There are now almost 20 records of this beautiful tyrannid for the Region.

The Purple Martins that moved into the Sechelt area in May turned out to be prospectors, with no evidence of breeding activity detected (*vide* TG). A Blue Jay at Ft. Nelson, n.e. B.C., July 13 (JB) had apparently appeared there for the first time the previous summer (*vide* P. Johnstone). The Sunshine Coast's 3rd **Rock Wren** first seen June 15 at Tetrahedron P.P., remained on territory for a month (DoB).

A survey of the Oxbow L. area of the Upper Pemberton Meadows on the w. slopes of the Coast Range June 7 (KB, DA, BJ, BMG) tallied at least 17 singing Veerys. A Gray Catbird was later seen by the same observers at One Mile L., Pemberton. A **Northern Mockingbird** at Wilson Cr. June

**SA** A stop at Goldpan Park near Spences Bridge in the dry sagebrush country of B.C.'s Thompson R. Plateau June 6 turned out to be momentous for Ian Macdonald. There to greet him in the surrounding rocks was a male **Blue Rock Thrush** of the chestnut-bellied migratory race *Monticola solitarius phillipensis*, a denizen of rocks and cliffs of southeast Asia and recorded only once from Alaska. Photographs were obtained and forwarded to authorities, leaving no doubt as to the identification. However, as with all such strays, the question of origin must be considered before the species can be added to the provincial and national lists. To date, avian distributors have reported no knowledge of outlets which carry this species for retail or captive breeding programs (*vide* RWC). Ultimate determination awaits further information.

1 (DoB) established a 2nd Sunshine Coast record. A **Red-throated Pipit** at Iona June 12 (p.v., †C. Klimko) was the first observed outside of the fall migration period on the coast.

#### VIREOS TO FRINGILLIDS

A late report from the spring, a male **Hutton's Vireo** was heard singing at Windy Bay, S. Moresby I., Q.C.I., May 27 (AD), the first vireo reported from the archipelago. A Philadelphia Vireo, the rarest of the Yukon's four vireos, was on territory along the lower La Biche R., s.e. Yukon, June 13–15 (CE, PS). Single Philadelphias at Gunn L., 60 km s.e. of Tumbler Ridge, June 10 & 30, were the area's first and 2nd (JK).

Tennessee Warblers show marked short-term population changes in the N. Peace area of B.C., being common some years and almost absent in others. From July 1–10, they were found to be quite common and widespread (CS, SyR, RRH, GSD). Cape May Warblers, previously considered extremely rare in the Yukon, were relatively common along the Beaver R. in the s.e. corner of the Territory in early June (CE, MGI, PS). Bay-breasted Warblers were reported as common in the lower La Biche drainage of s.e. Yukon during June (CE). This follows from last summer's census of the mature spruce forests of the adjacent "Big Bend" area of the Liard R. in n.e. B.C., where they were also found to be common (SNB, PS, VP). A census of the McGregor Model Forest, 50 km n.e. of P.G., June 11 (SK, LL, DG) yielded 30 Blackpoll

**SA** A fallout of eastern warblers occurred at the University of B.C. campus on Pt. Grey, w. Van., during the first half of June. It began June 4 when a male **Black-and-white Warbler** and male **Hooded Warbler** were spotted (p.v., †RTo, TP). This was followed by a male **Chestnut-sided Warbler** and another Black-and-white Warbler June 8 (RTo, †JAM, m.ob.), and then a male **Tennessee Warbler** and male **Blackpoll Warbler** June 17 (RTo). These were excellent sightings for the s.w. coast of B.C. Some have wondered if these may have been California overwinterers which stuck to the coast on their way north. Eventually, with enough research, this question may be answered.

Warblers, a high concentration for the area. Indeed, Blackpolls may have been more common than usual around the c. interior, since another survey along a pipeline cut n. of Fraser L. June 29 encountered the species in good numbers (*vide* RTo, IR). Two male Am. Redstarts 5 km s. of Whistler June 26 (BMG, N. Ricker) provided first summer records for the Whistler area; single males were found there June 30 and July 2–4.

Yukon's first breeding record for **Ovenbird** was obtained with the discovery of a nest with 4 eggs in mature aspen forest along the lower La Biche R. June 15 (CE). Connecticut Warblers are regular in appropriate aspen habitat in the S. Peace; however, one at Gunn L. 60 km s.e. of Tumbler Ridge June 10 (JK) provided a first area record. Conversely, Connecticut is rare n. of the Peace River in the N. Peace. One sang briefly from a young aspen forest denuded by tent caterpillars near Boundary L., e. of Fort St. John, July 8 (GSD, CS). While a singing Mourning Warbler was the only one seen along the Beaver R., s.e. Yukon, June 7 (CE), the same observer found this species to be regular through June one watershed e. along the La Biche R. A Mourning Warbler at Gunn L. near Tumbler Ridge June 30 (JK) was the area's first. The known range of Canada Warbler in the Yukon was extended one watershed w. to the Beaver R. drainage, where it was found to be fairly common in mid-June (CE, PS).

A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was heard singing at Forests for the World, P.G., June 7 (CA, NK) and seen the next day (CA, NK, JB); another (same one?) was seen near Hixon, 60 km s. of P.G., June 14 (RWC). Lazuli Buntings were found at 3 lo-

cations around the Sunshine Coast, in addition to the known breeding site at the Sechelt Airport (TG, m.ob.); it seems this bunting is now firmly established on the peninsula. A singing male Lazuli was once again found on the McLeod L. BBS, 140 km n. of P.G., June 23 (JB, CA), the 3rd year since 1993 that this species has been found on this route. A **Green-tailed Towhee** was reported from the Glen Valley area, 50 km e. of Van., June 3 (*vide* C. Buis). A singing male Clay-colored Sparrow, extremely rare in the Yukon, was at Watson L. June 8 (†PS); another was on the lower La Biche R. June 15 (†PS, †CE). This species' status in the Yukon is not well understood. A pair of nesting Clay-colored at White L., S. Ok., in June (*vide* RJC) provided the southernmost breeding record for the Region and is indicative of the species' spread S through the interior over the past several years.

A Brewer's "Timberline" Sparrow was observed at Montana Mt., Whse., July 13 (CE, YBC). In the Haines Road area of n.w. B.C., two Brewer's were at Quill L. near Haines Junction June 22 (JW, MW); and another one–two, identified as "Timberlines," were at Kelsall L. the same day (†ADM). The Yukon's 2nd **Lark Sparrow**, a singing male, was a pleasant surprise at the Lees' camp on the Beaver R. June 6–7 (ph. CE, MGI, L. Lee, R. Lee). A **Black-throated Sparrow** was reported from the University of B.C. campus June 1 (HC), perhaps a precursor to the warbler fallout. A singing Le Conte's Sparrow near Boot L. June 3 (JK) provided a first record for the Tumbler Ridge checklist area. Four singing Le Conte's Sparrows at a large wetland along the Beaver R. June 6 were at a new Yukon location for this wet grass species (CE, MGI).

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows can be found in the Peace district of n.e. B.C. with a little work. One was heard, but not seen, at McQueen Slough, Dawson Cr., June 17 (BCFO), and three were there June 23 (MPh, HA, SK, LL, MT). Farther north at Boundary L., a land survey July 2 followed by a canoe survey July 8 discovered six singing males on the w. shoreline (GSD, RRH, SyR, CS). A Swamp Sparrow nest with 4 eggs found along the Beaver R. June 6 (CE) confirmed this species' breeding status in the Yukon. Four Smith's Longspurs, a very elusive species through most of its Canadian range, were noted near km 421 of the Dempster Hwy June 13 (RDM).

A Bobolink, rare on the coast, was observed in N. Burnaby June 5 (†HC). A W. Meadowlark at Barbour Cr. near Tumbler Ridge June 28 (CH) provided the first local

area record. Census work of marshes in n. B.C. in June (RWC) found many dead Red-winged Blackbird broods due to the wet weather, the 2nd consecutive year of first brood failures. A fledgling Pine Siskin in Whse.-Hillcrest June 9 (LC) provided perhaps the Yukon's first confirmed breeding record for this common and widespread species.

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