

# british columbia–yukon region



## JACK BOWLING

**E**quatorial ocean temperatures peaked in March then decreased sharply in May. However, northern Pacific waters remained abnormally warm through the season, holding land temperatures above normal across the entire Region. Precipitation fell mainly in March except over southern British Columbia, where the latter half of May was wet. The meager overwinter snow pack dwindled quickly, being essentially gone from low and mid-elevations by early April. Only the coastal mountain ranges received above-normal overwinter snowfalls. Stiff southwest winds were prevalent in the Yukon. The combination of cool nights and windy days in April over the northern half of the British Columbia interior had two salient repercussions: scant water in the fields for staging waterfowl, which prompted an obvious shift westward

to the coast, possibly also affecting the larger waders; and delayed greening of deciduous trees, which slowed the advance of insectivorous species. This led to the familiar pattern of early passerine waves being on the late side, with subsequent ones arriving closer to the normal phenology. However, “scouts” of some species were astoundingly early, suggesting that these may have been birds which had wintered farther north than normal.

Coastal sections noted a steady buildup of migrants, most of which were on schedule. Notable rarities came from North America rather than off the continent this season, including a Snowy Plover in southern Yukon, a Brown Thrasher on the

Queen Charlotte Islands, and a Dickcissel in southeast British Columbia.

Work constraints now conspire against my continuing as Regional Editor. The good news is that Michael Shepard will be stepping up to the plate, eager to share his vast knowledge of the avifauna of this part of the globe. I have enjoyed my term and look forward to seeing you all in the field!

**Abbreviations:** alt.-plum. (*alternate-plumaged*); B.C. (*British Columbia*); Iona (*Iona I., at the mouth of the Fraser R., Richmond, BC*); Ok. (*Okanagan*); P.G. (*Prince George*); p.v. (*pending verification by responsible Bird Records Committee*); Q.C.I. (*Queen Charlotte Is.*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Vic. (*Victoria*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

## LOONS TO CRANES

A basic-plumaged. ad. Yellow-billed Loon was at Tofino, s.w. Van. I., Mar. 16–Apr. 28 (AD, ph. DGC). Several Yellow-billeds fre-

**SA** Returning Pacific Loons hugged the s.w. shore of Van. I. in a series of sea watches at Amphitrite Pt. in early May (†DGC). During 7 combined hours May 2–3, Cecile counted 11,021; while 12–13 combined hours of monitoring May 8–10 produced 16,485 northbound birds. The flights started early in the morning and lasted until dark. The total number of migrating loons was likely an order of magnitude higher than the 27,506 counted. The passage fits with the pattern observed from monitoring sites farther south along the w. coast of N. America, but future spring watches here would help confirm its regularity and chronology.

quented the Van. area. Two alt.-plum. ad. Yellow-billeds at Marsh L., s. Yukon, May 29 (RC) were a great find. The 690 Red-necked Grebes on Eaglet L., e. of P.G., Apr. 24 (CA) dwindled to only 75 the next day (PGNC). The Yukon’s first documented **Barred Grebe** discovered at Swan L. May 24 (†CE, †PS) lingered until at least May 30. A pelagic cruise s.w. of Tofino Mar. 5 produced two Laysan Albatrosses and 12 N. Fulmars (AD, R. Palm). A total of 931 Sooty Shearwaters was tallied during sea watches May 2–3 (DGC). American White Pelicans eased into the s. valleys of B.C. on time with four at Nelson May 9 (BKO) and 12 at Vaseux L. May 17 (GSD, RRH). Two adults turned up off the n.e. shore of Boundary Bay May 16 (M. Street, †JAM, HNM).

One of the more unusual locations for Am. Bitterns had to be Otter L. in the w. foothills of the Rockies May 18 (SK, LL). Only an occasional visitor to the Region, Great Egrets were seen near downtown Richmond Mar. 10 (R. Klein) and at the Pitt R. and Debouville Slough areas, Port Coquitlam, May 6–16 (L. Jellicoe, m.ob.). A vagrant Green Heron was observed at Wasa, E. Kootenay, May 30 (RG).

Trumpeter Swans were early in the Yukon with three at Johnson’s Crossing Mar. 3 (*vide* R. Knutson); over 1000 were at McClintock Bay, Marsh L., s. Yukon, Apr. 14

(*vide* CE). Snow Geese, usually rare in the s. Yukon, were noted in higher-than-normal numbers. The Greater White-fronted Goose near P.G. Airport Mar. 14 constituted the earliest arrival for the local area (CA, JB) The 450 passing over Iona Apr. 11 (RTo) comprised the largest flock recorded from the e. side of Georgia Strait. There was no repeat of last spring's Ross's Goose "invasion," with just three reported. The single Brant at Mission Pt. Mar. 11 (RTk) provided only the 6th record for the Sunshine Coast A high total of 36,650 geese (not including Brant) was noted overflying the Tofino area in April (AD).

Uncommon in the Yukon, Blue-winged Teal, Gadwall, and Redhead were all counted in relatively high numbers and at many locations (m.ob.). Blue-winged Teals were widely reported Regionwide. Eurasian Wigeons were well-reported. There is an increasing number of Eur. × Am. Wigeon hybrids. Two hybrid males were noted from Giscome, near P.G., Apr. 25 (PGNC), and one was at Lewes Marsh, s. Yukon, May 5 (CE) The Tufted Ducks of Lost Lagoon, Stanley Park, Van., were conspicuous, with one-two females seen until about Mar. 10 (EWh, MPr, m.ob.), and a male lingering until around Apr. 15 (MPr).

The young male **Common Eider** which graced the Van. Area since late 1996 was last seen off Iona Mar. 17 (RTo). An ad. male **King Eider**, likely the one which had been seen earlier at Royston, e. Van. I., joined its cousin off the Iona S. Jetty Mar. 13 (RTo, m ob) and stayed until Apr. 16 (MKM). There were 1800 Surf Scoters were off Mission Pt. Mar. 17 (RTk). The Hooded Merganser is rare in the Yukon, thus a female at Swan L. May 25 (CE, HG) was notable.

Turkey Vultures continue to show up in valleys of the s.e. interior of B.C. Cooper's Hawk is decidedly rare in B.C.'s c. interior, thus the one 15 km s.e. of P.G. Apr. 28 (SK, LL) was a surprise. A **Red-shouldered Hawk** was reported from Cassidy, e. Van. I., May 4 (p.v., †PVK). Surely the same bird seen earlier in n. Washington State, a **Crested Caracara** appeared at a logging camp at Drury Inlet on the B.C. coast across from the n. end of Van. I. May 4 (p.v., ph., m.ob.), and was still present at the end of the period This would be a first for the Region, if accepted.

Only a straggler to the outer coast, an Am Kestrel was at Tofino, s.w. Van. I., Apr. 6 (AD). Rarely seen in the c. interior, two Peregrine Falcons were observed s.e. of P.G. Apr. 16 (SK, LL), and another in nearby Vanderhoof Apr. 18 (LL) One identified as

the inland *anatum* race was at Vic. Airport May 29 (BB). Notable Gyrfalcon sightings included a gray-morph adult s.e. of P.G. Mar. 14 (CA, JB), and a light-morph bird near Swift R., s. Yukon, May 5 (JMCC).

Two Chukar seen 10 km n.e. of Lillooet, s.w. B.C., Mar. 22 (BMG) was a good find. Ruffed Grouse drumming didn't really get going until May in c. B.C., but by season's end first broods were widespread (m.ob.). A Blue Grouse at Crag L. Apr. 18 (MW) provided the Yukon's only sighting.

A Virginia Rail was detected at Buckhorn L., s.e. of P.G., May 6 (SK, LL) & 10 (PGNC). Although the distribution of the various races of Sandhill Crane in B.C. remains to be determined, the 50 seen flying NW over Mt. Washington, e. Van. I., Apr. 5 (SGC) were likely too early to be nominate "Lessers," hundreds of which were seen moving NW over Faro, s.c. Yukon, May 4-6 (GW).

#### SHOREBIRDS TO WOODPECKERS

The Black-bellied Plover at Drury's Farm, s. Yukon, Apr. 28 (PS, YBC) was the earliest ever for the Territory. A quite lost alt.-plum. male **Snowy Plover** was at Judas Cr. May 27 (ph. †CE, †PS, †HG, m.ob.) until May 29 (RC), the undisputed rarity of the Yukon spring season. The previous northernmost record for the Region was from Sandspit, Q.C.I. The locally largest passage yet of Pacific Golden-Plovers went through the Long Beach, s.w. Van. I., area with three May 3, five May 5-7, one May 14, and the last May 25 (all AD). Four Am. Avocets which overwintered at the mouth of the Serpentine R., Surrey, were last seen Mar. 25. Another was at the Reifel-Iona areas May 13-17 (JI, v.o.), while two more were at Duck L., Creston, W. Kootenay, May 24 (*vide* BKO). The large avocet colony noted near Robert L., Kelowna, last spring faced more hostile conditions this year, resulting in many fewer birds by the end of the season (J. Weir, m.ob.). A Willet at Vic's Clover Pt. May 16 (RS) provided one of few records for the area. A Wandering Tattler, rarely seen during migration in s. Yukon, was near Kloo L. May 5 (BrB), with another at Jackfish Bay, L. Laberge, May 29-30 (JMCC, EM, PN, HT). Tattlers also put in a locally good showing at Nanaimo, e. Van. I, where three were spotted at Neck Pt. Park May 6 (B. Cousens, GM). Long-billed Curlews have become more common in the c. interior during the past decade. Sightings included one on the s. shore of Dragon L., Quesnel, Apr. 12 (AL) and one heard in flight at Vanderhoof Apr. 26 (PGNC) On

the late side, a probable non-breeding Long-billed Curlew strayed to Tofino, s.w. Van. I., May 18 (D. Pitt-Brook).

It was a good godwit season. Hudsonians swept through n. sections in high numbers. In the Yukon, four were at Tagish Narrows May 3 (HG, YBC), two at Lewes Marsh May 5 (CE), two at Judas Cr. May 7 (CE), and 62 in the Whitehorse area May 9 (CE, PS, LK). Another was at Atlin Warm Springs, n.w. B.C., May 18 (BP, MV). The wave also reached the Q.C.I. with an alt.-plum. adult at the Yakoun Estuary May 8-11, one basic-plumage adult at Masset Golf Course May 10-13, and another there May 18 (all MH, PH, B. Merilees). With the Hudsonians at Masset May 18 was an alt.-plum. **Bar-tailed Godwit**, the 6th spring individual there since 1991 (MH, PH). A high of 76 Marbled Godwits were reported from s.w. Van. I., including 20 at Long Beach May 3 (V. Schelhas) and 15 at nearby Amphitrite Pt. the same day (DGC), typical counts for these outer coastal areas. But 26 at Blackie Spit, Surrey, along the n.e. shore of Boundary Bay May 9-10 (DTy, S. Hilton) was not just an impressive inner coastal congregation, but the largest on record for the Region.

The Q.C.I. are the place to see big flocks of Red Knots, as illustrated by 60 at the Yakoun Estuary at Port Clements May 18 (PH). The peep passage was unremarkable, but the s. Yukon hosted some "rare but regulars" with up to four Sanderlings in the Judas Cr. area May 27-31 (CE, HG, PS), two W. Sandpipers May 14 and another May 28 (both CE), one White-rumped Sandpiper at Lewes Marsh May 16 (HG), and a Dunlin at Tagish May 17 (HG).

A Franklin's Gull at Elizabeth L. May 30 (GSp, LC, JLa, PD, CSm) provided only the 2nd E. Kootenay record. Some 60 Bonaparte's Gulls moved onshore at W. Spanish Banks, Van., May 28 (MPr), joining a flock of Ring-billed, California, and Glaucous-winged gulls foraging for cutworms, atypical behavior for Bonaparte's in coastal habitats. Herring Gulls followed the breakup northward through the interior with 36 on Dragon L., Quesnel, Mar. 31 and 75 there Apr. 2 (both AL); and a whopping 900 at the Whse. Landfill Apr. 21 (CE). A first-summer Thayer's Gull at Whse. May 6-11 (ph. CE) provided one of few documented spring records for the Yukon. First-winter Iceland Gulls appeared in late February/early March in scattered s. location. Two farm fields historically favored by rarer gulls hosted **Slaty-backed Gulls**, with an adult in S Delta, s. of Van., Feb 20-Mar 7

(DJ, m.ob.), and another 3rd-winter bird s. of Duncan, Van. I., in early February (ph. †DM). Perhaps driven inland by strong SW winds, Whse. saw an invasion of Glaucous-winged Gulls with at least seven different individuals noted Apr. 17–May 19 (ph. CE). Glaucous Gulls included a 2nd-year at Iona Mar. 4 (RTo, MKM), a first-winter at the Whse. landfill Apr. 18 (CE), an unaged bird at Tofino Apr. 30 (AD), and an adult at the Whse. landfill May 8 (CE).

The first returning Caspian Tern was an adult over Iona Apr. 16 (MKM), shaving 3 days off the previous early return date. Notable inland sightings included two at Vernon Cr., Ok. L., May 4 (EN&P Irvine), and a pair at McClintock Bay, s. Yukon, May 31 (†CE, PS). A flock of 800 Com. Terns was camped on the tidal flats off Iona May 28 (MKM), typical May numbers. Startling was the **Arctic Tern** foraging with a flock of gulls on the lawns of W. Spanish Banks, Van., May 28 (MPr); four more Arctics were in the vicinity.

A report of 77 Rhinoceros Auklets off Amphitrite Pt., s.w. Van. I., May 8–10 (DGC) was notable. Observers should be on the lookout for the establishment of new colonies along the s. Van. I. coast.

Local on Van. I., a Mourning Dove was at Tofino Mar. 29–Apr. 1 (AD), and two were at Cassidy May 10 (PVK). A Great Gray Owl at Venner's Meadows, S. Ok., May 17 (GSD, RRH) may have been a local breeder. A Long-eared Owl perched one meter off the ground at Fort St. James, c. B.C., Apr. 14 (R. Rawluk) allowed killer looks. This area may be hosting a breeding

**SA** The status of Boreal Owls in the s. half of the Region may be changing. Usually hampered by deep snow cover during the species March–April calling period, surveyors were aided by the lack of a significant snow-pack this spring. In the W. Kootenay district of s.c. B.C., Stewart Clow et al. heard at least a dozen in the Crusader and Chaplow Cr. valleys Apr. 9, in spruce/fir habitat above 1500 meters (Clow, BKo, S. Bennett). Farther north, no fewer than 18 calling males were detected along the Rainbow Forest Service Rd., 50 km n.e. of P.G., May 21 (SK, LL), all at the plateau level of 690 meters, mostly in spruce/fir forest. Whether the mild winter had affected the species' distribution, or if there is a population expansion underway, may be determined with further research.

pair or two. Short-eared Owls were commonly reported in the s. Yukon. Its migration there has only recently been recorded regularly; it is uncertain whether it has been overlooked or was not as common before. A rarely reported Short-eared nest, with one egg, was found at km 93, Dempster Hwy, c.e. Yukon, May 19 (BMu). Part of the small outer coastal migration, a Short-eared was at the Tofino airport Mar 18 (AD).

A Com. Nighthawk spotted 50 km n.e. of P.G. May 21 (SK, LL) provided the earliest return for the checklist area by 5 days. A flock of 400 Vaux's Swifts was feeding on emerging stoneflies near Tahsis, s.w. Van. I., May 26 (SB). The famous female **Xantus's Hummingbird** remained at its adopted Gibsons, s.w. B.C., location, though roaming more widely in the neighborhood. A Rufous Hummingbird at Pine Ridge, Whse., May 14 (HG) was the only one reported in the Territory. A set of backyard feeders at Fort St. James, c. B.C., hosted 50–80 Rufous hummers during early May (RRa).

A Red-naped Sapsucker was at the University of B.C. campus Apr. 18, and a young male was at Port Alberni, s.c. Van. I., Apr. 28 (SMcR, ph. DGC).

#### FLYCATCHERS TO FRINGILLIDS

Hammond's Flycatcher numbers were down in the Whse. area (HG, CE) after their late arrival there May 7 (HG). Dreary, wet weather the last half of May in s. B.C. produced a fallout of Dusky Flycatchers in Vancouver. Usually a spring vagrant to the coast, a Say's Phoebe was at Green Timbers, Surrey, Apr. 2 (BSc). Unusual in the W. Kootenay, a W. Kingbird was at Nakusp May 25 (GSD). Rarely does it stray to the Nanaimo area, where one was seen May 28 (GM). A pair of E. Kingbirds were at the Yukon College Beaver Pond, Whse., May 30 (VL, JS).

An impressive 200 Horned Larks and 700 Lapland Longspurs was at Carcross, s. Yukon, May 9 (CE, PS). Two Violet-green Swallows along lower McIntyre Cr., near Whse., Apr. 12 were record-early (CE, PS). At the McIntyre Wetlands, Whse., May 20 (CE) were 1000 swallows, indicative of the importance of this wetland to migrants. Northern Rough-winged Swallows reach the n. edge of their range in the s. Yukon with four birds from Apr. 30 to May 21.

For the 3rd consecutive year a Blue Jay was observed in Ft. Nelson, n.e. B.C., with one near downtown May 22 (MGS). Three Am. Crows were noted in s. Yukon. One bird discovered at the Whse. shipyards Apr.

8 (CE) remained until at least May 30 (HT); its calls were recorded to help distinguish it from Northwestern Crow (HG).

Perhaps due to the mild winter, Mt. Chickadees were well-reported from the s. Yukon. In contrast, numbers of returning Ruby-crowned Kinglets were down in the Yukon (m.ob.). Several mimids provided local thrills. Signs of a possible invasion year for N. Mockingbird came with one–three at Wycliffe, E. Kootenay, May 30 (GSp, LC, JLa, PD, CSm), and another farther north at Parson, near Golden, B.C., the same day (RG et al.). Also in the Kootenay region were two overshooting **Sage Thrashers** at Duck L., Creston, May 24–25 (GSp, LC, m.ob.), surprisingly the 2nd local record. The **Brown Thrasher** which overwintered at Terrace was last seen Mar. 4 (D. Walker). Most likely the same bird appeared farther west at Tlell, Q.C.I., May 6 (J&M Brown), the first thrasher for the Islands.

Rare n. of the 60th parallel, single Eur. Starlings included one at Teslin L., Yukon, Apr. 23 (MG), another at Marsh L. May 1 (D. Phillips), and one at Swan L. May 18 (HG). There are now thought to be fewer than 20 pairs of Crested Mynas left in the Van., area (*vide* DTy); two pairs were observed nesting at separate downtown locations through the period (m.ob.).

Wood-warbler migration elicited little comment, although indications were that the usual contingent moved through in good numbers. A full 17 days ahead of the earliest local return date was the singing male Magnolia Warbler at P.G. May 4 (JB). One male Magnolia was on the slopes of Mt. Douglas, Vic., May 27 (p.v., M.E. Goodwil), providing the 2nd potential record for the local checklist. A male Black-and-white Warbler was at Queen Elizabeth Park, Van., Apr. 25 (L. Plath). A **Yellow-breasted Chat**, only casual on the coast, turned up at Cecil Green Park on the campus of the University of B.C. May 27 (†RTo).

Part of the flood of W. Tanagers that appeared on s. Van. I. during the last week of May included two males at Tofino May 25 (AD), w. of their usual range. A male **Dickcissel**, a scarce and irregular visitor to s. B.C., allowed good views at Wasa, E. Kootenay, May 30 (p.v., RG et al.). American Tree Sparrows turned up at a couple of W. Kootenay locations, unusual in B.C. w. of the Rockies. A small colony of three Song Sparrows was discovered at a marsh along Little Atlin L., s. Yukon, May 17 (ph. CE, PS). The species is very rare this far north. The only Harris's Sparrow sightings came from the Kootenay region.

A W. Meadowlark at the Tofino, s.w. Van. I., airport May 31 (AD) provided one of few records for the area. A female Brown-headed Cowbird was at a Masset feeder May 23 onward (J. Thorgeirson, MH, PH). The male **Hooded Oriole** which successfully overwintered at Terrace was last seen Apr. 2 (G&C Thomas).

Extraordinary flocks of Lapland Longspurs totaling many thousands moved through the Whse. area late April–mid-May (m.ob.). A relatively high count of 500 Com. Redpolls was made at a Whse. feeder Mar. 31 (HG). An partial albino redpoll sporting a white head and pink legs frequented a Whse.–Porter Cr. feeder Apr. 4–6 (CE, PS).

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 295.

## ABA Regional Conference - Chatham, ON May 18 - 22, 1999

### Speakers & Programs

- Tom Hince:**  
*Pelee Birds and Birders—A Love-Hate Relationship?*
- Paul Pratt and Glenn Gervais:**  
*Insight and Insanity—24 hours at the World Series of Birding*
- Ron Ridout:**  
*Tracking Tundra Swans by Satellite and More*
- Bob Curry:**  
*Brown Thrush ID—A Vastly Underrated Challenge*
- Katherine McKeever:**  
*The Intimate Behavior of Owls*
- Bruce Mactavish:**  
*Spring Icelandic Vagrants in Newfoundland*

### Daily Field Trips

- Point Pelee National Park
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