

# British Columbia & Yukon



**Donald G. Cecile**

7995 Wilson-Jackson Road  
Vernon, British Columbia V1B 3N5  
(dcecile@sd22.bc.ca)

Everyone was prepared for the worst as the same weather pattern that produced the icy spring of 2002 developed yet again in early March. But the cold snap was relatively short-lived and had abated by the start of April. By the last third of that month, the Yukon saw temperatures soar into the 20s Celsius for 10 days, an extraordinary heat wave coupled with its driest spring in nearly 50 years. The last snowstorm of the spring occurred after this warm spell ended, with up to 15 cm falling across the Yukon and northern

## British Columbia 1–5 May

The weather on Vancouver Island was colder than average, which delayed the peak migration by one to two weeks, with many areas receiving frost in May. Very few storms of any kind moved inland, leading to rather dry weather throughout but especially over southern sections. Shorebirds were notably absent in the interior, while the lower mainland had a remarkable string of rarities.

**Abbreviations:** P.G. (Prince George, BC); P.G.N.C. (P.G. Naturalists Club); P.R.N.P. (Pacific Rim National Park, Vancouver Island); Q.C.I. (Queen Charlotte Islands); R.P.B.O. (Rocky Point Bird Observatory, Victoria); Whse. (Whitehorse, Yukon).

## LOONS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

Ice-out on Stuart L., Fort St. James was the earliest ever, accommodating the first arriving Common Loon 23 Apr (RR). Horned Grebes were numerous, with 137 on Schwatka L., Whse. 5 May (JJ). An early-arriving Eared Grebe was on Tabor L., P.G. 8 May (SK, LL). Western Grebes have declined in the province due to fluctuating water levels at traditional nesting areas combined with disturbance from human development. A once-abundant staging area off the e. coast of Vancouver I. produced only a single grebe during the Brant Festival Big Day 5 Apr (*vide* GLM); on the other hand, two staging areas for birds moving to the prairies had healthy numbers: 500–1000 on Stuart L. 3 May (RR) and 5000 on Okanagan L. 6 Apr (CC). A single Western Grebe, very rare in the Peace R. area, was at the Dawson Creek S.T.P. 6 May, where it joined a migrant flock of 108 Red-necked Grebes (MP). A Clark's Grebe was in Salmon Arm 3 May (DGC).

Great Egrets, rare in the interior, included singles in Kelowna 7–24 May (CJ et al.) and Creston 15 May (MAB). North of P.G., a pair of Snow Geese was grounded by a snow storm at Summit L. 4 May (MC et al.). With a continental increase in numbers, Ross's Geese have occurred more regularly in the province, and although there were numerous sightings this spring, few received attention: 2 in Courtenay 7 May+ (GLM et al.) and a

single near Cranbrook 13 May (m. ob.). An unusually large flock of 500 Brant was at Swan L. near Whse. 31 May (BD, HG). Very rare in spring, especially this late, 3 Tundra Swans were in Parksville 5 Apr (DALD et al.). An ad. Whooper Swan, a Yukon first, was at M'Clintock Bay 11 Apr (JJ et al.) and was flying past Whse. 12 Apr (JJ).

A pair of Wood Ducks on Swan L. furnished the 2nd record for the s. Peace R. area 2 May (MC). Rare in the province, a second-year male King Eider was at Deep Bay 6–20 May (DW, GLM et al.). An ad. White-tailed Kite thrilled observers in Burnaby 14–18 Apr (IO et al.), was then in Pitt Meadows 18–21 Apr (BMN, ph. WA et al.), and possibly the same bird was in Chilliwack 29 Apr (JO). Surprisingly few Broad-winged Hawks were reported this spring, with singles 6 May at Gavin L. (CK), a first for the Cariboo; 11 May over P.G. (MAI, DAI); 23 May over Oliver (LD); and 15 May near Groundbirch (MP). A Swainson's Hawk and a Peregrine Falcon were at Ear L. 5 May (JJ), and an ad. *anatum* Peregrine was at Lewes Marsh 12 May (CE). A Prairie Falcon flew over R.P.B.O. 12 Apr (DA), a first local record.

Dawson Creek had thousands of Sandhill Cranes passing over the last week of Apr (MP), where they are otherwise uncommon. A male Pacific Golden-Plover at M'Clintock Bay, Marsh L. 17 May (CE, PS) provided the only report for the territory. A male Snowy Plover at Roberts Bank 29–30 Apr (JI et al.) furnished the 11th record for the province and the first in seven years. Black-necked Stilts were less numerous this spring, with only 13 reported and no sign of them at T'Kumlups Marsh, where they nested last year. American Avocet numbers were down this spring as well, and further breeding at the Alki L. colony in Kelowna seems doubtful, although this may encourage more wandering, such as the 3 at Williams L. 7 May (PR, SH).

Greater Yellowlegs were especially numerous on the outer coast, with 76 around Tofino 20 Apr (AD). A Willet was at Separation L. 25–27 May (RH, MHa), for a 3rd Kamloops area record. The Wandering Tattler that overwintered at Ogden Pt., Victoria remained through the period (m. ob.). Long-billed Curlews have shown an increase in recent years in the cen. interior, with at least 27 individuals tallied (*vide* JB); one wayward individual was discovered in Comox 12–20 Apr (HP, NH). Very rare anywhere in the province away from the Peace R. area, an alternate-plumaged male Hudsonian Godwit was at Reifel 22 May+ (JI). Rare in the interior, a Marbled Godwit was at Duck L., Creston 29 Apr (LVD). An alternate-plumaged Red-necked Stint at Boundary Bay 15 May furnished a 2nd spring record and the 11th provincial record (RTo, †JO). The Okanagan's first Mar record of Dunlin involved 3

birds at Head of the Lake 23–30 Mar (DGC et al.).

### JAEGERS THROUGH WAGTAILS

A northbound Parasitic Jaeger was at Pine L. near Haines Jct. 10 May (MH). An odd second-basic Mew Gull that appeared to be of the *kamtschatschensis* race was at Vernon's Head of the L. 29 Mar (ph. †DGC, CS). Very rare in the Yukon, single ad. Ring-billed Gulls were at Quartz Road marsh 30 Apr (JJ) and Marsh Lake Marina 27 May (JH, YBC). An incursion of Glaucous-winged Gulls involved at least 15 birds of various ages around Whse. (CE, JJ) and 2 at Bennett L. 4 May (CE).

Burrowing Owls invaded urban areas in the lower mainland: 2 were at Zeller's in Maple Ridge 11 Mar–3 Apr (m. ob.); one was at another shopping mall in Abbotsford 4 Apr (m. ob.); and another was in Chilliwack 22 Mar–5 Apr (ph. DCI). Roadside owl surveys were run widely this spring in the Yukon with 32 Boreal Owls and 7 Great Gray Owls tallied (TMK, MOD, HG). A female Anna's Hummingbird near Kaleden 12 May (TH) visited a feeder, for the only interior report. A Calliope Hummingbird was at Gibson's, Sunshine Coast 6 May (ph. AR), where very rare. A Red-breasted Sapsucker was reported from Haines Jct. 12 Apr (BL).

Considering Victoria's 2001–2002 overwintering Pacific-slope Flycatcher, it is probable that the individual found in Chilliwack 3 Mar (JO) was doing just that, otherwise the bird was well over two months early. Very rare on the coast, a Say's Phoebe was in Parksville 1 Apr (GLM). Very rare in most of the W. Kootenays, a Black-billed Magpie was at Johnson's Landing 3 Apr (GS). The Okanagan's first Mar record of Cliff Swallow involved a single bird at Vernon's Head of the L. 30 Mar (DGC), and at this same location an imm. Barn Swallow was exceptionally early 29 Mar (CS, DGC)—undoubtedly one of the holdovers of the winter coastal invasion. The Rock Wren discovered in late winter at the French Creek Marina, Qualicum Beach remained to 4 Mar (GLM et al.).

A Mountain Bluebird wandered as far w. as it could to Long Beach 12 Apr (BCa). A Veery was a very rare find at Reifel 22 May (RT0, JO, †JJ). This season's only Northern Mockingbird was in Oliver 25 May (RJC, RC, MH). The Sage Thrasher hotspot in the Kootenays

is clearly Duck L., Creston, where one 24 Apr represented a 4th record since 1990 (MAB); at a more expected location was one at White L. in the s. Okanagan 26 May (GW et al.). Observers had brief looks at what appeared to be a **Black-backed Wagtail** at Brunswick Pt., Ladner 21 Apr (RT0, †GLM); the bird was later relocated and identified at Iona I., Richmond 25 Apr (KiT), but unfortunately the photographs did not turn out.



This adult White-tailed Kite made the rounds of at least three communities in the lower mainland of British Columbia 14–29 April 2003 (date unknown here at Pitt Meadows). Photograph by Walter Ammann.

### WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

A singing Tennessee Warbler was a rare sight 24–25 May at Queen Elizabeth Park, Vancouver (†PC et al.). The Region's 4th Northern Parula was a singing male at Qualicum Beach 17 May (†GLM), also a 3rd Vancouver I. record. Very rare was a singing male Chestnut-sided Warbler in Powell River 28 May (DB). Almost annual, a singing Hermit Warbler was in Burnaby Mountain Park 14 May (†DP). Vancouver's 4th Ovenbird was found singing at Cecil Green Park 26 May (†PC).

Western Tanager numbers in the cen. interior were way down from last year, when a spring cold spell may have had adverse affects (JB). Northbound Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were w. of their usual route, with singles in Quesnel 27 May (AL) and at Johnson's Landing 29 May (GS). Again, Lazuli Buntings made an appearance at Mt. Tolmie, Victoria, where 3 males were present 26 May (*vide* DM); it remains to be seen if breeding will occur there again this year.

Chipping Sparrows are very rare on the w. coast of Vancouver I.; one was in Ucluelet 6 May (BSI). The lower mainland's first record of the *taverneri* race of Brewer's Sparrow (known as Timberline Sparrow) came from Burnaby Mountain Park 25 May (ph. DP et al.). All five previous records were of the desert race *breweri*. A Lark Sparrow wandered as far w. as it could to Ucluelet 29 May at the P.R.N.P. lagoons (BSI). Black-throated Sparrows are casual vagrants that can turn up almost anywhere in the s. half of the province; one such bird visited a feeder in Invermere 1 & 9 May (†BN), and another was on Triangle I. 9 May (LS).

The rare and elusive Grasshopper Sparrow made its first appearance in the lower mainland since 1979! One was at Iona 27–28 May

(ph. KL et al.). This species can be found in a few scattered locations and at very low densities in the Okanagan, but it is otherwise rare in the province. A Song Sparrow was at McIntyre Creek Wetlands in Whse., where rare, 15–21 May (JH, BD, HG). Lapland Longspurs, although a common migrant through the Peace R. area, had an exceptional migration, with an estimated 7080 on 23 Apr (ph. MP); numbers peaked around 6 May (MP). Snow Buntings are rare in the Okanagan; an unusually large flock of 70 was seen on the commonage near Vernon 26 Mar (CC).

A flock of 200 Rusty Blackbirds was notable at Simpson L., se. Yukon 1 May (UR). A male Brewer's Blackbird at the Whse. dump 10–11 May (CE) provided the first documented record for the area. Kelowna's resident Great-tailed Grackle, now present for its 4th consecutive year, was seen sporadically this spring. Bullock's Orioles appear to be increasing in abundance on cen. Vancouver I., with three nests found in Nanaimo (GLM).

Rare in spring along the s. coast, single Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches were at Iona 23 Mar (MKM) and Tsawwassen Ferry Jetty 24 Apr (RS). Cassin's Finches are casual spring migrants along the s. coast, with a female seen in Pitt Meadows 4 Apr (RFi, JFi). House Finches, discovered in Dec, successfully overwintered in Whse., with sightings of 3 on 15 Mar (BaS, BoS) and 2 on 24 Mar (CE, HG).

**Contributors** (subregional editors in bold-face): David Ainley, Marika Ainley, David Aldcroft, David Allinson, Walter Ammann, Marc-André Beaucher, **Jack Bowling** (Prince George, weather summary), Doug Brown, Barry Campbell, Peter Candido, **Richard J. Cannings** (S. Okanagan), Russell Cannings, Chris Charlesworth (Kelowna), Murray Clark, Dick Clegg, Bill Cutfield, Gary S. Davidson (Kootenays), Boris Dobrowolsky, **Adrian Dorst** (Tofino-Ucluelet), Linda Dupuis, **Cameron Eckert** (Yukon), Jamie Fenneman, Jess Findlay, Randy Findlay, **Helmut Grünberg** (Yukon), Mike Hanry, Jim Hawkings, Nathan Hentze, Margaret Holm, Steve Howard, Rick Howie, Todd Hunter, John Ireland, Jukka Jantunen, Cathy Jones, Cathy Koot, Adrian Leather, Brent Liddle, Kevin Louth, Martin K. McNichol, Bill McNye, **Guy L. Monty** (Vancouver I.), Ted Murphy-Kelly, Bill Nicholson, Mark O'Donahue, Istvan Orosi, Jim Osterold, Dan Petersen, **Mark Phinney** (Peace R.), Heather Pratt, **Phil Ranson** (Cariboo), Randy Rawluk, Ulla Rembe, Amelie Rousseau, Laurie Savard, Chris Siddle, Pam Sinclair, Brian Slater, Gail Spittler, Barbara Studds, Bob Studdes, Richard Swanston, Kiyoshi Takahashi, **Rick Toochin** (Vancouver), Linda Van Damme, Gwynneth Wilson, Dale Whitmee. 📍