

British Columbia & Yukon

From droughts to floods, fire to ice—British Columbia experienced all extremes this season. A strong ridge of high pressure stayed off the coast until the first week of September. As a result, storms were directed across northern sections. During the first weekend of the month, a 90-minute deluge hit the Fort Nelson area, resulting in cars floating down the streets. Meanwhile, the parched southern quarter of the province's interior sections was going up in smoke, as numerous wildfires consumed both forests and some unfortunate adjacent urban areas. The ridge began to weaken during the first week of September, providing enough moisture to allow fire-fighting crews to finally gain an upper hand on the blazes. The autumn storm season began in mid-October, as a series of powerful storms barreled onto the coast, overflowing what had become nearly empty reservoirs and squelching the lingering fires. Following two weeks of Pacific storms, the flow turned more northerly, and most of the province was enveloped in cooler air, which lingered through most of November. The Yukon experienced a fairly typical fall, with most species departing on schedule and winter conditions sweeping the territory by mid- to late November.

Abbreviations: P.G. (Prince George), R.M.B.S. (Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner), R.P.B.O. (Rocky Point Bird Observatory, Victoria), S.T.P. (Sewage Treatment Plant), Whse. (Whitehorse, Yukon).

LOONS THROUGH COOT

Two Red-throated Loons were at Pentiction, 17–20 Sep (FW, LN et al.) for a very rare Okanagan occurrence. A group of 5 Western Grebes, casual in the Yukon, was on Schwatka L. 3 Oct (HG, CE). Northern Fulmars washed ashore in Oct, both alive and dead, suffering from starvation and dehydration. Six live birds were found on Long Beach 19 Oct (AD et al.), and 40 birds

were turned in to the local bird rehabilitation center. Severe ocean conditions may have prevented the birds from feeding. Highlights from a cruise boat s. of Hecate Strait included 750 Northern Fulmars, 500 Sooty and 4 Pink-footed Shearwaters, 40 Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels, and a single Laysan Albatross 8 Aug (TS, ShM). The range and numbers of Double-crested Cormorants continue to grow in the province, with a pair successfully breeding in the Creston Valley W.M.A. (LVD) and the highest count ever in Tofino, of 360 on 28 Nov (AD). Interior outliers included singles at Wardner 16 Oct (PD) and Castlegar 7–18 Aug (EB), increasing to 3 at Castlegar on 3 Sep (EB).

Cattle Egrets were noticeably absent except for 6 at Nelson 10 Nov (JG). Likely the same Black-crowned Night-Heron that was at Vaseux in Jul was there again 13 & 17 Aug (RJC, AB). An imm. White-faced Ibis was first located at Boundary Bay 18 Sep (KL), then found in a ditch in Delta 20 Sep (RT0), and finally seen in Langley 27 Sep (*fide* RT0) for a 2nd Vancouver area record. A very early ad. Emperor Goose, seen in flight with Snow Geese in Delta 12 Oct (RT0, CI), provided the lower mainland with its first record in five years. The only Ross's Goose of the season was a single at Creston 25 Sep (LVD, Pmc). An ad Rock Ptarmigan was a rare find on Grouse Mtn. 21 Nov (ph. LM). American Coots bred on the Whse. sewage lagoons, with 2 ads. and 2 downy young 1–2 Aug (HG, BD). The high count of coots there was 166 on 3 Oct (HG), and the last bird was seen 29 Oct (HG), by which time the lagoon was nearly frozen over.

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS

Black-bellied Plovers were found in record numbers in Salmon Arm, with 11 on 19 & 28 Sep (DGC). One of the Region's Pacific Golden-Plover hotspots, Tofino, furnished 6 on 8 & 10



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Oct (AD), and a late individual was present there 23 Oct (AD). Two Pacific Golden-Plovers alongside 2 American Golden-Plovers provided a nice study at the Whse. sewage lagoons 14 Sep (ADM, CE, HG). American Avocets are casual visitors to the s. coast in fall, where 3 birds remained at the Serpentine R. mouth 9–30 Nov (JA). Rare away from the Peace R. area, a juv. Hudsonian Godwit was at R.M.B.S. 14 Sep (IP), and another was in Tsawwassen 23 Oct–2 Nov (PC et al.). Western Sandpipers were present in record numbers in Salmon Arm, with 127 on 23 Aug (DGC), and Baird's Sandpipers were there in numbers not seen there for many years, with 232 on 29 Aug (DGC). The Vancouver area's 12th and 13th records of Red-necked Stint were both from Boundary Bay: an alternate ad. 7 Aug (GLM) and a juv. 30 Aug and 3 Sep (†RT0, JF). The Vancouver area's 8th record of White-rumped Sandpiper was a basic ad. at R.M.B.S. 18 Sep (RT0). Single juv. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were at Whse. sewage lagoons 12–14 Sep (CE, HG, ADM); Viaduct Flats, near Rolla 20 Sep (MPh); Saanich 23 Sep (GLM); and Tofino 17 & 23 Oct (AD). Rare in fall was a Dunlin at the

SA The Region's first confirmed record of Whooping Cranes was furnished when a pair was discovered near Prince George last summer. The pair continued their movement along the Fraser R. to Dome Cr. 10 Aug (RZ) and finally on to the McBride area 22–28 Aug (DT, vt. JS, ph. GS). During this time, there were a number of sightings that would suggest the following flight path: 30 Jun–6 Jul Prince George area; 7 Jul–7 Aug Fraser R. to Dome Cr.; 7–13 Aug Dome Cr. to McBride; 14–28 Aug McBride area (Figure 1). Since these birds were unbanded, it was not possible to establish their origin or their life-history, although one would assume that they are part of the Wood Buffalo N.P. flock. This occurrence leaves more questions than answers, such as: why would a pair of ad. Whooping Cranes arrive in British Columbia when others are still tending to chicks? Assuming they experienced a failed nesting attempt, where was that attempt made? What are the chances that these birds actually arrived during spring migration and thus had a chance to seek out new breeding sites?

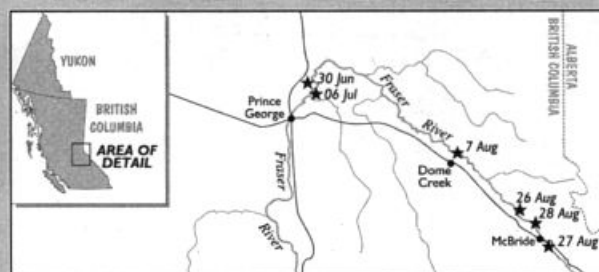


Figure 1. The probable route traveled by the Whooping Crane pair in British Columbia, 30 June to 28 August 2003. Map by Virginia Maynard.



This Spotted Owl at Jericho Park, Vancouver, British Columbia 30 September 2003 is one of perhaps 10 that remain in Canada. Photograph by Calvin Gehlen.

Whse. sewage lagoons 24–27 Oct (CD, HG). Juvenile Ruffs included singles at Boundary Bay 13 Sep (MTo, STo) and Courtenay 22–26 Sep (AM, NM et al.). As Northern Fulmars were washing ashore, small numbers of Red Phalaropes were in inshore waters, with one at Tofino's airport 19 Oct, 3 at Tofino 20 Oct, and 4 at Long Beach 22 Oct (AD). S. Yukon also enjoyed juv. Red Phalaropes at the Whse. sewage lagoons, where rare, with 2 there 12 Sep (CE), 3 there 1 Oct (CE, HG), and 2 lingering to 3 Oct (HG).

A Little Gull was sighted in Comox 11–12 Sep (JF, NH, GLM et al.), a first local record. A juv. Glaucous-winged Gull, very rare in fall, and a second-year Glaucous-winged x Herring Gull hybrid were at the Whse. landfill 5 Nov (CE). An ad. Slaty-backed Gull was found at the Cumberland Landfill 29 Nov (†JF) and later relocated 6 Dec at the Cumberland S.T.P. (†JF), while another ad. was in Delta 2–30 Nov (RTo). The only interior Sabine's Gulls were singles: one seen flying across Kelowna's floating bridge 15 Sep (RJC) and an ad. at the Whse. Sewage lagoons 11–12 Sep (HG, ph. CE). A second-year Crested Auklet furnished the 2nd provincial record when discovered at R.P.B.O 5 Sep–3 Oct (AR, ph. JJ et al.). It was often in the company of Rhinoceros Auklets between Pedder Bay and R.P.B.O. The precipitous crash of Whitehorse's—the Yukon's *only*—Rock Pigeon population, which numbered over 500 in 1997, has brought the species nearly to the point of extirpation there. Some 42, likely the whole population, were counted there 21 Oct (CE).



The incredible Crested Auklet at Rocky Point Bird Observatory, Victoria, British Columbia (here 23 September 2003) stayed in the ocean between the observatory and Pedder Bay, usually in the company of Rhinoceros Auklets. See the Pictorial Highlights for a color image. Photograph by Jukka Jantunen.

Northern Pygmy-Owls were fairly conspicuous in the cen. interior, suggestive of a widespread southward/downslope movement that may result in above-average numbers in the coming winter (*vide* JB). A Spotted Owl, one of few remaining in Canada, was in Jericho Park 30 Sep (ph. HD et al.), an extraordinary Vancouver record. The most recent surveys found fewer than 10 birds in the province. A hummingbird at Royston feeder, s. of Courtenay, was finally confirmed as an ad. male Rufous Hummingbird 29 Nov (ph. AM et al.), one of very few Nov records for the Region.

WOODPECKERS THROUGH FINCHES

Rare in the lower mainland, an imm. Lewis's Woodpecker was in Delta 30 Aug (RTo, JF). A pair of White-headed Woodpeckers was at the w. end of Green L., s. Okanagan 6 Aug (RaC, CaC). A record-late Willow Flycatcher was at R.P.B.O. 15 Oct (JJ, JG). Vancouver's first Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was an imm. at R.M.B.S. 1 Oct (RTo, MM). The Yukon enjoyed its first and 2nd Scissor-tailed Flycatchers: a male near Dawson City 3–4 Aug (CD, RO et al.) and an imm. first found in Tofino 24 Aug (JW) and later relocated in Ucluelet 2 Sep (BSL). A Tropical Kingbird was in Ucluelet 23–24 Oct (BSL), and another was found later in Tofino 12–13 Nov (AD), where this species is almost annual. Two late swallows, one confirmed as a Cliff, were at the Whse. sewage lagoons 7 Oct (HG). An imm. Barn Swallow of Eurasian subspecies was in Delta, a first Vancouver area record 1–4 Nov (†RTo). A Western Scrub-Jay was in Ladner 19 Oct–30 Nov (DK et al.). A Rock Wren on Mt. Albert Edward 21 Aug provided one of few modern Vancouver I. records (JE, NH, AM).

A cold front dropped dozens of American Robins in Whse. 19 Sep, with two flocks totaling 130 noted in Whse.—Porter Cr. (CE, PS) and another 200 in downtown Whse. (CE). Among the robins were a Gray-cheeked Thrush 20 Sep (CE) and a Swainson's Thrush 19 Sep (HG). A Gray Catbird, rare on Vancouver I., was at R.P.B.O 16 Sep (GLM, SM). Almost annual, a Red-throated Pipit was at Boundary Bay 13 Sep (RTo). Rare in the Okanagan, a Tennessee Warbler was banded at Vaseux 10 Sep (BL, SO). Nashville Warblers rarely wander to Vancouver I., yet one was in Duncan 21 Sep (DM). An ad. male Chestnut-sided Warbler at Creston 6 Sep (LVD) provided

a new addition to the West Kootenay area checklist. A Palm Warbler was in Vernon 4 Oct (CS), where this species rarely occurs. An imm. Blackpoll Warbler was a rare sight in Richmond 26 Sep (RTo, JO, TK). A window-killed Ovenbird was picked up near Victoria 1 Sep (JH, ph. MN) and sent to the University of Victoria. The Yukon experienced an unusually high number of warblers that breed to the se. of the territory: this year's catch at the Albert Cr. Banding Station at Upper Liard through Aug and Sep included 36 Magnolia Warblers (latest 31 Aug) and 27 American Redstarts (latest 4 Sep) (TMK). An imm. male American Redstart flashed through a yard in Whse. 22 Aug (PS, CE). A Wilson's Warbler was very late in Nakusp 18 Nov (GSD).

An imm. or female Western Tanager remained very late at R.M.B.S. 10–30 Nov (ph. JI et al.) and was joined by a 2nd on 20 Nov (JI). More often seen in spring, an imm. Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Kelowna 29 Sep (CC) furnished the latest Okanagan record; an imm. female was in Richmond 26 Sep (JO, TK). An ad. Brewer's Sparrow was found in Duncan 9 Nov (DM). A Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow was found at Viaduct Flats, Sydney 10 Oct (*vide* CSa). The Yukon's only previous fall record of Song Sparrow was in 1943; reports this year included one apparently lingering on a possible breeding territory at Judas Cr., Marsh L. area 8 & 11 Sep (CE) and one feeding with Dark-eyed Juncos at Watson Lake 14 Sep (TMK). A cold-front fallout 20 Sep produced a flood of sparrows, with about 500 Dark-eyed Juncos, along with 20 American Tree Sparrows, 100 White-crowned Sparrows, and one Chipping Sparrow tallied in downtown Whse. (CE). An ad. White-crowned Sparrow remained at a Dawson City feeder 16–30 Nov (ML). An ad. male Brambling was in North Vancouver 20 Nov (RB).

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