

# British Columbia



## Donald G. Cecile

March had a cool first half and a milder second, with minimal precipitation except over the Northeast and along parts of the coast. April was unsettled and showery over the first half of the period, with a drier ending. May started cool and unsettled but soon turned summery. This lasted until the final week, when the ridge of high pressure crashed. The southeastern corner got the worst of it during this time, as rapid mountain snowmelt combined with heavy rain leading to widespread lowland flooding. The last few days of the period saw a cold front descend from the Yukon, bringing a return to winter for the northern fringe of British Columbia, much to the peril of early nesters.

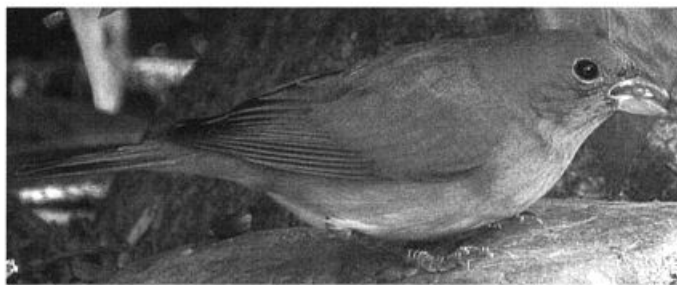
## LOONS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

A Ross's Goose, seen on both sides of the British Columbia/Alaska border, at Hyder, was with 106 Snow Geese 12-13 May (ph. LD), as it kept to the periphery of the flock. A Bewick's Swan remained in Delta through 25 Mar (ph. CCL, WA). A King Eider was seen from the tip of the Iona South Jetty among a flock of scoters 14 Apr (GP). Rare in spring in the interior, an imm. Yellow-billed Loon and a molting Pacific Loon were on Kalamalka L. 17 Mar (CS), holdovers from the winter. A late Yellow-billed was near Robson Bight (famous for its attraction to Killer Whales) 8 May (GLM). A single ad. Clark's Grebe was a surprise find in Kelowna at the mouth of Mission Creek 8 May (CC). The best concentration of migrating American White Pelicans was from Skaha L. Pentiction 21 Apr, when 85 touched down (BH). A Brown Pelican was discovered in the Alert Bay municipal dock 26 May (JT) and was behaving as though sick or injured; a

flock of 22 off Lennard I. near Tofino was the largest reported 26 May (IC). Double-crested Cormorants were found in very small numbers in the s. interior, with a peak of 3 flying away from the Grant I. gull colony 19 May (DGC, EN). As usual, a few solo Great Egrets were located in s. sites: at Oliver 14 May (BL) and at Cowichan Bay 6 May (DM). The only report of White-faced Ibis involved a sizeable flock of 10 at Elizabeth L. 23 May (DN).

An astounding 500 Bald Eagles were found at a site that produces garden mulch using fish entrails near Beaver Cove, n. Vancouver I. (GLM, DMO); on 7 May, the same observers returned to this location and found more than 700 eagles. They watched one alder tree snap as 20 Bald Eagles tried to perch in it, and another 30 eagles were dispersed from its base as the tree snapped. Swainson's Hawks away from their s. interior haunts included one over Mount Douglas, Victoria 3 May (RTO); one at Contact Creek 20 May (RD, BF) was extremely far n. and w. in the province.

Very rare in spring migration in the interior, a Black-bellied Plover was at Stuart L. 27-28 May (GL, RR). The trend of early arriving northbound shorebirds on the outer coast



This second-year Painted Bunting visited a Victoria, British Columbia feeder 21 (here 24) March through 4 April 2006. Photograph by Ted Ardley.

continued this spring: a Pacific Golden-Plover was at the Long Beach G.C. 27 Apr (AD), while at Tofino, 4 Greater Yellowlegs were seen 31 Mar (RC), 3 Marbled Godwits 4 Apr (AD), and 15 Short-billed Dowitchers 5 Apr (GB). The only spring report of Bar-tailed Godwit came from the n. of Vancouver I., with a single at the Quatse Estuary in Port Hardy 24 Apr (GLM). Rare in spring in the interior, a Sanderling was at the mouth of Mission Cr., Kelowna 6-7 May (RyT).

## GULLS THROUGH FINCHES

A visit to the Grant I. gull colony (host to four species of nesting gulls) furnished a record-early egg-laying date of 13 Apr for California Gull and 14 Apr for Ring-billed Gull (DGC, EN). While Iceland Gulls can be found anytime from Nov through Apr, there is often an increase in sightings during their northward movement in Mar/Apr, as evidenced by the

singles in Mud Bay, Kelowna 4 Mar (RyT, CC) and at Little River, e. coast of Vancouver I. 7 Apr (m.ob.). Vernon's Lesser Black-backed Gull was again relocated at the mouth of Vernon Cr. 4 Mar (BP), a holdover from winter. Adding to the winter influx of coastal Slaty-backed Gulls, a subad. was at Kye Bay, Comox 12 Mar (ph. JJ), then later found at Qualicum Beach 17-20 Mar (m.ob.); another ad. was at Willow Pt., Campbell R. 17 Mar (JJ); and a third-winter bird was at Little Qualicum Estuary 22 Mar-2 Apr (ph. GLM et al.). Very rare in the province away from the Creston Valley, a single Forster's Tern was at Swan L., Vernon 27 May (RyT, TF).

Eurasian Collared-Doves are resident in Cawston, but in recent years they have been observed from as far away as Kelowna and Whistler; it is not known whether these are from the Cawston population or from farther south. One was in West Sechelt (m.ob.), another in Comox with a flock of Band-tailed Pigeons 16 May (ph. MJ), and another was in Kelowna 26 Apr and 7 May (MB, JA). Kamloops birders were surprised by a late lingering Snowy Owl 9-29 Apr (*vide* RH), which furnished a first Apr record for the Kamloops

area; other singles were in the Highland Valley near Kamloops 22 May (*vide* RH) and in the Lac du Bois area n. of Kamloops 29 May (KW). At least 3 Snowy Owls also remained late along the Boundary Bay dike through 10 Apr (CP), and a single remained at Sea I. through 11 May (MMN). Black Swifts can be found in large migrating flocks in late May just ahead of stormy weather. On just such an occasion, a record-breaking 1100 were tallied while feeding over Swan L., Vernon 22 May (DGC, DB). A Calliope Hummingbird, very rare along the coast, furnished a 6th Victoria area record 23 May (RTO) at Mount Newton.

A Black Phoebe was discovered 28 Apr at a pond on the campus of Trinity Western University, Langley (†SO, ph. MW et al.), furnishing a 6th provincial record, and an Eastern Phoebe was at the Rocky Point B.O. in Metchosin 7 May (GD), a first record for the Victoria area. Say's Phoebes are annual spring visitors to the s. coast in late Apr-early May, and at least 3 were found, including an early one at Chesterman Beach 20 Mar (AD), furnishing the 2nd record for the w. coast of Vancouver I. An Ash-throated Flycatcher

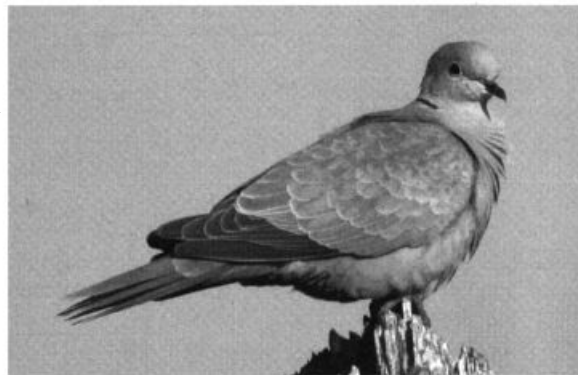
provided a 3rd Rocky Point B.O. record 24 May (GD). Record early by nearly a full month, an Eastern Kingbird was found along the Grey Canal Trail in Vernon 8 Apr (CG). A Clark's Nutcracker, very rare on the island, was in a trailer park in Port Alberni 22 Mar (RM). A very early Barn Swallow was with a few Violet-green Swallows in Kelowna 18 Mar (RyT).

A male Western Bluebird was investigating a nest box in Mackenzie, where casual, 15 May (ph. VL). For some unknown reason, there was an unprecedented spring coastal invasion of both Mountain Bluebirds and Townsend's Solitaires, with most sightings from Vancouver I. and the Lower Mainland. A Northern Mockingbird was at Carmanah Point Lightstation 31 May (ph. JE); another was in Osoyoos 2 May (CS). Sage Thrashers returned to the s. Okanagan again this spring, with the first report of a singing male at White L. 19 May (CC) and another located at Chopaka 27 May (CC). Once again, the species was confirmed breeding—a nest with 2 young was documented at Chopaka 30 May (RC). A singing Nashville Warbler was a rare coastal sight 11 May in Victoria (RT0). Very rare in the province, a Hermit Warbler was found on Mt. Tolmie, a well-known vagrant trap in Victoria 21 May (BG et al.); it made the 2nd record for the Victoria area. Single Palm Warblers were at Radar L., Dawson Creek 15 May (BF et al.) and at Steamboat 18 May (TS, BT). Arriving rather early, a Yellow-breasted Chat was at one of its preferred s. Okanagan spots 7 May along famed Rd. 22, Oliver (RC). An extremely early or possibly wintering Vesper Sparrow was in Kelowna 13 Mar (CC, DW, NK). Rare on Vancouver I., aside from the few that are known to nest at the Nanaimo Airport, a Vesper was in Duncan 17 Apr (AT), but most out of place was a single on the Long Beach G.C. 21 Apr (AD). A Black-throated Sparrow, casual in the province, arrived with Savannah Sparrows and was later heard singing 27–28 Apr in Gibson's (ph. AS et al.). A wintering Harris's Sparrow remained rather late at a feeder near Kelowna through 25 Apr (TF). A Black-headed Grosbeak at New Hazelton 13 May (RS) furnished a first record for the locale and one of the most northerly records in the province.

A second-year Painted Bunting at Brentwood Bay, Victoria 21 Mar–4 Apr (JG et al.) furnished a 2nd provincial record and had probably wintered locally. A male Dickcissel was at Jordan R. 27–28 May, a highlight of the Victoria Natural History Society field trip (GT, MR et al.). The province's best-known and most reliable Bobolink colony contained 20 males 22 May (DGC, DB). Casual away

from the Peace R. area, a Common Grackle was in Tofino 31 Mar (AD). A male Bullock's Oriole made a brief appearance in Prince George, well n. of its s. interior breeding range, 17 May (m.ob.). Baltimore Oriole, a bird of the Peace R. area, was well away from its summer haunts along the Jordan R. 30 May (RT0). Duncan's Brambling remained until 18 Mar (GeD, ph DM), furnishing a 6th Victoria area record. Remarkably late, a singing Common Redpoll was in Kelowna 7 May (CC et al.), especially remarkable given the species' relative absence this winter. Cassin's Finches were unusually prevalent in the cen. interior, with a mid-Mar influx that included singles in Prince George 16 Mar (JB et al.) and Fort St. James 19 Mar (RR). Following their winter absence, Evening Grosbeaks began returning in very small numbers 16 Apr to Vernon (PB).

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Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to make occasional appearances along the southern coast of British Columbia; this individual was photographed in Comox 16 May 2006. Photograph by Malcolm Jolly.



Continuing from the winter season, this Brambling remained at Duncan, British Columbia through at least 18 March 2006 (here 28 January); it was the sixth for the Victoria vicinity. Photograph by Derrick Marven.



This Black-throated Sparrow was photographed 28 April 2006 at Gibson's, on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. Photograph by Arnold Skei.

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