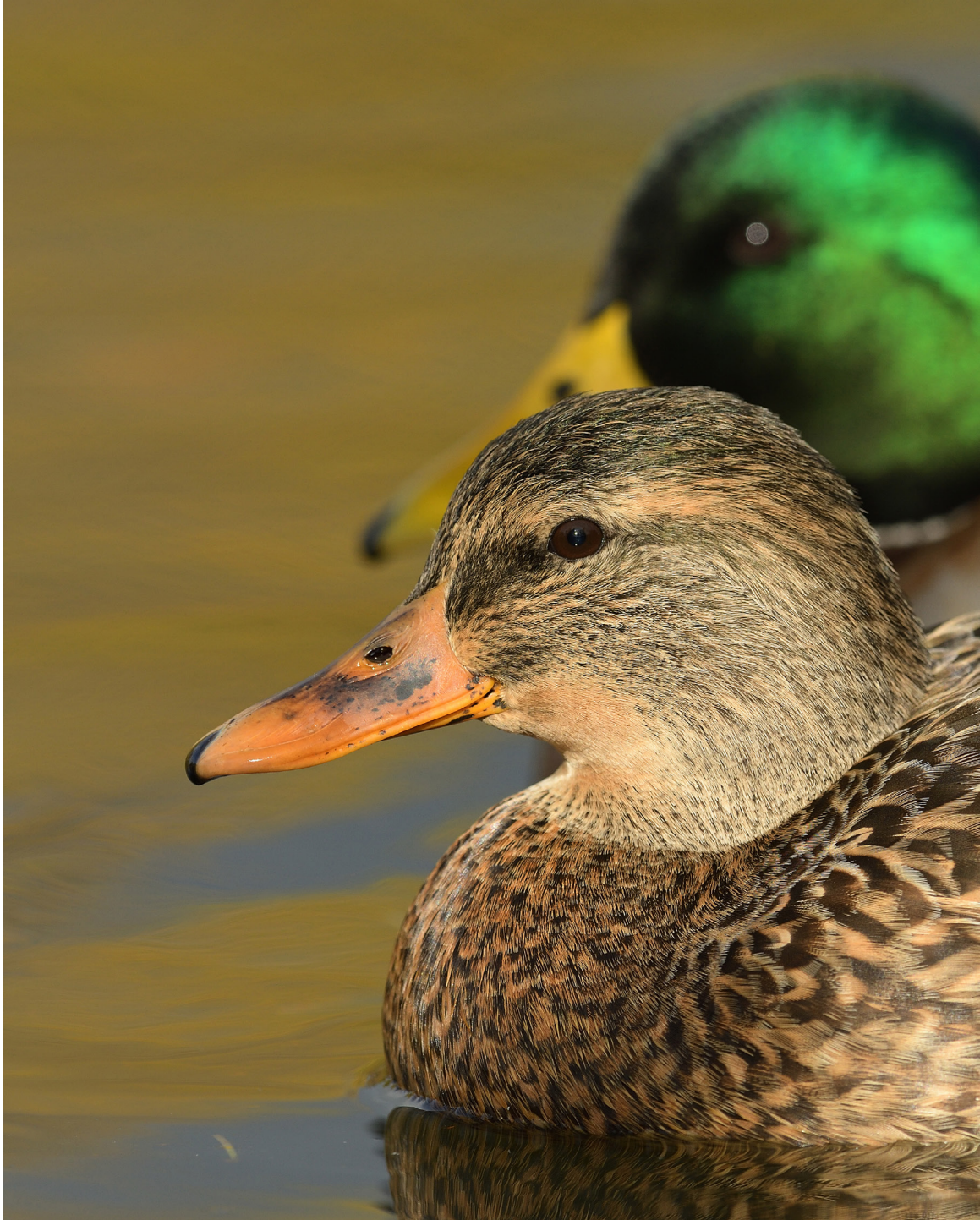


Marshnotes®



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
FALL 2017**

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Managers of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary Since 1963

- dedicated to the conservation and study of migratory waterfowl-

Marshnotes:

Editor: Kathleen Fry

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Submissions, articles, photographs and letters for publication may be sent to the above email and postal addresses marked for attention of Marshnotes Editor. Please include your telephone number and the Editor will contact you.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

January 15th, 2018

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Reception: Susan Norris
Biologist: Dan Dixon
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Hours of Operation: 9:00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. every day. The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible.

Admission: Members: Free
Non-Members: Adults: \$5 Children (2-14 yrs) and Seniors (60 yrs +): \$3
School Groups: Special discounts available; pre-booking is required.

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Seasonal Notices

THE 2018 CALENDAR IS NOW AVAILABLE



2018 Calendar

“IMPROVING YOUR BIRDING SKILLS” COURSE IS OFF TO A GOOD START

The first session is underway, with 9 people starting on 6 consecutive Saturdays birding with Brian Self. If people are interested, the registration forms are at the Gift Shop, and there are still spaces left in the following two sessions:

February 17th to March 24th, 2018
April 21st to May 26th, 2018

UPCOMING CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Counts are held every year to keep track of bird species and populations in mid-winter across North America.

If you are interested in helping with local counts, please contact the associated coordinators below:

Vancouver count- Dec. 17th:
Adrian Grant-Duff 604-263-7597
angranteduff@gmail.com

Ladner count- Dec. 23rd:
Jude Grass 604-538-8774 or 604-219-2043
judegrass@shaw.ca.
Note this is on a Saturday, not the usual Sunday.

Surrey/White Rock/Langley count- Dec. 30th:
Gareth Pugh 604-576-6831
gareth@intergate.ca
Note this is also on a Saturday, not a Sunday.

Note that you can also help by monitoring and reporting birds at your own bird feeders on these dates. Connect with the local coordinators above for more information.

A Note From The Editor

Note that the most useful photos for Marshnotes are those featuring birds of the three months covered by that edition. The best approach is to send thumbnails or reduced images or links to posted images. See page 2 for my email and the next deadline. Kathleen Fry

About Our Covers

Front Cover: *Mallard Pair* © Jim Martin
Back Cover: *Curlew Sandpiper* © Devon Lu

Contents

Page	3	Seasonal Notices	
	4	Manager's Report	Kathleen Fry
	7	Bird Highlights	Varri Raffan
	11	Volunteer's Corner	
	11	Why Be a Member	

Manager's Report

Visitor numbers for July, August and September were all slightly higher this year, with a combined three month total of 23,309 compared to the 19,630 of 2016. There were seemingly endless sunny, hot days over the months of July and August, with the weather changing to intermittent rain in September.

Summer and early fall is when we tackle many maintenance projects, and this year was no exception. For most of the summer, we need to mow or prune vegetation back from trails, and manipulate the water controls to ensure the water in our ponds is refreshed.

Members may have noticed that we cleared some of the Cattail in West Field to help maintain water circulation and views, only to have much of it grow back with renewed enthusiasm in September. We had none of that same enthusiasm, not wanting a repeat of our previous work parties which always seemed to end up on swelteringly hot days and to almost cause heat stroke. For the time being, we have left the re-growth alone. When it is cooler this fall, we will do one more trim while we formulate how best to tackle this aggressive growth using some larger machinery next year.

At the base of the tower, considerable work was also done to reduce the shrubbery to allow some machine access for the maintenance of the tower itself. The tower is a strong structure, but sometimes needs the replacement of bottom stair sections due to the corrosion of gravel from boots, and a more complete painting of the whole structure is planned instead of the touch-up jobs done every year.

By far the biggest project started in the past few months has been the replacement of the roofs of all the buildings near the entrance. At the end of August, the crews moved on-site and began removing the old single roofs and replacing them with metal roofing. Ladder access to the roof on the pond side of the Gift Shop was problematic with the usual water levels, so we dropped them about a foot, making for some mudflats in the House Pond, and hundreds of interested shorebirds poking around and investigating the newly created feeding area.

Throughout the roofing project, there were a few discoveries. The shingles had hidden thousands of wasp nests. Long-billed Dowitchers and Yellowlegs seemed to be relatively uncaring about the presence of nearby workers and ladders as long as they could have their daily nap out on the mud. The pounding on the roof during the installation caused a mass exodus of



New metal roofs on entrance buildings

Photo: Kathleen Fry

rodents from roof areas to other parts of the buildings. At the time of writing (late October), the roofing project has progressed very smoothly and the crew is nearly done.

Over the summer, being out on the trails regularly, we see a lot of predator and prey interactions, and sometimes the behavior of the prey is a bit odd (to us). This summer, we were watching 20 Mallards in the water below the Viewing Platform. A Mink slipped into the water from one of the nearby islands, and caught one of the hens. It must have been very efficient, killing it with no fuss at all, as the rest of the Mallards did not seem to notice. Normally they all start to quack in unison and stare at a Mink, or worse yet, they all swim towards it. The Mink gripped the neck of the duck in such a way that the hen looked alive and swimming while looking back over its shoulder at the rest of the ducks. In the Mallard world, this seems to be a flirtatious pose, so it caught the attention of the rest of the ducks. The Mink was on its far side, like one of those movie warriors who slide down the side of their galloping horse so that nobody can see them. The dead hen, powered by its invisible Mink, then swam along the shoreline, leading a parade of now 19 Mallards on this new game. It wasn't until the Mink decided to take the hen ashore several minutes later that the rest of the Mallards seemed to really take stock.

I was thinking about this odd reaction to predators while watching the cows on the other side of the fence from the picnic area. In late July and early August, there were a few days when coyotes were seen in with the grazing herd. Initially the cows ignored them, as there was sometimes only one pup or perhaps a threesome of coyote pups present, and they were amusing themselves burrowing through recently cut pasture grass for voles and a few other questionable items. I think one was playing with a bullfrog one day. The cows seemed to ignore them. One day, though, the pups showed up with an adult coyote that sat in the sun on the far side of the field at the edge of the trees, watching pups and cows. Within just a few minutes, the cows had all rearranged themselves so that any younger members of the herd were close to our end of the field, and all older members were walking purposefully towards the tree line and the adult coyote. The latter and its pups, once surrounded, disappeared into the trees very quickly. Curiosity or was it defense by group intimidation?



Juvenile Great Horned Owl Photo: Kristina Breit

Bird diversity and numbers were typical of most recent summers. On July 1st, we had our first sign that the Great Horned Owl nest somewhere next door in the Alaksen National Wildlife Area had produced at least one young, as we found an adult and one fledged young in the northeast corner of the Sanctuary. Every winter, we have a pair of these owls roosting together along East Dyke until February, then they disappear for months, presumably to nest, then we wait until mid-summer for some sign of fledged young. This year, we have only seen one juvenile owl over here on any given day, sometimes also finding the remains of its meal (usually a duck) on a fence post, or perhaps on a picnic table. A pile of duck feathers on the roof over the Men's washroom door marked one of its pluck sites and the feathers stuck to the shingles and remained there for months. In September, we sometimes saw not just the juvenile, but also one of the parent birds down in the northeast corner. The juvenile bird spent considerable effort begging from its parent some days to the delight of onlookers.

(.../ continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

Although July at the West Field was quiet for shorebirds, by the end of the month it had a few early Phalaropes, hundreds of Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, a mix of Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers, and some Western Sandpiper flocks visiting at high tides. By early September, there were a few sightings of Pectoral Sandpipers, Stilt Sandpipers, and a group of Western Sandpipers with one leucistic almost-white bird. Birders were on the lookout for the elusive Sharp-tailed Sandpipers that generally visit in September when a Curlew Sandpiper was seen briefly September 10th. (see page 10 for details).

Waterfowl use during this season was typical, with most birds in moult in July and August, and nearly a thousand Canada Geese moving regularly between offshore roosting sites and nearby farmland. Gadwall are probably the least understood of the dabbling ducks using the Sanctuary. They nest later than the Mallards, but we also see waves of migrants coming through in summer. Our bird survey crew noted 159 Gadwall July 8th, then very few for the next few months, then some broods that must have hatched unnoticed in late July. Last year, we also noted a wave of (90) migrants in early July. As we move into fall, we are starting to see the usual return of Mallards, Northern Pintail and American Wigeon to the Delta, as well as small flocks of Cackling Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese and the first of the flocks of Lesser Snow Geese.

The Sandhill Crane pair kept to themselves for the summer, joined by another pair ("Junior" and its mate) for most of July. In early August, periodic visits from other birds started, then the group increased to 12 by early September. At the end of September 25 flew past the Sanctuary gates just as we were opening. For most of September and well into October we could see them in the farm fields of Westham Island or out in the offshore marshes, but even our resident pair were not present along our trails very often. This is the time of year when local cranes seem to gather and socialize with other cranes prior to migration so this may be why we didn't see them much, but they also may have been put off by the all the roofing activity at the trail entrance.

Text: Kathleen Fry, R.P.Bio,
Sanctuary Manager

Some Fall Visitor Reminders

Remember to watch your time in the late afternoons, as we need all visitors to be out of the Sanctuary and going home no later than 5 pm.

Every year, when the Lesser Snow Geese start arriving from their nesting grounds on Wrangel Island, Russia, we start to get very busy. If you are seeking a quiet birding walk, bear in mind that Sundays can be very busy days, and that we also have many school groups booked to visit on weekdays, most of which start at 10 am. On the other hand, if you enjoy sharing your knowledge of birds with the public, we greatly appreciate anyone willing to volunteer on those busy days to answer basic questions about birds or perhaps share a view of an interesting bird through a spotting scope.

Note also that our Society strives to keep on friendly terms with our neighbours. Farm fields (and farm roads) on the island are either privately owned or managed specifically for wildlife. People should not enter these areas without landowner permission, even if it is just to take pictures.

The Lesser Snow Goose flocks we see in the fall consist of some birds which will pass through on their way to California, but the majority are part of what is known as the Fraser-Skagit sub-population. They will be spending the winter either locally in the Fraser Delta, or just south of the Canada/ United States border in the Skagit River delta in Washington. If you are viewing large flocks, watch for this year's young, which will show as greyish-brown instead of the adult bright white birds with black wing tips.

As the weather gets colder in the next few months we can expect some of the usual owls to start roosting along the trails. Remember the issues of past years, and keep on trails. Please do not play calls or otherwise try to make them react for photos. They are nocturnal and need to sleep during the day.

Last but not least, we have had a few incidents involving visitors trying to fly drones here. It is illegal to fly them at or near the Sanctuary, so if you witness someone doing so, please take a picture of them and call our office (at the Gift Shop 604-946-6980).

Bird Highlights

I would like to thank everyone who contributes their bird sightings to the Log Book on the deck of the Gift Shop or to the staff. We couldn't compile such a concise list of sightings without your help.

July 2017, one of the driest and hottest months on record, had an average of 64 species per week ending with a total of 89 species for the month. Instead of picking a few birds to highlight for the month here is the whole species list. Even though July is one of the quiet months you can see that there is still a high diversity of birds.



Sleepy shorebirds in West Field

Photo: Kathleen Fry

Canada Goose
Wood Duck
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Hooded Merganser
Ring-necked Pheasant
Pied-billed Grebe
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Virginia Rail
Sora
American Coot
Sandhill Crane
Killdeer
Spotted Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs

Baird's Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Snipe
Glaucous-winged Gull
Caspian Tern
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Great Horned Owl
Anna's Hummingbird
Rufous Hummingbird
Belted Kingfisher
Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Peregrine Falcon
Western Wood-Pewee
Willow Flycatcher
Pacific-slope Flycatcher
Eastern Kingbird
Northwestern Crow
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Violet-green Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Barn Swallow

Black-capped Chickadee
Bushtit
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Marsh Wren
Bewick's Wren
Swainson's Thrush
American Robin
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
Orange-crowned Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Yellow Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Wilson's Warbler
Spotted Towhee
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Black-headed Grosbeak
Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Bullock's Oriole
House Finch
Purple Finch
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow

(.../continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

August continued with hot dry weather. Mid-day birdwatching was very quiet as many species headed to the shade of trees to escape the sun and heat. Additional species that showed up this month were mainly shorebirds and warblers. The total for the month was 99 species.

July 30 – August 5

Viewing from the back deck of the Gift Shop, a mix of 50 to 60 adult and young Barn Swallows were spotted perched on the bulrushes. In the absence of data on the success of nesting Barn Swallows this spring they appear to have had a good year. Throughout the Sanctuary and surrounding farm properties other large flocks were also spotted. Hopefully they had a good year because according to a *North American Breeding Bird Survey* report, Barn Swallow numbers have declined 1% each year from 1966 to 2014, resulting in a cumulative decline of 46%. On cue with the return of shorebirds, the Peregrine Falcons are now present on most days. August 1st 6 Sandhill Cranes were reported from along the trails. A Stilt Sandpiper, Least Sandpipers, Red-necked Phalarope, Wilson's Snipe and Western Tanager were all highlights for this week.



Red-necked Phalarope

Photo: Kathleen Fry



Stilt Sandpiper

Photo: Kathleen Fry

August 6 – August 12

On the 9th, 4 Stilt Sandpipers were reported in the West Field. Stilt Sandpipers are best viewed from end of June to beginning of October. A Hairy Woodpecker was found on the 12th along the inner grassy trail in the northeast corner. As far as size goes the Hairy Woodpecker is larger than the Downy Woodpecker but size is not always a useful gauge when they're not perched together for comparison. Another way to tell them apart is by the beak length. The Hairy Woodpecker's beak is longer, nearly as long as its head from front to back, while the Downy Woodpecker's beak is shorter than its head. In both species, the males have a bar of red on nape of neck. Another bird that you can use the gauge of "beak to head ratio" is the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. The beak of the Greater Yellowlegs is longer than its head from front to back and also have a slight upturn. The beak of the Lesser Yellowlegs is as long as its head and as its name denotes it is a smaller bird. Then you have birds such as Long-billed and Short billed Dowitcher which should be self explanatory but in fact their beaks are similar in length so the "bill to head ratio" doesn't work. The best ways to tell Dowitchers apart is by their call. Larger numbers of Northern Flickers are now returning from higher forested elevations

August 13 – 19

The first Black-crowned Night-Heron was seen July 16th, and now we have 2 adults. Purple Martins are feeding young at the old set of boxes early in the week, and 37 were in the air on the 19th. Earlier this summer, they were using one of the newer boxes off the outlet control, but that structure was partly obscured by Cattail in late summer. This recent August activity could be their 2nd or even 3rd broods. Since eggs only take 15 to 18 days to hatch, then 26 to 31 days to fledge, it is possible for them to have 3 families per season if they start early enough in the spring. An adult Pied-billed Grebe and four juveniles were seen at the south end of the water way that parallels the Center Dyke. Being very secretive nesters, this family could have hatched here and have gone unnoticed until now. Bullock's Oriole, Western Wood-Pewee, Willow Flycatcher, Common Raven and Osprey were the weekly highlights.

August 20 – August 26

On the 20th we saw the first returning flock of Greater White-fronted Geese. The 26th was a good warbler viewing day with Black-throated Gray Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler and Warbling Vireo along with a Western Tanager all being seen along the inner grassy trail of the northeast corner. The 26th and 27th a female Redhead was seen in the water around the wooden Viewing Platform. In Robertson Slough a late hatch of approximately 1 month old Gadwalls were found. Throughout the week two Belted Kingfishers were seen fishing in various waterways. On the high tides of this week shorebird viewing was very good with 13 different species being observed.

August 27 – September 2

On the 27th 3 Osprey were noticed as they flew over the parking lot. An unusual sighting of 6 Bobwhite were found at the northwest corner. It is more than likely that they were included in the annual Westham Island release of Ring-necked Pheasants. On August 30th and again on September 2nd, 12 Sandhill Cranes were seen offshore of the West (seaward) Dyke. From around the middle of September until middle of October we can expect to see Sandhill Cranes gathering in preparation for their migration south. On the 2nd we had one Baird's Sandpiper and one Red-necked Phalarope in the Southwest Marsh. On the same day 2 Hairy Woodpeckers were spotted pecking away at trees along the East Dyke, as well as a female Western Tanager in the alders around the picnic area.



Purple Martins on the snag Photo: Kathleen Fry

September we see the return of wintering sparrows, Snow Geese and northern waterfowl. We were able to add a new bird, the Curlew Sandpiper, to the overall Sanctuary checklist. The total species for September 2017 was 108.

September 3 - September 9

The big action for this week happened on the 9th when all of the following were seen; 1 Stilt Sandpiper, 4 Pectoral Sandpipers, 1 Wilson's Phalarope, 1 Northern Rough-winged Swallow, 2 Bank Swallows, 2 Savannah Sparrows, 5 Lincoln's Sparrows, 1 Dark-eyed Junco, 4 White-crowned Sparrows and 68 other species that made up the week's list.

September 10 – September 16

Out of the 88 species recorded in this week the main highlight was the appearance of a Curlew Sandpiper flying with a flock of Western Sandpipers. It still had the remnants of the rich rusty coloring on its breast

(...../continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)



Osprey and Sculpin

Photo: Peter Holmes

and belly from its breeding plumage so was very noticeable in the flock of pale bellied Western Sandpipers. Curlew Sandpipers have been found in the fall in other parts of British Columbia but not since the late 1970s and early 1980s. They breed on the tundra's of northern Asia and spend winter in southern Eurasia as well as Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Just a wee bit off course. The bird is shown on the back cover of this issue of Marshnotes, flying with a flock of Western Sandpipers.

The first time an Anna's Hummingbird was seen at the Sanctuary was September 10th, 2008. They are now present all year, and are active at the feeders. If you are lucky come nesting season, as early as February, you might find a nest. Some of the new arrivals noticed this week are Northern Saw-whet Owl, Marbled Godwit, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and Vaux's Swift, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Nashville Warbler and White-crowned Sparrow.

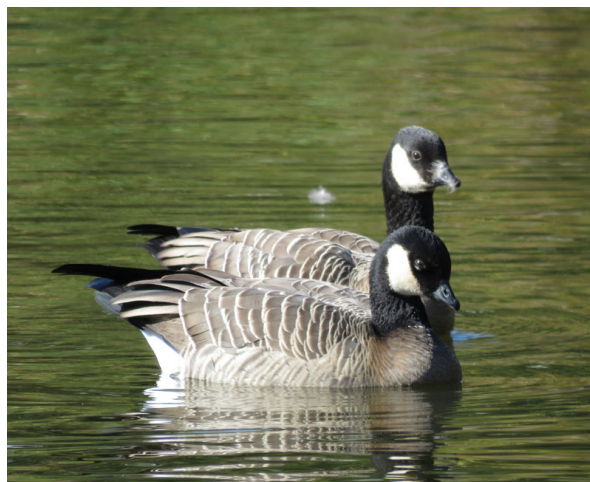
September 17 – September 23

The first few Lesser Snow Geese are spotted in the air just south of the Sanctuary. From now on numbers will be on the rise until they peak around the middle of November. The 18th a Pileated (which means

crested) Woodpecker was found close to the portable toilet. This largest woodpecker of North America a bit bigger than a crow and is mainly found in mature forests. It has a striped black and white face, a lovely red crest and the males have a red moustache. Two Stilt Sandpiper were reported September 21st and 22nd. A Pacific Wren (formerly the Winter Wren) was spotted on the 22nd. It is only about 4 inches long, brown in color with a very short stubby cocked tail. Locating them is hard as they are always foraging among the forest floor debris in search of insects.

September 24 – September 30

Cackling Geese which look like miniature versions of Canada Geese are now showing up in larger numbers. In the waterways of the inner Display Ponds 50 of them were easily viewed on the 24th. Being smaller in size, having shorter beaks and a much higher pitched honk they were obvious among the Canada Geese. On the 27th we had our first fall sighting of a Northern Saw-whet Owl. It was seen along the East Dyke which seems to be their favorite roosting area. They have been absent since the 3rd week of March and have been nesting at higher forested elevations over the summer. A Red-breasted Sapsucker this week, along with the Pileated Woodpecker of last week brought our woodpecker species count up to 5. Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush and Pine Siskin were the new fall arrivals on this week's list of 88 species. Fall migration is under way and viewing is starting to get much more interesting



Cackling Geese

Photo: Robbin Whitbread

Text: Varri Raffan
Gift Shop Manager

The Volunteer Corner

Special Thanks To:

- ◆ Our regular Sunday birding team of Mary Taft, Brian Self, and Istvan Orosi, as well as Jim Martin, Kristina Breit, Emma Turgeon and David Bruce for helping visitors along trails.
- ◆ Justin Makonin, Eric Rossicci, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed and filling bird feeders, and Ben Lambert for weekend help.
- ◆ Our summer newsletter mailout team of Jim Martin, Eric Rossicci and Eileen Axford.
- ◆ The team of Arlie Darby, Irene Banack, and Barbara Warrick for all the garden work.
- ◆ Ivy Whitehorne, Jessica Weiss, Nicole Lamarche, Kristina Breit, and Brian Self for their assistance with bird surveys,
- ◆ New volunteers Owen and Jamie Shutter and Justin Huang for their assistance pruning back vegetation over the summer and into the fall., particularly the messy cattail work.
- ◆ Robert Keen for his hard work during his summer job here.

Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities:

- ◆ Trail maintenance; Weekend hosting of visitors; and Bird surveys.

For more information, visit our website.
www.reifelbirds sanctuary.com/volunteers.html.

Please leave your name and contact information at our office 604-946-6980 or send me an email.

Kathleen (kathleen@reifelbirds sanctuary.com.)



**A SPECIAL THANK YOU
TO 8 YR OLD
ANDREW CASTILLO
FOR DONATING HIS
BIRTHDAY FUNDS
TO THE SANCTUARY**

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Curlew Sandpiper (just left of center) with Western Sandpipers © Devon Lu