

# Marshnotes<sup>®</sup>



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY  
SPRING 2011**

# BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Managers of The George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary since 1963

*~ dedicated to the study and conservation of migratory waterfowl ~*

## Marshnotes:

Editor: Patricia M. Banning-Lover  
Produced at Minerva House

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Telephone: 604 946 6980

Facsimile: 604 946 6982

Website: <http://www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com>

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

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Kathleen Fry

## Staff:

Sanctuary Manager: Kathleen Fry  
Gift Shop Manager: Varri Raffan  
Reception: Laura Jordison  
Habitat Maintenance: Dave McClue

## DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF MARSHNOTES

**July 8th 2011**

Hours of operation:	Sanctuary Gate:	9.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. (all year round)
	Gift Shop:	9.00 a.m. - Noon 1.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.
Admission:	Members:	Free
	Non-members:	Adults: \$5.00 Children (2-14 years) and Seniors (60+): \$2.50
School group tours:	Adults: \$2.50	Children (2-14 years) and Seniors (60+): \$1.50
<b>The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible</b>		<b>School group tours by arrangement</b>

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# Submissions invited for BCWS 2012 Calendar

2012 will be the ninth year the British Columbia Waterfowl Society has produced a calendar from images submitted by our members.

Each year the calendar's popularity grows and we now sell approximately 125 calendars between the beginning of September and year end.

Once again we ask for submissions of Sanctuary subjects for consideration in our 2012 calendar. Please leave your images at the Sanctuary Gift Shop for the attention of Varri Raffan. We receive submissions in a format of either 4x5" or 5x7" printed photographs or jpeg disc.

**Deadline: Saturday, July 16th 2011**

PLEASE NOTE:

Due to time constraints send only your top five favourite images for our consideration.

Text: Varri Raffan, Gift Shop Manager

## About Our Covers

### Front Cover:

American Wigeon Courtship Behaviour © Virginia Hayes

### Back Cover:

Male Wood Duck © Virginia Hayes

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# Sanctuary Manager's Report

In the first three months of 2011, visitor use reached a record 20% higher than usual, with ponds frozen periodically until late February and some beautiful cold clear days drawing visitors, but even more coming on a mission to see owls. Just over 17,000 visitors attended over the three months, with heightened owl interest in January due to media and birding network coverage about the nearby Northern Hawk Owl on Westham Island Road and the abundance of Northern Saw-whet Owls roosting in our own East Dyke trees. Visitors were also able to periodically spot the Great Horned Owls and the elusive Long-eared Owls. The last time winter visitor numbers were this high was in 2008 when the Great Horned Owls were nesting here.

Mapping Saw-whet Owl roost sites over the three months showed there were five regular roost locations along East Dyke which were used nearly every day. The owls showed up temporarily in other sites: during cold and windy weather, picking lower more sheltered roost sites, often right over the trail; or heading for higher roost sites away from people just after very busy days with hundreds of visitors looking at them. The East Dyke was often crowded with visitors trying to see and photograph the birds which undoubtedly had an impact on some of the owls' roosting choices. Many thanks to everyone for their patience and understanding with well-meaning visitors.

In February, the Wood Duck nest boxes were prepared for this year's nesting season. Many are in use already. Most of the songbird nest boxes were also repaired and some retrofitted with an additional front plate or "baffle" to reduce the hole size and restrict access by House Sparrows or larger birds. This baffle design courtesy of Chris Gates, Salmon Creek Tree Swallow Project in New York favours nesting by Tree and Violet-green Swallows, Bewick's Wrens and Black-capped Chickadees, and is called a "Sparrow Stopper". Our nest box volunteers, led by Peter Ward and Ken Hall, are testing its efficiency this year, and we are hoping to collect some observations about which bird species can fit through these hole sizes and shapes. Claire de la Salle made a Nest Box Log Book which is outside the Sanctuary Gift Shop by the Bird Records Log Book. Members can be quite helpful this summer by making note of any species activity seen around the numbered nest boxes for ducks or songbirds in this book.

In general, the spring passage of shorebirds and songbirds such as warblers seems delayed compared to last year, but waterfowl migration seems typical. It is approaching the time of year when all the grass-eating waterfowl species such as the Lesser Snow Geese and American Wigeon leave us for northern nesting grounds and then we will have to start mowing the lawns ourselves!



*Mallards share a nest near the Sanctuary Gift Shop*

Kathleen Fry



Kathleen Fry

*Wood Duck hen checks out Box 12*

The Lesser Snow Geese have been feeding in large flocks in Delta since the end of February and are due to depart northwards by the end of April. The American Wigeon flocks will move on to Alaska and other northern nesting areas at about the same time. The diving ducks such as Greater and Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead and Ring-necked Ducks have been congregating here for the past few months and will also be on their way north to boreal forests and the interior of the province.

Signs of spring are everywhere, with Salmonberry and Pussywillows putting on a show right now, although it is only 6 degrees C today (April 10<sup>th</sup>) and a tad chilly for the Mallards, Canada Geese and Wood Ducks which have been sitting on nests since late March. Recent walks on the Southwest Marsh trails have netted many visitors excellent views of Canada Goose nests, Marsh Wren nests under construction, many pairs of Gadwall and American Bittern standing in the wet meadow catching small minnows.

Every year in the early part of nesting season many questions are asked about the behaviour of our local birds. This year, a couple of Mallards near the Gift Shop are sitting head to tail on the same nest of twenty-something eggs. Are they related birds? What happens when the eggs hatch? Will the pair of Wood Ducks seen cautiously exploring the owl nest box meet an untimely end inside an owl, or have they lucked out with a spacious summer abode littered with old pellets for nest material?

Where will the young Sandhill Crane born here last May go when its parents want to nest again? Our resident pair of cranes has tended their full-grown young all winter, but are now doing mating dances and are showing some hostility towards this young bird.

Most young cranes become independent of their parents at 10 or 11 months of age and there is usually a gap of 30 to 60 days before the parent have a new clutch to care for (Nesbitt, 1992). A non-breeding crane from Richmond fitted with a satellite transmitter was tracked last summer moving to different local crane habitats such as Burns Bog, Richmond, Pitt Polder, Derby Reach and other remote wetlands. Our last year's young crane will likely do that sort of thing while its parents nest again. The resident pair finally selected a nest site on April 15<sup>th</sup>, after they spent a week chasing away the colt. We were not sure where they were going to nest, after seeing courtship displays in several locations, including the front entrance area, so last month, we created a raft-like nest island for them in House Pond with the idea that perhaps visitor and crane interactions could be more controlled this year. Although all three cranes walked around the raft and inspected this real estate, there were no takers, and they have chosen last year's nest island again. Predicted hatch date if all goes well will be the third week in May.

*continued overleaf ... ..*

Along the trails, members may notice a few work areas. Several fallen or hazard trees were dealt with over the winter. Late this winter, a tree across the path to the West Ewen Slough blind caused a temporary trail closure for safety reasons. Several large alder trees fell along Robertson Slough this winter but were away from visitor use areas. The large sprawling, trailside Scots Pine just south of the sign kiosk was taken down after it was discovered to be breaking in half. After the process of cleaning up around it and several other windfalls from a few years ago, the resulting space was seeded to grass and planted with native vines and shrubs such as Mock Orange, Indian Plum, Snowberry, Honeysuckle, Ocean Spray, Salal, Nootka Rose, and Bunchberry. This clearing is designed to promote greater awareness of these native plants and their value to wildlife and people.

After considerable hard work initiating many very positive changes at the Sanctuary, both Larry Kane and Claire de la Salle are moving on to new endeavors and we wish them well. Larry leaves behind a legacy of well-built structures such as the split-rail fencing at the front entrance and Claire has had considerable impact on the management of our habitats, helping organize equipment, nest boxes, and water level records, and bringing considerable energy and enthusiasm to new clearings and plantings.

The recent shoring up of the trail edges on East Dyke this past month has been the handiwork of Dave McClue, who has also built short enclosure fences along the front entrance trail to keep people away from newly planted areas. Along East Dyke, in early March, we also set back the vegetation a bit more than usual so that undue pruning would not be required in the songbird nesting season. Throughout the upcoming nesting season, the focus will be trail surfaces, erosion protection and fence repairs.

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

**Reference:**

**Nesbitt, S. A. 1992.**

First reproductive success and individual productivity in Sandhill Cranes. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 56:573-577.



Kathleen Fry

*Claire de la Salle on House Pond with the "raft-like nest island"*

# The Volunteer Corner



Varri Raffan

*Door Prize Winners at the Appreciation Dinner.*

*Back Row left to right: Richard Beard, Rob Stewart,  
Lee Houghton, Eric Rossicci, John Toochin,  
Mary Taitt, Gerald Oyen.*

*Front Row left to right: Alan Russell, Ken Hall*

***A BCWS Volunteer Appreciation Dinner  
was held at Vagellis Taverna in Ladner  
on March 6th 2011.***



*Twenty-seven BCWS Volunteers  
attended the Appreciation Dinner*

## ***A Special Thank You to the following Volunteers***

- Mary Taitt, Bill Topping, and Murray MacDonald for their constant assistance with the Sunday bird walk, and all members including Alan Russell and Jim Martin who have helped orient our visitors along trails this past season on busy weekends.
- Brian Self for his assistance with above, as well as his shared bird records submitted for the Sanctuary through eBird.
- Doug Fiddick, the First Kirkland Ladner Venturers, Dave and Rita Richardson and Shurli Tylor for helping with trail maintenance and clean-up activities over this winter. A special thank you to Dave and Rita also for their donated walker to loan to visitors.
- Justin Malkonin, Eileen Axford and Eric Rossicci for their many hours spent bagging bird seed and filling bird feeders. Twenty-one empty crates done one day by the E & E team!
- Sue Earles for her help and guidance on how to prune the apple trees in the house yard.
- Francois Cleroux for helping our computer to speak DOS to our new printer.
- Karen Holmes for helping in the Gift Shop on several busy weekends.
- A special thank you to visitor Sandy McDonald who took time out of his walk to go get his rigging equipment to help stabilize a falling tree one Sunday until we could deal with it properly.
- The Provincial Resource Program through Delta Secondary school for their assistance with firewood and general maintenance of feeders and blinds.
- Ken Hall, Peter Ward, John Toochin and the volunteers from the Delta Naturalists for the bird box program to fix up and monitor our duck and swallow boxes.
- The Marshnotes "mail-out" team and Jim Martin for his contributed photographs.

## ***Volunteers are needed for the following***

- Members willing to host visitors in the Lecture Hall (Museum) or along trails during busy weekends this spring and summer. Please leave a message for Kathleen at the Sanctuary Office 604 946 6980. There will also be a few work parties for trail maintenance posted at the Gift Shop window.

Text: Kathleen Fry, Sanctuary Manager

# **BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY**

## **Report on the 50th Annual General Meeting**

The 50th Annual General Meeting took place on April 12th, 2011 in the Lecture Hall of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. BCWS Vice President George Reifel called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm and welcomed everyone. He declared a quorum in attendance. BCWS Administrator Robert Butler acted as Secretary.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE 49th AGM:** The Minutes of the 49th Annual General Meeting, held on April 13th, 2010 were approved.

**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS:** The financial statements for the year ending December 31st, 2010 along with the Accountants' Report, prepared by our auditors, was presented by the Society's Treasurer James Morrison. Questions from the floor followed the Treasurer's brief summary of the year's highlights.

**APPOINTMENT OF THE ACCOUNTANTS FOR 2011:** KPMG were appointed as the Society's Accountants for the fiscal year ending December 31st, 2011, with remuneration to be determined by the Board.

**REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS:** Vice President George Reifel introduced the Society's Directors and staff present, and gave a brief report on the Society and the Board's activities for the year 2010 noting the Society remains in a strong financial position. He thanked our staff, the Directors and all of the volunteers for their contributions during 2010. He also thanked Patricia M. Banning-Lover for her ongoing work to produce and distribute Marshnotes quarterly, and Jim Martin for his spectacular images on the covers of recent issues of Marshnotes. He thanked Gift Shop Manager Varri Raffan for her work and for her 26 years of service to BCWS. He also thanked our Sanctuary Manager Kathleen Fry for all her initiatives during the past year.

**SANCTUARY MANAGER'S REPORT:** Sanctuary Manager, Kathleen Fry, reviewed the Manager's report briefing members on the 2010 activities. The report noted there are 2,208 members as of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2010, down slightly from the prior year. There were 69,568 visitors to the Sanctuary in 2010, with November 7<sup>th</sup> being the best day at 1,050 visitors. May with 9,458 visitors was the best month, with October next at 7,748 visitors through the gates. There were 275 group bookings in 2010. As in previous years, many people buy seed and remain in the parking area to feed the birds. Kathleen also acknowledged Varri Raffan and all the other staff and volunteers who, through their hard work, contribute to making the Society a popular destination for visitors.

**ELECTION OF DIRECTORS:** In accord with the Society's bylaws, three Directors were elected by acclamation. The Directors are: Douglas B. Ransome, Barney W. Reifel and Kenneth I. Thompson.

**The meeting was terminated at 8:06 pm**

Refreshments followed the meeting

**British Columbia Waterfowl Society**  
gratefully acknowledges the continuing support  
of its Accountants  
**KPMG Peat Marwick Thorne Inc.**  
Suite 400, North Tower  
5811 Cooney Road, Richmond, B.C. V6X 3M1

# Sanctuary Highlights

*Thank you to all who take the time to input their sightings into our Bird Sightings Log-book on the Gift Shop deck. We appreciate this help in compiling the Sanctuary records*

**JANUARY:** *the total count for this month was 79 species (one less species than in January 2010).*

## January 2nd– 8th

Eight Sandhill Cranes were still at the Sanctuary; a count which included our resident family of three cranes. The odd Varied Thrush was seen mixed in with the Northern Flickers feeding along the grassy edges of the entrance driveway. Good numbers of birds of prey were recorded in the area. Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawks, two similarly marked birds, were both seen this week. Both hawks are commonly seen preying on songbirds in backyards over the winter. The very agile Cooper's Hawk hunts for prey from tree cover or while flying quickly through dense vegetation. Once they capture a bird they squeeze it repeatedly to kill it instead of pecking it to death like falcons do.

## January 9th—15th

Reports of a Red-throated Loon and Brant Geese, seen off-shore through a telescope from the tower, were submitted from the Sunday morning birding group. Brant Geese primarily a salt water bird are not often seen around the Sanctuary. They are more commonly seen on the shores of Mud Bay and Boundary Bay in spring on their migration north to nest in Arctic North America and Eurasia.

The count for Sandhill Cranes in the Sanctuary fell to six birds. Another bird which is not often seen at the Sanctuary is the Brewer's Blackbird. Two males were seen around the feeders at the entrance to trails. These birds are similar in size to the Red-winged Blackbirds but, especially in the sun, they have a lovely dark purple glossy head and neck with a tint of glossy green/blue in the feathering over the rest of the body and a noticeable yellow eye.

*continued overleaf ... ..*

## Why be a Member?

### **As a Member, you receive the following benefits:**

- FREE admission to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary 365 days a year
- Quarterly issue of the BCWS publication "Marshnotes".
- A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop (please show your membership card at time of purchase).
- Membership in one of British Columbia's most respected conservation organizations.

### **With your support the British Columbia Waterfowl Society is able to:**

- Staff, maintain and expand facilities at the Sanctuary for the benefit of its visitors and members (approximately 70,000 visitors in 2010).
- Provide interpretive and education programs, including guided tours for organized groups of all ages.
- Contribute towards important scientific research on waterfowl to determine their life cycle need for survival.
- Provide support for like-minded organizations who are working in waterfowl-related projects.

### **Enclosed is my cheque or VISA/Mastercard number for:**

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| Donation (tax deductible) | <input type="checkbox"/> |              |

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Telephone: 604 946 6980 Facsimile: 604 946 6982  
Website: [www.reifelbirdsantuary.com](http://www.reifelbirdsantuary.com)

During this week we recorded both juvenile and adult Northern Goshawks. Three species of mergansers (Hooded, Common, and Red-breasted) were spotted this week. The females of the species all have what looks like a punk hairdo with feathers sticking out from their heads. The male Hooded Merganser has a lovely white with black trimmed crest. The male Common and Red-breasted Mergansers have dark heads, thin orange bills with a dark reddish brown chest on the Red-breasted Merganser. The Red-breasted is the least commonly seen at the Sanctuary as it likes salt water areas. The Hooded and Common Mergansers can be spotted easily diving for fish along Robertson Slough at this time of year. Sixty-five species were reported for the weekly list.

#### **January 16th–22nd**

Following are some notable highlights for this week. Red-throated Loon, American Bittern, Greater White-fronted Geese, Cackling Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Canvasback, Northern Goshawk, Merlin, Black-bellied Plover, Common Raven, Hutton's Vireo and Pine Siskins.

#### **January 23rd–29th**

On January 23rd a Long-eared Owl, 14 Greater White-fronted Geese and a very early-to-arrive or late-to-leave Yellow-rumped Warbler were reported. We were still seeing Ring-necked Ducks at the Sanctuary. At first glance they are very similar to the scaup but the Ring-necked Ducks have more of a triangular look to the top of their heads and a white ring on the bill tip. The cinnamon coloured ring around the neck is rarely identifiable unless at very close range. On January 26th six Canvasback were reported.

**FEBRUARY:** *this month can be quieter with less variety of species as we await spring migration. A total of 80 species was recorded with an average of 64 species each week.*

#### **January 30th—February 5th**

Five Northern Saw-whet Owls were still roosting at the Sanctuary. We will have them until roughly mid-April before they move up to higher elevations for breeding season. An unusual sighting of a Barrow's Goldeneye was seen at the Sanctuary this week. The adult and juvenile Northern Goshawks were still being seen. Bewick's Wren, Marsh Wren and Pacific Wren (formally Winter Wren) were all seen most days. A Red-breasted Sapsucker, Western Grebe, Thayer's Gull, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck and Peregrine Falcon were other birds of note for this week.

#### **February 6th—12th**

On February 9th the first sighting for the winter of a solitary Lincoln's Sparrow was recorded. Another Black Brant was seen from the tower on February 9th. Large numbers (up to 20,000) of these birds arrive at Parksville/Qualicum Beach to feed in March/April. A Brant Festival to celebrate their arrival is held every year in the spring.

We recorded Great Horned Owls along the East Dyke for the last time during this week. They will have started to nest now and we assume they picked the thick treed

area in the Alaksen National Wildlife Area (Canadian Wildlife Service property) next door to us. During this week 60 species were observed.

#### **February 13th—19th**

On February 13th a Hutton's Vireo was seen. This small vireo much like the Ruby-crowned Kinglet has a thicker beak and no dark wing bands. The Hutton's Vireo is a year round resident along the southwest British Columbia coast. On February 16th a Northern Shrike was seen along the outer seaward dyke. On February 19th five Northern Saw-whet Owls were seen mostly along the East Dyke. Barn Owl, Thayer's Gull, Canvasback, Belted Kingfisher, Ring-necked Duck and Peregrine Falcon were all seen in this week.

#### **February 20th—26th**

We still had good representation of waterfowl at the Sanctuary with 17 different species. The one Lincoln's Sparrow was still in the area. High counts of six Northern Saw-whet Owls were recorded during this week. On February 24th a single blue phase Lesser Snow Goose was seen in a flock of Lesser Snow Geese. Four Black-crowned Night-Herons were still roosting across from the Warming Hut. They will be around until approximately the middle of April. Other notable species for this week's list of 61 species were the Common Raven, Ring-necked Ducks, Killdeer, Dunlin and Greater White-fronted Geese.

**MARCH:** *is the month when bird activity really picks up at the Sanctuary. We start to see the return of swallows, Lesser Snow Geese, hummingbirds and the pairing up of ducks and geese. With daffodils and trees starting to bloom surely spring can't be far away. A total of 84 species was recorded.*

#### **February 27th– March 5th**

In this week 62 species of birds were recorded. Ring-necked Duck, one male and one female Canvasback, 12 Greater White-fronted Geese, 15 Cackling Geese (subspecies of Canada Goose), Common Goldeneye, Merlin, Virginia Rail, American Bittern and Varied Thrush were a few of the highlights.

#### **March 6th–12th**

March 7th saw our first sightings of Tree Swallows and Violet-green Swallows. March 12th was our first sighting of a Rufous Hummingbird seen at the feeder by the Warming Hut. The males return first to the breeding grounds from Mexico where they spend the winter. They have very good memories and will return to an area to look for a feeder that was there the previous year. They will be around the Sanctuary until mid-August then will fly back to Mexico to winter. Other birds which were unusual for the week were Hermit Thrush, Peregrine Falcon, female Common Goldeneye, Killdeer and Virginia Rail.

#### **March 13th—19th**

A Sora Rail, Eurasian Wigeon and Western Meadowlark were spotted this week. The Western Meadowlark reported

on March 19th had dark brown streaked back parts and bright yellow under parts with a black V on the breast. This bird is mostly a ground dweller foraging for insects, seeds and berries. They have a very nice call. A Northern Shrike was also seen on the 19th. Tree and Violet-green Swallow numbers grew. Watch for these and different species of swallows as they perch on wires at the front gate or as they hunt for insects over Robertson Slough.

**March 20th– 26th**

The Lesser Snow Geese now started returning from Skagit Valley, WA. They could be seen feeding on certain farm fields along Westham Island or out along the foreshore. The Trumpeter Swan numbers declined as they headed back to northern B.C, Alaska and Yukon to nest. A Yellow-rumped Warbler was spotted on March 26<sup>th</sup>. The Yellow-rumped Warbler is usually the first warbler to show up in spring and the last to leave in the fall. We started to notice courtship displays and territorial disputes as geese and ducks prepared for nesting. The incubation period for geese and ducks is roughly 25–30 days so if all goes well and their nests are not predated we should see young at the end of April.

**March 27th–April 2nd**

During the last week of March we always notice a decline in the number and variety of waterfowl as they return to nesting

grounds in Northern B.C., Alaska or Alberta. On March 28th, 12 Canvasback and one Turkey Vulture were recorded. Long-eared Owl, two female Common Goldeneye, Hairy Woodpecker, American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, Purple Finch and an early sighting of a Brown-headed Cowbird were all seen during the week. During this time we were down to two, sometimes three Black-crowned Night–Herons roosting in the trees across from the Warming Hut. We only found two of the six Northern Saw-whet Owls during this week. The total count for this period was 72 species.

**References:**

**The Birds of Canada** by W. Earl Godfrey  
**The Birder’s Handbook—A field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds** by Ehrlich, Dobkin, Wheye.  
**The Birds of British Columbia (Volumes I-IV)** by R. Wayne Campbell, Neil K. Dawe, Ian McTaggart-Cowan, John M. Cooper, Gary W. Kaiser, Andrew C. Stewart, Michael C.E. McNall, G.E. John Smith.  
**History of North American Birds** et al.  
**The Bird Watching Answer Book** by Laura Erickson  
**Our Magnificent Wildlife-How to Enjoy and Preserve It** by Reader’s Digest

## BCWS 50th Annual General Meeting



Patricia M. Banning-Lover

*The 50th BCWS Annual General Meeting was held in the Lecture Hall at the Sanctuary on Tuesday, April 12th 2011.*

*Back Row left to right: BCWS Directors Hugh A. Magee, Gerald O.S. Oyen, Kenneth I. Thompson.  
 Front Row left to right: BCWS Directors Wayne F. Diakow, John H. Bowles, BCWS Vice President George C. Reifel,  
 BCWS Directors James A. Morrison, Douglas B. Ransome*

# BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

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*Male Wood Duck © Virginia Hayes*