

Marshnotes[®]



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
SPRING 2023**

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 for Marshnotes may be sent to the email and postal addresses below marked for attention of the Marshnotes Editor. **Deadline for the next edition: July 15th, 2023.**

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George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary:

Prices: (effective September 1st, 2022).

Daily Admission:

Adults: \$8.00

Seniors: \$6.00 (65+ years)

Children: \$6.00 (2-14 years)

Bird seed: \$2.00/bag

Annual Memberships:

Family: \$100.00

Individual: \$ 50.00

Life: \$1,000.00

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Buildings/ Grounds:

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Community Relations:

George C. Reifel

Interpretation/Education:

F. Wayne Diakow

Outreach:

George C. Reifel

Staff:

Sanctuary Manager:

Kathleen Fry

Gift Shop Manager:

Varri Raffan

Maintenance:

Dave McClue

Field technician:

Kristina Breit

Kiera Fritsch

Biologists:

Evan Gogal

Marissa Sasaki

Hours of Operation:

Reservations are required for all visitors.

Open 9:00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. every day except

Mondays. (Closed Mondays)

The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible.



We now send out a tweet from our Twitter account @ReifelSanctuary when it looks like there is a weather alert, all reservation spots are full, or something interesting has been seen.



Young Birders Award 2023 Recipients

(British Columbia
Field Ornithologists)

On April 15th, a select group of young birders gathered here at Reifel Bird Sanctuary. Four recipients of the BCFO (British Columbia Field Ornithologists) 'Young Birder Award' came to receive their Award plaques and BCFO caps. Each awardee has also received an annual membership to Reifel for themselves and a parent or guardian. Left to right: Clay Zou-Radies, Bentley Colwill, Paul Jaques, Carlo Giovanella, Josh Yiu, and George Clulow. Three other awardees were not able to be present on this day (Raymond Liu, Daniel Poon, Harry Sedin). Carlo Giovanelli and George Clulow were present to represent the BCFO.

Sanctuary Locations Map

Please refer to the location map to the right to locate place names used in the Marshnotes articles.

About Our Covers

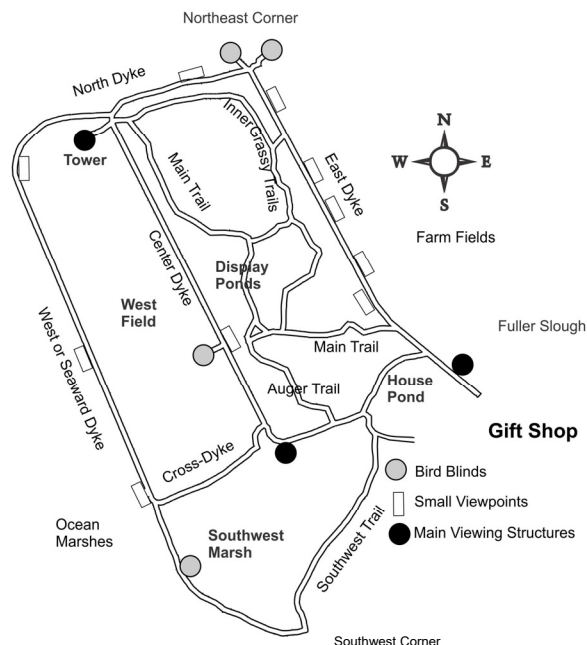
Front Cover: Bufflehead Male in Flight

© Dan Parlee

Back Cover: Blue-winged Teal Female

© Jim Martin

Marshnotes is issued four times a year but is now available only in electronic format on our "Archives" page at www.reifelbirdsantuary.com/archives.html. If you would like to be notified when a new edition is posted, email memberships@reifelbirdsantuary.com.



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Carlo Giovanella

Kathleen Fry

Kathleen Fry

Varri Raffan

Manager's Report

The first three months of 2023 brought storms, snow and rain events, lengthy Westham Island bridge traffic closures, phone service problems, a broken water pipe, power outages, staff sick days due to Covid, and a month long March construction project at the side of the parking lot and in the main entrance trail. All of this limited our visitor use, so we only had 10,818 visitors over this first quarter of the year. On average, temperatures were milder than last year, except for some particularly cold days (-7 C) in the last half of February, and we were closed a few days that month. Most people came on weekends to avoid bridge closures and construction noise. Lengthy Westham Island bridge closures began in mid-January, and went to the end of February. The repairs will be continuing into summer, so we will try to keep visitors informed if access to the Sanctuary will be impeded.

Windstorms in early January and throughout February were very hard on the Sanctuary's trees, and one of our younger Douglas Firs, planted in 2012, fell on Center Dyke. In early January, at an extremely high tide, wood debris entered the inlet water control structure on the Seaward Dyke and damaged the hinged mechanisms, but these will be replaced this summer.



Replacing the culvert under the road by the washrooms.

March began cold and clear and the Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) contractors moved in materials and equipment, worked on four sites and finished up the project by the end of the month. They replaced the culvert under the service access road by the washrooms, the water control structure connecting Fuller Slough and Robertson Slough, and a couple of culverts along the roadway behind the house. The completed work now makes managing water levels right around the parking lot and driveway finally possible. Culverts in this area had not been replaced for decades and one control had been non-functional for at least 6 years. There was a lot of noise, trail blockages, active construction vehicles everywhere at times, and major disruptions right where the Black-crowned Night-Herons roost; however, we were very happy to note that the Night-Herons remained in the area just a few trees back and away from the noise, and were often at their usual roost trees on days when machines were not working.

Throughout the winter months, we have had Barn, Barred, Great Horned, Short-eared, Long-eared, and Northern Saw-whet Owls, but there have been very few sightings of the last species. One early sighting in September, followed by a few records in the January cold weather, then a single record March 11th was all we saw of our smallest owls species. Barn Owls are very secretive and roost in areas way off the public



Digging out the old Fuller Slough water control.

trails. Staff had regular (41) sightings of them from September to the end of March. Barred Owls were winter residents, with 58 sightings from September to the end of February. Short-eared Owls probably go unnoticed here unless they are out in the foreshore marshes late in the afternoon. Most records were in November and December. Long-eared Owls nearly always flushed when encountered and roosted in swampy inaccessible areas, with only a few sightings in January and February.

We had regular views of a pair of Great Horned Owls all winter. In early fall, they were seen along Inner Grassy and East Dyke in the Northeast corner, then they disappeared during cold weather into denser nearby conifer roost sites. In mid-February, they moved to the driveway area, roosting together in the Cedars for a week before nesting in the same stick nest that they used in 2021. This big stick nest is high up in an Alder tree and a pair of Red-tailed Hawks had rebuilt it in early February. The hawks do not usually nest until April, but they spent some effort each day working on it, then roosting nearby on the Coast Guard towers. On February 22nd, though, the Great Horned Owl pair took over the nest and the female spent the next month sitting there presumably on eggs, with the male nearby in a nearby Cedar. Starting March 20th, though, something was bothering the female and she started leaving the nest unattended for a few hours, sitting with the male in the nearby roost. From the 25th onwards, she started leaving the nest unattended all day and a week later the owl pair could not be found anywhere along the driveway. They could have been spooked by all the heavy construction machinery going past, or the Bald Eagles in the area may have been targeting the bird on the nest, especially if the female was moving around a bit close to hatching time.

The Wood Duck nest boxes were all checked January 23rd and provided with fresh wood shaving for the upcoming nesting season. At the same time, the nest materials left inside from last summer were assessed for signs of nesting success or other outcomes. 16 of the 46 boxes checked were used by Wood Ducks to some degree last year, with materials like down and eggshell fragments indicating nest success in at least 8 of them. Last year, 14 broods were observed.

Our first two Anna's Hummingbird nests seen this spring were being constructed in amidst all the construction by the parking lot on March 10th, high up in Hawthorne and Alder trees. The first Rufous Hummingbird of the spring arrived March 17th. Based on our nest discoveries of last year, we expect to find quite a few more nests of both species well into April and May. The first Bushtit nests seen were already well into construction mid-March, but we are just starting to see more of these hanging sock-like other nests being built from the Easter Weekend onwards.

Our first nests of Canada Geese started mid-March, and we expect to see goslings before the end of April, and perhaps some Mallard ducklings as well.

In spite of their 2021 offspring "Evan" tagging along with them constantly, the Sandhill Crane pair has been checking out many nest sites since mid-March. On the 15th, we noticed them out on their usual nest island in the middle of Display Ponds. Things quickly turned into a big fight as they were joined by Evan and two Canada Geese that also seemed very possessive about the island and were incubating a clutch there just a few days later. All in all an unsuccessful "planting of the flag" for our pair of cranes. All three cranes were then seen in a group effort to pile up material in the cattail marsh to the east of the nest island. After a few days, they gave that up and have been deepening the staining on their feathers and trying to chase off Evan. At the end of March, a lone first year crane of unknown origin dropped out of the sky and joined the three cranes, so the pair then had two youngsters tagging along wherever they went. Egg laying has occurred anywhere from early April to mid-May in past years, although any really late dates have usually represented the last clutch of several nest attempts. At time of writing (mid-April) finally, a nest with 2 eggs has been seen out in the Cattail, so we are crossing our fingers!



Many thanks to the contractors Double M Excavating and Ducks Unlimited Canada staff for working around all of our public safety needs!

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

Snow Geese & Technology



Snow goose with collar Photo: Dominic Janus

Some high-tech neck collars with built in GPS/GSM tags have been put on a few of the Snow Geese that winter here and nest on Wrangel Island Russia. These collars will be used by Dr. Sean Boyd and Dominic Janus and other researchers to track the movements of these geese in great detail using GPS (satellite) plus cellular technology to pinpoint their location regularly through the day and night. The tags can indicate their location every 15 minutes and also indicate whether geese are resting, foraging or flying. This is solar powered technology and tags will remain active for many years, so the telemetry data will also help to identify any new staging areas, movements back and forth between here and the Skagit Estuary, new inland wintering areas, and variations in migratory routes from year to year in response to weather factors. Mid-winter aerial surveys are currently the standard for obtaining a population estimate each year, but flocks move constantly throughout the wintering grounds and sub-populations may have some new locales here or are now taking different migration routes and may be missed in population analyses.

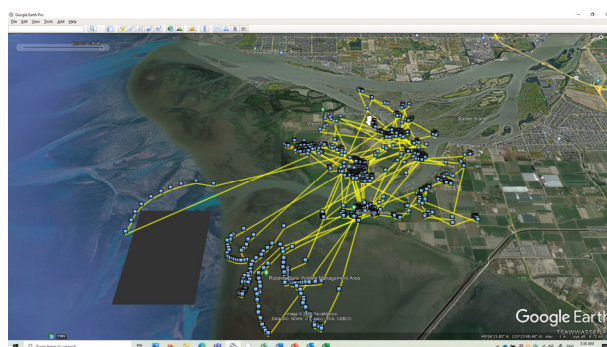
This research will also help document the intensity of the foraging of geese in areas where marsh plants are depleted, where their activity overlaps with aircraft activity, their night feeding behavior, and overall intensity of use in different local farm fields where visible impacts of grazing are seen. Some of the collars will be fitted on Canada Geese, as this species has been seen foraging out in foreshore marshes shared with the Snow Geese.

In 2016, a few geese that winter here in the Fraser delta were captured on Wrangel Island during nesting

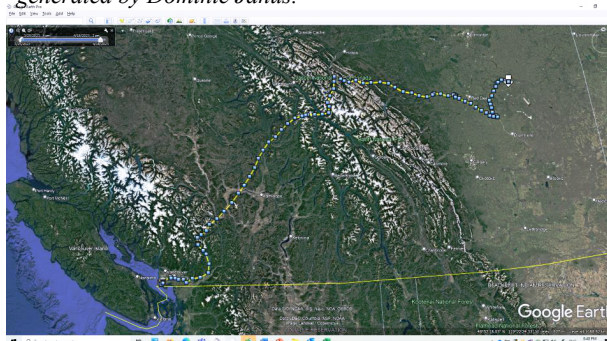
season and fitted with these collars. This preliminary study was very informative once the birds were on their wintering areas and is the basis for expanding this research with more birds this year.

So far in 2023, only a few collars have been installed, with local captures starting mid-March targeting a flock of up to 12,000 geese using Westham Island and Brunswick Point. The figure below is the track of one goose X33 from the 28th of March to the 4th of April. Note the concentration of dots on farms held by Hugh Reynolds and Jack Zellweger, plus some offshore explorations. According to Sean, "The offshore roosting/resting locations for these geese (and the entire flock) are shown for that week. They flew directly offshore and moved with the currents for several hours in the early morning, and then flew directly back to shore and used notable farm hotspots during the day. Also note there were few foraging points on the foreshore marsh that week, with all foraging seen on farms."

A week later X33 flew 16.5 hours non-stop from the Fraser Delta clear across BC to land somewhere south of Edmonton., Alberta.



Examples: Goose X33's wanderings 28Mar to 4Mar 2023 in Delta (top) and her travels to Alberta (bottom). Images generated by Dominic Janus.



This project is supported by the British Columbia Waterfowl Society, Environment and Climate Change Canada, The University of British Columbia, and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife.

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

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Report on the 62nd Annual General Meeting

The 62nd Annual General Meeting took place on Wednesday, April 20, 2023 at the Sanctuary. BCWS President Jack Bates called the Meeting to order at 7:10 pm and welcomed everyone. A quorum was in attendance. Moira Moore acted as Recording Secretary.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE 61st AGM: The Minutes of the 61st Annual General Meeting, held on Wednesday April 20, 2022 were approved.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS: The financial statements for the year ending December 31, 2022 along with the Accountant's Report prepared by KPMG, were presented by the Society's Treasurer Jim Morrison together with a brief summary of the highlights. Questions from members in attendance were responded to by the Treasurer.

APPOINTMENT OF THE ACCOUNTANTS FOR 2023: KPMG were appointed as the Society's Accountants for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2022, with remuneration to be determined by the Board.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS: The President introduced the Society's Directors and members who were present and gave a brief report on the Society and the Board's activities for the year 2022, noting the Society remains in a strong financial position. He thanked the staff and volunteers including the Directors for their contributions to the Society in 2022.

During 2022 the BCWS contributed \$35,000 to the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust for the 2022-2023 Greenfields winter cover crop program. This program supports both wintering waterfowl and the local agricultural community. The BCWS will continue to provide financial support for habitat improvement and waterfowl research projects relevant to its mission as they arise.

SANCTUARY MANAGER'S REPORT: The Sanctuary Manager's report was pre-circulated to the Board and members attending prior to the meeting. With the current reservation system, a daily quota is now in place for the number of visitors on-site. Throughout 2022, this was kept somewhat consistent with 100 bookings spots (the number of cars that fit in the parking lot) for the morning and 75 for the afternoon, with a period of no entry mid-day to ensure enough morning visitors had to accommodate the afternoon bookings. The new system alleviated past issues such as traffic congestion, crowding the birds and overloading washroom infrastructure.

In 2022, maintenance focused on trails and the reconstruction of small viewpoints, benches and ensured water control structures were properly functioning. Repairs were made to eroded shorelines and trail edges along with replacing wood duck and songbird nesting boxes.

Many thanks to the volunteers who have helped to keep the Sanctuary a special and welcoming place for visitors. Our volunteers engage in a variety of activities such as leading bird walks, maintaining trails, filling bird feeders, bird surveys and monitoring sensitive species.

A special thanks to our Directors and staff, many of them long term, for keeping the Sanctuary operations running smoothly throughout the year.

Our website www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com continues to function as our main communication tool for the general public and as an education link for teachers and students. Our Twitter account @ReifelSanctuary seems to be working effectively as a way to alert people of snow closures, reservation requirements and bird highlights.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: In accordance with the Society's Bylaws, three Directors were elected for a two year term by acclamation: Clayton Botkin, Barney Reifel and Ken Thompson.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:33 pm

The 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

Bird Highlights

The George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary welcomes you to the first "Bird Highlights" for 2023. A few of you are now starting to compile an annual bird sightings list and this January was a good month to check off many species as the month ended with 98 different bird species.

January 1 – January 7

Birding offshore remains good. With the use of telescope from the Observation Tower, Surf Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Red-throated Loon, Pacific Loon and Common Loon were all observed. This is also a good time to view a variety of birds of prey, as they concentrate at the estuary preying on the ducks and other birds. One highlight to mention for this week was the sighting of an American Tree Sparrow along one of the inner grassy trails.

January 8 – January 14

Further additions to last week's list of birds seen offshore were Pelagic Cormorant and Brant. On January 10th we were surprised to see the American Avocet back in the Southwest Marsh. After the last sighting at the Sanctuary on December 5th we thought it had finally headed south. However it ended up being spotted at Brunswick Point (end of River Road West) from the middle of December into January. On the 11th a female Blue-winged Teal was seen in the Display Ponds. This got the attention of a few people as it is unusual to find this bird here in the winter. April to August is when you expect to see Blue-winged Teal around the Sanctuary. At this time they should be enjoying the warmer climates of southern Texas and into the Caribbean Islands down to Peru and Brazil. On the 14th members had a quick view of an American Bittern skulking in the grasses along the Southwest trail before it inclines to meet the outer Seaward Dyke.

January 15 – January 28

In this 2 week period a total of 82 bird species were recorded. Both Sora and Virginia Rail made the list. More often than not sightings of them are just by chance as they quickly dart for cover between the reeds and grasses of the marsh. Virginia Rails are usually just heard. Sometimes they make a booming noise and other times they make a "kidick, kidick" sound. Like a lot of good bird sightings it's being in the right place at the right time.

On January 22nd a Western Meadowlark was located in the marsh off the south end off West Dyke. Short-eared Owls are still being seen hunting at this same location. There have been no trailside sightings of Northern Saw-Whet Owls and just one or two staff records in out of bound areas. It has been the same story from other areas around the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. I am not sure what



Northern Flicker

Photo: John Whitmore

the underlying reason could be for very low numbers but hopefully they will bounce back next year. On the 28th and 29th a Barn Swallow was seen flying over Fuller Slough. There have been numerous Northern Flickers throughout the Sanctuary in this period. As you walk along the outer Seaward Dyke you might have noticed small ¼ to ½ inch holes along the grass edges. These have been made by the beaks of Northern Flickers as they probe for insects.

The other larger holes are more than likely made by Townsend's Voles. In winter when ponds are frozen, these voles can be the number one food source for Great Blue Herons. After eating the voles Great Blue Herons are able to regurgitate a pellet which consists of hair and bone which are indigestible. Other bird species that cast pellets are grebes, cormorants, hawks, owls, eagles and shrikes.

The total count of bird species for February 2023 was 93. February is not an active month for bird migration as the northern population has already arrived. We are now waiting for Spring migration which usually starts in early March.

February 1 – 25

Some early migrants such as Tree Swallows and Violet-green Swallows, plus a few Yellow-rumped Warblers all showed up this month. This February we had large numbers of Northern Shovelers, with a high

count of approximately 450 birds reported from the bimonthly bird survey team. Shovelers are aptly named for their large broad bills which have comb like “teeth” along the upper and lower mandibles. These enable Shovelers to sift out unwanted pieces and retain the best food. Years ago they were nicknamed “spoonbill”. Not hearing much in the way of singing birds over the winter months, it was lovely to hear the happy sounds from birds enjoying the warmth of the sun on February 10th. Male Anna’s Hummingbirds are now trying to attract females by performing display flights in which they fly high up and then quickly plunge straight back down. The unusual sound at the end of the descent is caused by air rushing across their tail feathers. Anna’s Hummingbirds are one of the early nesters and will usually have raised a family before the Rufous Hummingbirds arrive in mid-March from the winter homes in Mexico.



Anna’s Hummingbird on nest Photo: Varri Raffan

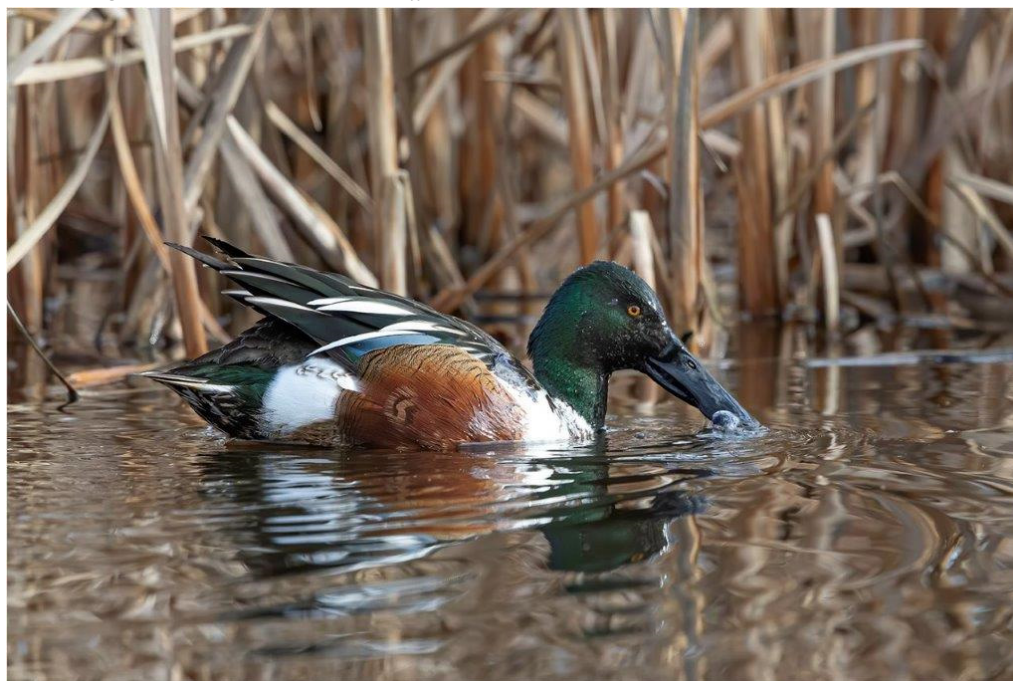
The American Tree Sparrow was again seen on February 13th, 16th and 25th. February 18th a Common Goldeneye was located on Robertson Slough. A Northern Shrike was seen along the outer Seaward Dyke on February 19th. At the beginning of February, along the driveway, a pair of Great Horned Owls watched over a pair of Red-tailed Hawks as they fixed up a previous nest. And, just like in 2021, the Great Horned Owls ended up taking over the nest.

Throughout February viewing of seabirds like Loons, Mergansers and Scoters will be good and will peak in April when the small oil-rich fish called Eulachon are spawning in the mouth of the Fraser River. With 76 species observed from Feb 19th to the 25th we are now heading into an upward trend bringing in new spring migrants.

March had a total of 89 bird species recorded.

Many species of birds are now looking dapper in their “breeding plumage”. The lovely sounds from songbirds are also noticeable as they attempt to attract mates. In the background of twittering songbirds you can’t miss the loud honking of Canada Geese having disputes over nesting territories along with shrill calls of Red-winged Blackbirds from the marsh.

The first male Rufous Hummingbird arrived on the 17th of March. Males head back first from their wintering grounds in Mexico in order to establish



Northern Shoveler

Photo: Thomas Dethlefsen

choice nesting territories for the females that will soon join them. Coincidentally this was the same date that a Bushtit nest was found almost completely built along the driveway. Staff and keen visitors have been keeping an eye out for nests of both hummingbird species and Bushits this month, and by the end of March, had tallied 9 Anna's Hummingbird nests and 3 Bushtit nests. Sunshine on the 19th brought out 3 turtles that were spotted sunning themselves on a log in Fuller Slough. March 23rd the American Avocet once again showed up in the same spot in the Southwest Marsh. It is more than likely the same bird as previous and has come back to where the food is good.

Turning left past the Warming Hut check out the waterway on the right for signs of the winter activities of the Beaver. In recent winters, the Beavers have stockpiled some food there in the form of branches with bark, leaves and buds from the trees they have cut down, piling it so that they can access these food items even if the pond is frozen over. By spring this winter cache looks more like a midden, as they have chewed and discarded the sticks that they are finished with. This waterway is also a good spot to watch for Pied-billed Grebes and Mergansers diving for small fish that secrete themselves in the entangled sticks and past fallen trees. Squirrel middens can also be seen this time of year, typically made up of a pile of nut shells maybe some pinecones or fir cones which they take apart for the small seeds between all the scales of each cone.

As nesting season approaches, watch for mink along the trails as they search for eggs in unattended nests. The last Northern Shrike and Belted Kingfisher were seen in this week but we also saw the return of Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Moving into April we will see the return of shorebirds and warblers and more nesting activity.

Text: Varri Raffan
Gift Shop Manager



Mink on the prowl *Photo: John Whitmore*



Bushtit Nest under construction *Photo: Jim Martin*

Summer Bird Diets

The sunflower treats for Black-capped Chickadees are not sold here from April to September. Small nesting songbirds such as these eat different foods during the summer months and take advantage of the many small insects, fruits, seeds and berries naturally provided by the diverse habitats of the Sanctuary. During nesting season, young birds are fed higher protein diets of spiders, flies, and small caterpillars by the parent birds.

Sanctuary staff



Top row left to right: Marissa Sasaki, Evan Gogal, Kristine Breit, Kathleen Fry, Keira Fritch. Bottom row left to right: Varri Raffan, Jean Zhang. Missing: Dave McClue.

Summer brings some changes in our younger staff. Jean Zhang has taken a provincial government summer job after working here since 2021, and will be attending BCIT for the fall term to finish her degree. We will miss you Jean!. Our staff now includes Kiera Fritsch who joined us last September to fill in some staffing gaps and will continue to help with the Gift Shop, the front gate and habitat work.

The Volunteer Corner

Special thanks to:

- ◆ Mary Taitt for leading our regular Sunday Bird Walk.
- ◆ Brian Self, Jim Martin, John Chandler, Mary Taitt, Luca Santamaria, Dirk Fleming, and Christine Barker for filling feeders and hosting visitors.
- ◆ Christine Barker, Eric Rossicci, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed.
- ◆ Brian Self, Peter Candido, Ben Lambert, Janice White, and Sabine Jessen for helping with bi-weekly Sanctuary bird surveys.
- ◆ Margaret Gorham for hosting visitors at the Museum every Sunday.

If you are interested in volunteering, please leave your contact information at our office or send an email to kathleen@reifelbirdsanctuary.com.

For more information, ask at the Gift Shop or visit our website www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com and explore the Volunteer page.

Why be a Member?

As a Member, you receive the following benefits:

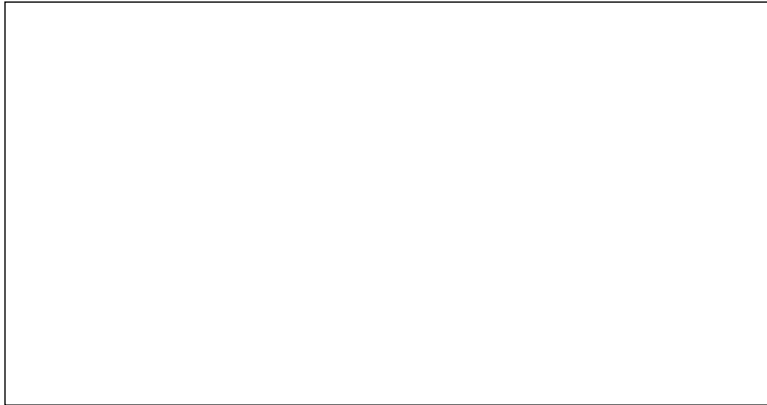
- FREE admission for a year to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary .
- Quarterly issue of the BCWS publication "Marshnotes".
- A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop.
- Membership in one of British Columbia's most respected conservation organizations.

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; 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 needs for survival; and provide support for like-minded organizations who are working on waterfowl related projects.

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

5191 Robertson Road, Delta, British Columbia V4K 3N2



Blue-winged Teal Female © Jim Martin