

Marshnotes[®]



**BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
SUMMER 2022**

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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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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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.



*Tree Swallow chicks waiting for the incoming food run.
Photo: John Whitmore*

About Our Covers

Front Cover:

Mallard duckling

© Jim Martin

Back Cover::

Wood Duck Ducklings

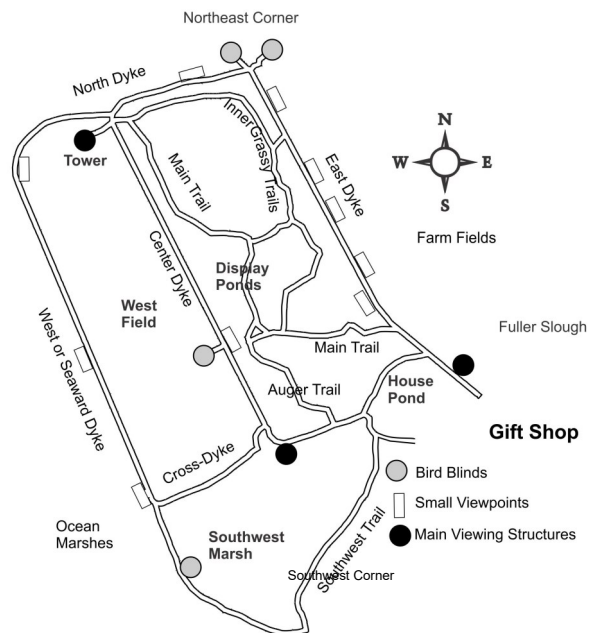
© John Whitmore

Remember to book your visit

Visit our "Planning Your Visit" website page at www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com/planning.html for details. All visitors need to book a time slot. These show for 3 days and remain open until 8 am of the date in question (unless all spots are already taken). Bikes just need to call ahead and come within a booking window but there is a quota of 10 bikes for the morning and again in the afternoon. Group birding tours and school classes also need to contact the office to make arrangements a week or two in advance.

Sanctuary Locations Map

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



Contents

Page	4	Bird Highlights
	8	Manager's Report
	9	Special Notices
	11	Volunteer's Corner
	11	Why Be a Member

Varri Raffan
Kathleen Fry
Kathleen Fry

Bird Highlights

In April you will notice waterfowl numbers decreasing as most of the population of ducks that wintered at the Sanctuary are now heading back to where they were born to nest. April also brings the spring migration of shorebirds and warblers. The total count of bird species for April 2022 was 113.

April 3 – April 9

The Yellow-rumped Warblers that showed up in mid-March have now been joined by Orange-crowned Warblers and Common Yellowthroats. These three warbler species are the first to arrive in the spring and the last to leave in the fall. Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Greater Scaup and Swamp Sparrow all made their last appearance on this week's list but will return in the fall. There is still one late Northern Saw-whet Owl in a Holly bush along the East Dyke.

April 10 – April 16

Along one of the waterways of the inner grassy trail an elusive American Bittern was spotted on the 10th. The majority of American Bittern sightings happen along the Southwest Trail and Seaward Dyke from mid-February to end of March. After that they turn secretive as they will be nesting on well concealed platforms of vegetation among the cattails and bulrushes of the Marsh.

Also on the 10th the first Brown-headed Cowbird was reported. Back in the 18th century Mark Catesby described them as “cowpen” birds who scavenge food in soil kicked up by the hooves of cattle and this is

how they got their name. Cowbirds are classed as a nest parasite because they don't build their own nests but lay their eggs in other bird's nest leaving them to feed and raise the young cowbirds. April 12th was the last day we were able to locate the Black-crowned Night-Heron. A few other highlights from this week were Greater White-fronted Goose, Cinnamon Teal, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon and Northern Shrike.

April 17 – April 30

This 2-week period ended with 104 species observed and is the peak time to observe a variety of birds as they move through our area heading north. Some first new spring sightings were Blue-winged Teal, American White Pelican, Turkey Vulture, Sora, Spotted Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Vaux's Swift, Hammond's Flycatcher, Hutton's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Hermit Thrush and Yellow-headed Blackbird. The first hatch of four Canada Goose goslings showed up on Earth Day, April 22nd. The 23rd we had an unusual sighting for the Sanctuary, a Calliope Hummingbird. Besides the seasonal Rufous Hummingbird and the year-round Anna's Hummingbird it is not often we find a Calliope. In fact, the last one to be reported at the Sanctuary was back in May 2007. Even though the last day of April was wet and windy it proved to have the highest count of species. The inclement weather system could have stalled bird migration and grounded them giving us an opportunity to view many spring migrants. To see the entire species lists for each week for the past few years, visit our website page www.reifelbirds sanctuary.com/birds2.html

May 2022 topped April's species list with an even more outstanding list of 115 different birds. With cooler temperatures incubation can slow down and that could be one of the reasons we haven't seen many ducklings and goslings as of yet. Of course, we must take into account the ever-present threat from numerous predators that are fond of eggs. By mid-May and through June we will be seeing more young waterfowl.

May 1 – May 7

On May 6th I was surprised to see so many Wood Ducks on the grass in front of the Gift Shop. There were 12 in all, 11 males and 1 nervous looking female. Wood Ducks will nest in tree cavities if available, but do use the nest boxes installed on trees along East Dyke, Robertson Slough and the pond system.



American White Pelican

Photo: Dam Nguyen



Western Wood-pewee

Photo: Bruce Hutchison

We saw the first brood of 10 Wood Duck ducklings this week. It's quite something to watch them when they are ready to leave the nest box. The female will be on the ground below calling, trying to entice the young to jump. When they do jump from the nest box, they have their stubby little wings wide open, and their little webbed feet splayed in order to give more wind resistance. When they land, they seem to bounce and quickly recover to follow their mother to water. Shorebirds are now migrating to their breeding grounds in Alaska and the Arctic. On the 3rd a Ruff was found at the west end of Robertson Slough. On the 4th an American Bittern was observed. On the 6th a Yellow-headed Blackbird was seen at the edge of the West Field. The total species count for this week was an impressive 91 different birds.

May 8 – May 14

Tree Swallows are investigating the numerous nest boxes to see which will be the new home to raise a family and at the Northeast Corner, Hutton's Vireos are already bringing food to their nestlings. Even though our weekly list still shows a variety of waterfowl we are only seeing very small numbers of each. A male Canvasback showed up on the 10th and is the first for this year. May 14th a Black Swift was spotted. They have been wintering in the Amazon Basin but are now returning to nest in the damp coastal cliffs of BC and cliff ledges of Alberta. They are a very dark bird with a touch of pale coloring on the stomachs and have crescent shaped wings and a broad tail. Western Wood-Pewee, Bullock's Oriole, Townsend's Solitaire, MacGillivray's Warbler, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Black-headed Grosbeak were some of the numerous highlights for this week.

May 15 – May 21

On the 19th we now have reports of 2 Ruffs, one still at the west end of Robertson Slough and the other in the Southwest Marsh. This shorebird is not commonly seen at the Sanctuary but if they do show up the best time to see them is May, July and October. Another sporadically seen bird is the Brewer's Blackbird which we used to see much more frequently at the Sanctuary. However, you can find them feeding in grain fields in the surrounding Westham Island farm fields, especially in the winter. May 20th another brood of 12 Wood Ducks showed up. A Great Horned Owl is still being found along the entrance driveway. The driveway is also good to find warbler and flycatcher species. Just pull park in the parking lot and take your time walking the driveway.



Lewis's Woodpecker

Photo: Kathleen Fry

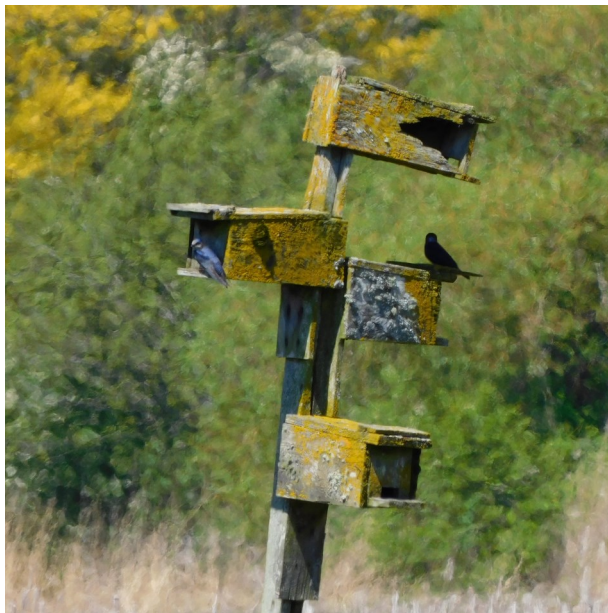
May 22 – May 28

Although we had 83 species recorded for this week the main highlight occurred on May 24th. A volunteer had a rare sighting of a Lewis's Woodpecker perched on one of the dead snags behind the Information Sign Boards. It has been many years since one has been reported at the Sanctuary, but I found one record for Westham Island from back on May 12, 1982. They

...../Continued on page 6

(Continued from page 5)

are insect eaters and typically perch on a dead snag which gives them an unencumbered view to catch insects as they fly by. They nest in Southeastern BC, western Alberta, down into Washington and Montana. It was last seen on the 27th, this time on the ground in the parking lot. Purple Martins, which were first spotted at the Sanctuary in May 2003, are now well established and annually use the sets of nest boxes constructed on posts in the Marsh north of the Observation Tower.



The favourite pole of Purple Martin boxes
Photo: Kathleen Fry

June typically is a moulting month for waterfowl. From their showy breeding plumage of the spring, they will now drop their primary feathers in order to grow fresh ones for the fall migration. You will notice over the summer, especially in the males, their feathers are dull and mottled and look very much like females. This is referred to as "eclipse plumage". Further broods of Wood Duck, Mallard and Canada Geese continue to hatch through June.

May 29 – June 4

When adult ducks are moulting and virtually flightless, this coincides nicely with their flightless ducklings. Since they are all grounded the females can focus on looking after their young. White-crowned Sparrows and Dark-eyed Junco have now left our area heading further north for the summer. One of Great Horned Owls, probably the male of our regular pair, has been visible this week. The partner may

have a nest in a tree cavity or an existing raptors nest or even an old crow's nest. The female, with a small amount of help from the male, will do most of the incubating of their 2 to 3 eggs.

June 5 – June 18

This 2 week period had an average of 67 species each week. We are now officially in the quiet period for bird watching. Over the summer it is a good time to brush up on your identification of wildflowers, butterflies, dragonflies and even watch the Carp in Fuller Slough as they clean up the left-over seed given to the ducks.

June 19 – July 2

Various nesting Barn Swallows and an active Bullock's Oriole nest at the start of the East Dyke have caught the attention of many photographers. Barn Swallows build their own mud nests, but the Tree Swallows will use many of the boxes located at water's edge. Tree Swallows have a lovely iridescent blue back with a white belly and the Barn Swallows have a deep blue back with a rust-colored belly and a forked tail. They are both very acrobatic in the air when it comes to catching insects (flies, mosquitoes, gnats and beetles) and can eat up to 1000 insects in a single day. Circling over the parking lot on the 25th two Turkey Vultures were spotted. All though most of the waterfowl have finished nesting for the season we are still expecting to find a few more broods of Gadwall which are a later nester than Mallards. Some birds such as House Finch, Black-capped Chickadee, Bushtit, Downy Woodpecker, Barn Swallows, European Starling and American Robin are known to have a second brood so finding young birds into July and early August is not unusual. By the middle of August we will start to see a variety of adult and juvenile shorebirds returning from their nesting grounds up north.



Yellow Warbler and a Brown-headed Cowbird Chick
Photo: Jim Martin

Here is a summer quiz for you.

When looking at a bird species checklist you might have noticed a 4 letter abbreviation for the English name of the bird. These 4 letters are referred to as Alpha Codes and are used as a form of shorthand by ornithologists. If the bird has only 1 name you would use the first 4 letters to form the Alpha Code. For example Bufflehead would be BUFF. If the bird has a 2-word name such as Turkey Vulture you take the first 2 letters of each word which would be TUVU. When a bird has 3 names you use the first letter from each of the first 2 words and the first 2 letters of the last name, example Black-capped Chickadee would be BCCH. See if you can identify the 8 different species underlined in this peculiar sentence.

HUGO use MODO to COME HOME and KILL the PUMA in the SNOW covered BUSH. (see answers page 9)

Text: Varri Raffan,
Gift Shop Manager



Rufous Hummingbird and young Photo: Dan Parlee



Parent Barn Swallow (far right) feeding young

Photo: Varri Raffan

Manager's Report

It has been a quiet few months here at the Sanctuary, with visitor use at 13,000, approximately the same as last year. April and May were colder than usual, and June was about average. Each month had a few “atmospheric surprises” in store for birds and visitors alike. April had a couple of below-freezing nights, some rather spectacular weather fronts that brought winds, thunder, lightning and hail storms mid-month, and some very wet and windy days. Snow Geese were still present for most of the month, as were owls, and a White Pelican starred in many photos at the end of the month. Although May had some hot days towards the end of the month and Barn Swallows were building nests everywhere, 70% of the monthly rain fell just on the 15th. June was warmer finally, but with a couple of extreme rainfall days such as the 9th, just when the Sandhill Crane nest was hatching.

Waterfowl production was surprising this year. To date, we have recorded the following broods:

Canada Geese– 9 broods, hatching between April 22nd and May 22nd. This is slightly lower than last year, possibly due to predation and cold weather .

Mallard-27 broods, hatching between May 7th and and July 20th. This is high number compared to previous years.

Wood Duck-14 broods, hatching between June 26th and July 29th. These are higher numbers and all later than usual. In most years, we have had Wood Duck broods hatching at about the same time as the Canada Geese.

Gadwall-7 broods so far, hatching between June 26th and early August. This seems to have been a good year for this species.

All in all, the cooler inclement weather probably delayed some nesting activity this year as well as some early plant growth. From early June onwards, though, the trail edges needed constant pruning to keep blackberries and other vegetation from blocking paths. We are limited in the extent of our activities for this by regulations protecting nesting birds, so this is a cautious activity. Songbird and duck nests are present, (although we rarely find them), and there are many factors to consider to optimize summer bird use.

Many of these trailside hedgerows are a mix of native and invasive plants, and each year we try learn a little more about how to effectively manage this mix. This year we took a closer look at the timing of the plants that produce flowers, nectar, seeds and fruit throughout the Sanctuary. These are critical to berry-eating birds but also hummingbirds, Spotted Towhees and other songbirds using these habitats. Because of the cool wet spring, the impression was that plants such as Salmonberry were slow starting,



Sitka Bumblebee in Salmonberry Photo: Josh Lee

and not in bloom until quite late this spring. This spring's project documented dates for flowering and berry production for these plant species to establish a baseline for comparison from year to year. Red-flowering Currant, for example, was the first to bloom, providing nectar for early hummingbird arrivals. Ripening Twinberry berries coincided with the arrival of many hungry Cedar Waxwings in mid-summer. Our volunteer Josh Lee has helped the plant study with close-up photographs of insects on these plants.

These trailside areas have a mix of native and invasive species but all provide significant nesting habitat and winter cover for songbirds, so we also made some detailed documentation of any songbird nests found. We quickly discovered that this could be very time consuming, especially for high up nests when chicks could not be seen from below unless a parent came in to feed them! Over the summer, a total of 32 nests were found and tracked to determine whether they were successful. The nests included 8 Rufous Hummingbirds, 9 Anna's Hummingbird, 5 Bushtit, 2 Bullock's Oriole, 3 American Robin, 1 Yellow Warbler, 1 Cedar Waxwing, and 4 Spotted Towhee nests.

Throughout the summer months, staff from Environment and Climate Change Canada have also been carrying out parts of their research within the Sanctuary. Dr Christine Bishop has been banding hummingbirds here for several years now. This year 72 Rufous and 56 Anna's Hummingbirds were banded, primarily in the front yard of the Sanctuary residence over two months starting the end of April. 12 of the Rufous Hummingbirds were recaptures (already banded). Elizabeth Gow is also studying songbirds, and her team has banded at least 17 adult Spotted Towhees during a study focusing on nesting success of hedgerow species.

...../Continued on page 10

Special Notices

Avian Flu Update

In February, the pathogenic versions of Avian Flu (H5 and H7) were starting to show up across North America in the form of outbreaks of this disease in poultry farms, but also some significant wild bird mortalities (for example, Bald Eagles, and Snow Geese). This disease can easily spread between wild birds when they congregate in large flocks. Visitors were alerted all summer about reduced feeding, protocols to follow and we have kept our bird feeders empty. Visitors were told to avoid spreading the disease through hand-feeding or touching the birds. In May and June, we noticed some sick birds and sent several specimens off for testing. A dead Wood Duck and Great Blue Heron both tested positive, and results for several sick Canada Geese are not in yet. Other species here showing possible signs of Avian Flu included Gadwall, Bufflehead, and more recently, Green-winged Teal. In the fall, depending upon the status of outbreaks, some protocols may continue. Many thanks to the Wildlife Rescue Association volunteers who helped round up sick geese on July 4th.

Marshnotes


Memberships have traditionally included a mailed version of Marshnotes issued four times a year. Starting with the Fall 2022 issue, it will no longer be mailed, but can be downloaded from our website www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com. This Summer 2022 will be the last edition mailed.


We ask that members provide us with their email to be able to receive future editions of Marshnotes electronically after the Summer issue.


Please confirm this information in person at the Gift Shop, by fax (604-946-6982) or by email to memberships@reifelbirdsanctuary.com.

Please include the name that is used for your membership, your preferred email, and your address (so we can tell which member you are if there are people with the same name as yourself). A notice will also be posted at the Gift Shop and on Twitter (@ReifelSanctuary) when a new edition is out.

Sanctuary Archives

Marshnotes

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
WINTER 2022

Marshnotes

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
FALL 2021

Marshnotes

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
WINTER 2021

Back issues of Marshnotes, the newsletter of the BC Waterfowl Society, published four times a year

Winter 2022	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Fall 2022
Winter 2021	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021
Winter 2020	Spring 2020	Summer 2020	Fall 2020
Winter 2019	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Fall 2019
Winter 2018	Spring 2018	Summer 2018	Fall 2018
Winter 2017	Spring 2017	Summer 2017	Fall 2017
Winter 2016	Spring 2016	Summer 2016	Fall 2016
Winter 2015	Spring 2015	Summer 2015	Fall 2015
Winter 2014	Spring 2014	Summer 2014	Fall 2014
Winter 2013	Spring 2013	Summer 2013	Fall 2013
Winter 2012	Spring 2012	Summer 2012	Fall 2012
Winter 2011	Spring 2011	Summer 2011	Fall 2011
Winter 2010	Spring 2010	Summer 2010	Fall 2010

For earlier editions, please contact the Marshnotes Editor: bcws@reifelbirdsanctuary.com

When new editions are issued, they can be found with past editions on our Archives page of the website at www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com/html. The pdf files can be read there or downloaded from the site.

Price Increases

Effective September 1st, BCWS will be increasing admission and membership fees. The costs of operating the Sanctuary have increased and our pricing has not changed since 2010. Thank you for your understanding. The new rates can be seen on page 2.

Answer to the Alpha Code quiz page 6

HUGO= Hudsonian Godwit
MODO= Mourning Dove

KILL= Killdeer
HOME= Hooded Merganser

PUMA= Purple Martin
BUSH= Bushtit

SNOW= Snowy Owl
COME= Common Merganser

(Continued from page 8)

As in previous years, we kept track of bird use of various nest boxes in the Sanctuary, noting bird activity at 117 boxes. Not all sightings resulted in confirmed nesting but Tree Swallows were noted at 91 boxes, House Sparrows at 17, and a few other species such as Black-capped Chickadees and rodents also used some of the boxes.

Approximately 40 of the usual Barn Swallow nest locations were in use this year, some of which were used for more than one clutch. The small “awning” of wood attached earlier this year to the Center Dyke Blind has been explored by Barn Swallows, and one nest was noted but it appears to be abandoned. Another small wooden shelter placed nearby has seen no use yet. These two additions were created to see if the swallows might opt for these structure instead of the beams inside the blind.

On April 22nd, the weather and tide was perfect for a journey with volunteers out into the marsh to replace some of the Purple Martin boxes that were lost in January’s windstorm. All of these new boxes were used this year.

Barn Swallows and Purple Martins are still nesting, and House Sparrows have been recently started new clutches in nest boxes just used by Tree Swallows, so these are all preliminary results. Many thanks to Kristina Breit for compiling preliminary summaries of all of these observations from everyone.

No summer report is complete without a Sandhill Crane saga. By the beginning of April, our pair was using a nest in the north meadow of Display Ponds. On April 9th, we found the two parent birds off the nest and a raccoon on the nest. The pair then moved over to the cattail nest site to the south used last year, again, very close to the trail, but did not settle right away. Another pair was present on the 3rd, and the 11th and may have been a contributing factor to the disruption of the first crane nest. By the 19th, the pair was checking out islands in House Pond, and there was a five-way fight about island property ownership on April 23rd involving our pair, Evan (their colt from 2021, and the visiting pair.

In early May, the Canada Goose nest on the crane’s long-term nest island hatched, and by May 9th, the crane pair had claimed it, renovated it and were incubating an egg. The second egg was laid sometime



The Sandhill Crane fight April 23rd

Photo: Janice White

In this photo, our 2021 colt “Evan” had ventured out to the island and attacked one of the visiting birds, but was then jumped on by the other visiting crane. A minute later, our pair (and parents of Evan) joined the pile of cranes.

between then and the 14th. From that point on, Evan was diligently chased away from the Sanctuary every day. On June 9th, the first egg hatched on a day of pouring rain. By the 11th, both parent birds began swimming this colt to the nearby trail system, abandoning incubation of the second egg. It was “warmed” only when the family was back on the island to sleep at night. The first crane colt did not make it past 5 days. We do not know what happened early on the 14th of June, but by 8 am that day the pair were constantly calling and searching for the young bird. After a few days, they seemed to have resigned themselves to a summer with no chick, and are now tolerating the presence of Evan (2021) again.

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

The Volunteer Corner

Special thanks to:

- ♦ Mary Taitt for leading our regular Sunday Bird Walk.
- ♦ Brian Self, Jim Martin, John Chandler, Rene Williamson, Mary Taitt, Emma Turgeon, Luca Santamaria, Dirk Fleming, Christina Barker, and Eva Janzen for helping visitors along trails, filling bird feeders and helping prune along trails this season.
- ♦ Christine Barker, Eric Rossicci, and Eileen Axford for bagging seed.
- ♦ Our winter newsletter mailout team of Eileen Axford, Eric Rossicci, and Jim Martin as well as staff.
- ♦ Brian Self, Peter Candido, Ben Lambert, Janice White and our staff for helping with bi-weekly Sanctuary bird surveys.
- ♦ Margaret Gorham for hosting visitors at the Museum every Sunday.
- ♦ Josh Lee for his excellent insect photo catalogue over the summer.
- ♦ The team of David Pawliuk, Donald Chen, Daniel Lair, and Dirk Fleming who helped our staff to replace some Purple Martin Boxes in April.

Volunteers needed:

- ♦ Sanctuary visitor hosts for busy weekends through the late summer and fall shorebird and songbird migration period.
- ♦ Work parties for special clean-up projects this fall. See our volunteer page on our website for details.

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

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

Kathleen (kathleen@reifelbirdsanctuary.com.)

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 .

The quarterly issues 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.

Enclosed is my cheque or VISA/MasterCard number for:

SINGLE Membership: ☐ **\$50**

FAMILY Membership: ☐ **\$100**

LIFE Membership: ☐ **\$1,000**

Donation (tax deductible) ☐

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