

Marshnotes[®]



BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY
Summer 2026

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: Marissa Sasaki

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George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary:

Prices: (effective January 1st, 2026)

Daily Admission:

Adults: \$10.00

Seniors: \$8.00 (65+ years)

Children: \$7.00 (2-14 years)

Bird seed: \$2.00/bag

Annual Admission:

Family: \$140.00

Individual: \$ 70.00

To better align with requirements of the BC Societies Act, the Board has approved steps to separate public gate admission from formal Society membership. More information will be available on our website.

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Vice President:	Barney W. Reifel
Treasurer:	Kenneth I. Thompson
Secretary:	Liam Reifel

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Community Relations:	George C. Reifel
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Outreach:	George C. Reifel

Staff:

Sanctuary Manager:	Evan Gogal
Gift Shop Manager:	Varri Raffan
Biologist:	Marissa Sasaki
Education:	Dani McRobbie
Maintenance:	Phoenix Black
Field Technicians:	Kristina Breit Kiera Fritsch Jean Zhang

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)
Entry is closed at 3pm, visitors need to leave by 4pm.
The Sanctuary is wheelchair accessible



We now send out a tweet from our Twitter (X) account @ReifelSanctuary when it looks like there is a weather alert, all reservation spots are full, or something interesting has been seen. Facebook account BCWS2023 has also recently been set up.

Call for Photos for the 2027 Calendar

If you have any photos of the Sanctuary that you would like to offer them for our annual calendar, please send us an email or send them in. We are looking for a range of species that represent the diversity of birds that we see in the Sanctuary throughout the year.

Deadline for submissions:

August 31st

Criteria:

Horizontal photos only.

Minimum 4MB size for good reproduction.

Max file size 8MB.

Only photos taken at the Sanctuary.

Submit only 5 of your best photos.

You can drop photos that are 5 X 7 Prints at the Giftshop or email them to varri@reifelbirdsantuary.com



Sanctuary Locations Map

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

About Our Covers

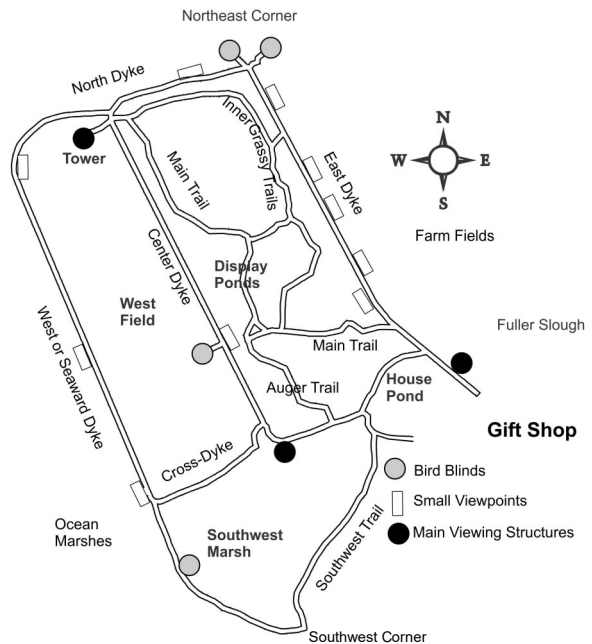
Front Cover: Juvenile Cinnamon Teal

© Kristina Breit

Back Cover: Canada Geese

© Dan Parlee

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 marshnotes@reifelbirdsantuary.com.



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Evan Gogal
Marissa Sasaki

Marissa Sasaki



Display Ponds

Photo: John Whitmore

Manager's Report

The early days of spring in the Sanctuary looked very different this year compared to those previous. With the Westham Island Bridge closure still in effect, only staff and wildlife shared the Sanctuary. After a few months in isolation doing what we could to maintain the Sanctuary, the news the bridge re-opening at the end of March put Sanctuary staff in full swing to get things ready. The bridge opening lined up just in time to welcome back visitors along with the migratory birds returning for the upcoming nesting season.

The beginning of March was spent refreshing the Wood Duck nest boxes. Staff climbed ladders to clean out overwintering rodent nests and to place a fresh layer of wood chips, providing a starting pad for this year's nesting ducks. In the past we would also check for eggshells to determine if the box was used during the previous nesting season while cleaning out the boxes, but this year we opted to take a different approach. Instead, we conducted a separate survey at the end of the 2025 nesting season to determine nest box use. The earlier give us a better idea if the nest successfully hatched young or not.

We also embarked on an aquatic adventure to repair the Sandhill Cranes' favourite nesting island that was damaged during the flood in January. While this island started life as a natural silty island, many years

of erosion from water required it to be reinforced a decade ago. This year's flood waters caused several of the outer supporting logs to shift and led to much of the surface soil washing away. The island was in dire need of a makeover. Staff loaded up a canoe with rocks, soil, logs and fasteners to rebuild a suitable nesting area. Our hard work did pay off in the end and the island had been successfully rebuilt. However, not long after the makeover, a pair of Canada Geese quickly claimed the island for nesting instead of the cranes.



Crane Island repair expedition Photo: Evan Gogal

Repairs to trails and other Sanctuary infrastructure were also underway during March to prepare for the return of Sanctuary visitors. Near the Viewing Tower, wattle fence construction began on the south facing slope of the West Dike. The project goal was to reinforce this particular section of the dike and prevent the soil from eroding away under the trail retaining wall. The edge of this trail was practically a gravel wall, leading to the trail edge to erode and crumble over time. Intervention was required to preserve the integrity of this section of trail.

The large growth of Himalayan Blackberry that once occupied the area was fully removed in February in preparation for the slope reinforcement. Once the pre-existing vegetation was removed, the wattle fence was ready to be constructed. The vision for this area was to build three terraces with wattle fences that provide support for the soil to stay in place. Overtime the fence will decompose, creating a gradual slope that will support plant growth and prevent the trail from eroding in the future.

Installing a wattle fence, or sometimes called a “living fence”, is an easy and inexpensive method to stabilize banks and trail edges. The fence requires only long cuttings and posts, which were harvested from plants growing around the Sanctuary. With wattle fences, the plant materials should be carefully selected as the harvested components will grow into a new plant. For this specific site, we harvested Salmonberry, Red-osier Dogwood, Hardhack, and Twinberry which are all hardy plants and grow well in this area.

To build the fence, we drove larger stakes into the ground and weaved long, thin branches between them.



Completed wattle fence

Photo: Evan Gogal

Soil was then backfilled behind the wattle fences to rebuild the slope, also allowing the cuttings to re-root into the soil over time. Between the three terraces, we planted Nootka Rose, Oceanspray, and Red Osier Dogwood. These native plants will provide food, nesting material and cover for native wildlife while providing slope stability as their roots grow. So far, the wattle fence construction has gone according to plan. Now all we have to do is to wait and see how the fence performs overtime.

By mid-March we were starting to see many of our early spring arrivals in the Sanctuary. Rufous Hummingbirds swarmed the feeders as males began to establish territories while they waited for the females to arrive. Tree Swallows, Barn Swallows and Violet-green Swallows also began returning in time for the emergence of the many aerial and aquatic insects around the Sanctuary. However, our most interesting spring surprise came from a bird that never left for the winter at all.

On March 12th, staff arrived to find a pair of Killdeer nesting in the middle of our gravel parking lot. While this wasn't an issue at the time, we soon realized that with us reopening at the end of March, this Killdeer nest may face some challenges. When we reopened on March 31st to a very busy Tuesday, our Killdeer family still had just under two weeks left before an expected hatch. We put up barriers and signs to help keep the family safe from traffic. Staff also occasionally played “Killdeer crossing guard” until all four eggs hatched and the family moved into the neighboring farm fields on April 12th.

On that same day, we also found our resident pair of



Killdeer pair in the parking lot *Photo: Kristina Breit*

(...../continued page 6)

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Sandhill Cranes sitting on a nest in the Cattail meadow in the middle of the Display Ponds. Unfortunately, the nest didn't last long, and by the next day they were walking around the parking lot together planning for their next attempt. The cranes tried again in West Field at the end of April, this time sticking it out a little longer but with no success there either. A final attempt was made mid-May in the Southwest Marsh. The cranes laid a single egg on a log floating in the pond without building much of a nest at all. This attempt lasted the longest of the three, but also ultimately failed.

As it has only been two years since their last successful nesting attempt, a nest failure isn't unusual for the Cranes. Sandhill Cranes generally only have

between 50% to 70% success rate on nesting attempts in the wild. Here at the Sanctuary, we have observed a pattern of roughly every three to four years with a successful nesting attempt. Although it may seem bleak, with an average lifespan of 30 years, this gives them plenty of time to try again in the future. We hope that next year they have better luck.

With the Westham Island Bridge and the Sanctuary back open, we could finally get materials in to continue the trail repairs that were put on hold. Some trail surfaces were in rough shape, and a few trails had to remain closed upon reopening. Over the coming weeks and months, staff worked hard to get things back in better shape, with all trails being back open by early summer.

By mid-May, the Sanctuary was flush with baby birds. Several broods of Canada Geese and Mallards could be seen swimming through the ponds or walking along the trails. The Red-tailed Hawk nest on our driveway had hatched, and glimpses of baby hawks could be seen on and off. Rufous and Anna's Hummingbirds were also very busy nesting and raising young all around the Sanctuary throughout this period. For most of May and June, the hummingbird feeders needed to be refilled several times a day.

At this point the growing season was also well underway, and staff were in full habitat management mode. Several invasive plant species including Broad-leaved Peavine, Yellow Flag Iris, Purple Loosestrife, and Canada and Bull Thistle were



Canada Goose with goslings

Photo: Evan Gogal



SANDHILL CRANE

Cranes on their "nesting log" in Southwest Marsh

Photo: Wayne Diakow

targeted for removal. These species can spread rapidly, as they all produce millions of seeds that are easily dispersed by wind or water. We worked hard this spring and summer to remove these species when found before they were able to produce seeds and spread. Efforts from the past few years have shown good results in the reduction of both the size and number of patches of these invasive species.

Invasive species removal is an important part of managing the various habitats within the Sanctuary. Many invasive plants can completely take over areas of existing native vegetation that provide important resources such as food, nesting habitat, and cover for many native wildlife species. Some invasive species in the Sanctuary, particularly the Yellow Flag Iris and Purple Loosestrife, can grow in aquatic environments and disrupt waterways. These plants can completely block flows and make it difficult to maintain appropriate water levels for waterfowl, fish and aquatic invertebrates. Our invasive species removal efforts help to maintain proper ecosystem functions within the Sanctuary.

To assist with conveying the importance of our local ecosystems to the public, we partnered with the Vancouver Avian Research Centre (VARC) this summer. On June 14th, VARC set up an information booth along our trails to provide educational opportunities to all Sanctuary visitors. We plan to host the VARC booth on two more dates this year. Everyone in the Sanctuary is welcome to stop for a chat with the knowledgeable hosts to learn about our local birds, volunteering opportunities, and how we can make small changes to improve bird habitat in our own backyards. Visitors can find them on the trails on Saturday, August 15th and Saturday, September 5th between 9:30 AM and 12 PM. To learn more about VARC, you can visit their website at <https://www.birdvancouver.com/>.



*VARC booth set up near the entrance kiosk
Photo: Evan Gogal*

In June we began our annual bat surveys. We've been conducting bat surveys in the Sanctuary since 2024 and have been submitting bat data to the BC Community Bat Program. Two surveys were conducted in June and two more are scheduled for July. We found our highest number of roosting bats (94) in one of our bat boxes since we started these surveys in 2024. In addition roost counts, we also sent guano (poop) samples collected from under the bat boxes to determine species and monitor for a fungus called White Nose Syndrome that is deadly to bats. As of now, we have not received any information regarding the guano sample. The data collected from these surveys improve our understanding of bat populations across BC and help improve conservation efforts for our little furry friends. Gaining understanding of other critters living around the Sanctuary can give us insight on the overall environment and any changes that might be happening around us that may influence the management of the Sanctuary. If you are interested in volunteering to do bat surveys in your local area, you can check for opportunities at <https://bcbats.ca/>.

Text: Evan Gogal
Sanctuary Manager



*Staff removing Loosestrife along Sanctuary islands
Photo: Kristina Breit*

Bird Highlights for March to June 2026

Table of bird highlights by week	
March 1 st —7 th	Canvasback, Black-crowned Night Heron, Wilson's Snipe, Short-eared Owl, Rufous Hummingbird, Peregrine Falcon, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Barn Swallow, American Pipit, Western Meadowlark
March 8 th —14 th	Canvasback, Black-crowned Night Heron, Wilson's Snipe, Caspian Tern, Barred Owl, Rufous Hummingbird, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Barn Swallow, Cedar Waxwing, White-throated Sparrow
March 15 th —21 st	Canvasback, Common Goldeneye, Black-crowned Night Heron, Wilson's Snipe, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Barn Swallow, Western Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird
March 22 nd —28 th	Cackling Goose, Canvasback, Belted Kingfisher, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Shrike, White-throated Sparrow, Western Meadowlark
March 29 th —April 4 th	Brant, Cackling Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Cinnamon Teal, Canvasback, Horned Grebe, Wilson's Snipe, Bonaparte's Gull, Short-eared Owl, Hairy Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Merlin, Common Raven, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, American Pipit, Orange Crowned Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Savannah Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird
April 5 th —11 th	Greater White-fronted Goose, Brant, Cackling Goose, Cinnamon Teal, Canvasback, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Merlin, N. Rough-winged Swallow, Hermit Thrush, Savannah Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird
April 12 th —18 th	Greater White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, Cinnamon Teal, Common Teal, Canvasback, Common Goldeneye, Caspian Tern, Short-eared Owl, Merlin, Purple Martin, Hermit Thrush, American Pipit, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Savannah Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird
April 19 th —25 th	Greater White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Canvasback, Turkey Vulture, Sora, Purple Martin, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Chipping Sparrow
April 26 th —May 2 nd	Greater White-fronted Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Canvasback, Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Band-tailed Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Pileated Woodpecker, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Purple Martin, Yellow Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, Western Tanager, Bullock's Oriole
May 3 rd —9 th	Turkey Vulture, Spotted Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Bonaparte's Gull, Vaux's Swift, Peregrine Falcon, Hammond's Flycatcher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, House Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Townsend's Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole
May 10 th —16 th	Snow Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Stilt Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Mourning Dove, Pileated Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, Warbling Vireo, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Cliff Swallow, House Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Nashville Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole

May 17 rd —23 rd	Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Ring-necked Pheasant, Turkey Vulture, Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Caspian Tern, Western Wood-Pewee, Warbling Vireo, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Bullock's Oriole
May 24 th —30 th	Snow Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Caspian Tern, Black Swift, Western Wood-Pewee, Eastern Kingbird, Bank Swallow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Swainson's Thrush, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole
May 31 th —June 6 th	Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Ruddy Duck, Turkey Vulture, Wilson's Phalarope, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Kingbird, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole
June 7 th —13 th	Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Bufflehead, Green Heron, Turkey Vulture, Mourning Dove, Common Nighthawk, Vaux Swift, Black Swift, Belted Kingfisher, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Brewer's Blackbird, Bullock's Oriole
June 14 th —20 th	Cinnamon Teal, Turkey Vulture, Caspian Tern, Great-horned Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole, Pine Siskin
June 21 th —27 th	Ruddy Duck, Osprey, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Mourning Dove, Great-horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Merlin, Swainson's Thrush, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole

With migration underway and birds moving from the south to the northern hemisphere, you never know what birds will unexpectedly make an appearance in the Sanctuary. During this time of year, excitement is buzzing in the air of the Sanctuary as you never know what you or others will find. The last four months have been very eventful in the bird world, and many exciting species were seen. Please enjoy this slightly longer edition of bird highlights.

March

In March, 81 species of birds were recorded. Maybe I was impatient for spring, but it seemed like just as the calendar flipped from February to March, the feeling of spring was in the air. Around the Sanctuary I could smell the warm and sweet vegetal scent of young leaves and flower buds as plants woke from their long winter nap. Just as life was beginning to sprout from the ground, the once cold and grey sky was also speckled with variety of swallow species that have been absent since last fall.

It wasn't long after the first day of March where sightings of new spring arrivals started to fill the species list. On March 5th, the first metallic-orange flash of a Rufous Hummingbird was seen around the hummingbird feeders at the entrance. Tree, Barn, and Violet-green Swallows also began to fly over house and display ponds. With some of the winter residents still around and spring migrants arriving, the March species list ballooned compared to February.

While some birds are just arrived and began to unpack their bags in preparation for nesting, others were eager to have a head start on the 2026 nesting season. On March 12th we noticed that a pair of Killdeer decided to lay their eggs right at the entrance to the Sanctuary parking lot. Just as other birds arrive and begin thinking of nesting in the Sanctuary, some others do the opposite. Like clockwork, on March 19th, the Black-crowned Night Heron was gone from its winter roost to return to their own mysterious nesting grounds. While I expected to also see the departure of the Canvasbacks by now, the small flock still hung around Robertson's Slough as of March 31st. The



A pair Wilson's Phalarope

Photo: Evan Gogal

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Red-tailed Hawk family

Photo: Dan Parlee

highlights of March were wrapped up by the discovery of a pair of Red-tailed Hawks reusing their nest from last year. It was reported that they were sitting on the nest as of March 31st.

April

Finally, after a three month closure, the Sanctuary was back to regular operation. April was an impressive month for bird diversity, recording a total of 109 species. The Pacific Flyway must have been very busy this month. I think the species list for April reflected the keen eyes of birders that the Sanctuary was lacking during the closure. Some of the easier missed things, like Hairy Woodpecker, early arrivals of Common Yellowthroats and other warblers started to be reported for the species list. Our summer ducks, like the Cinnamon Teal, made its seasonal debut in Southwest Marsh on April 3rd. The first Hermit Thrush of the season was seen on the driveway on April 6th, along a flock of Greater White-fronted Geese swiftly passing over the Sanctuary. Perhaps the most exciting, though, was the sighting of American White Pelicans soaring over the Sanctuary on April 10th. American White Pelicans are such a treat to catch in flight. The whole flock hold their wings out to

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catch the wind and they all fly silently like kites through the sky.

April overall was an exciting month for ducks. While the density of the ducks in the Sanctuary was starting to dwindle, we still saw all of our dabbling and diving ducks. The majority of the Canvasbacks left, a couple of them remained in the Display Ponds of Sanctuary for the remainder of April. A Common Teal was also reported in South West Marsh on April 12th, a rather uncommon duck on this side of the globe.

More species continued to fill the checklist in the last half of the month. On April 18th, Purple Martins were seen flying around their nest boxes located offshore. Additional nest boxes were installed last fall, so hopefully they will enjoy the new real estate and use them for nesting this season. In Display Ponds, the Canvasback duo was joined by a rarely seen female Common Goldeneye on April 19th, and a pair of Blue-winged Teal were spotted in House Pond, along with a Cinnamon Teal on April 21st.

Just as April was coming to a close, we were greeted with the first batch of goslings on April 29th. The



Common Teal

Photo: Jim Martin

little family made their first debut in front of staff by the dike across from the Warming Hut. The little family all piled together into a small ball of feathers and basked in the sun for a little nap. The steep climb up the dike must have been difficult for their short day-old legs. On the last day of the month, several Bullock's Orioles announced their arrivals with their beautiful songs on the driveway. With the Bullock's Orioles loudly singing across the Sanctuary, it finally felt like summer was approaching.

May

In May we recorded 112 species in the Sanctuary. For the most part, May was sunny with only a handful of rainy days. Temperature wise it was pleasantly warm and comfortable. I think the birds thought the same since we had many new species being added to the weekly checklist week after week.

May started off strong as we were greeted by the elusive Western Tanager singing on the Drive Way, and seldom seen House Wren on East Dike on May 7th. At the Ewen Slough blind where the East and North Dike meet, a Spotted Sandpiper was seen flitting about along the shoreline on May 8th. After a period of absence, Cedar Waxwings returned on May 11th to capitalize on the ripe Twinberries and Salmonberries. Just as fruits and berries are becoming readily available, the insects have been forming large plumes all across the Sanctuary as well. Insectivores like Western Wood Pewee and Olive-sided Flycatchers were frequently seen and heard all over the Sanctuary.

Variety of shorebirds have been making a quick pit-stop in the Sanctuary as they continue their migration northward, which drummed up some excitement within the bird watching community. Just

around the entrance in House Pond, a Stilt Sandpiper and a couple of Red-necked Phalaropes were seen foraging with some Dowitchers. Neither bird stuck around for more than a few days though. The Stilt Sandpiper was only seen from May 15th to 17th and the Red-necked Phalaropes were only seen on May 16th. A short and sweet visit for the birds, but I think they have disappointed some visitors who missed them by a day or two. Their nesting season is fairly short so we should see them soon again in August.

While nomadic birds moved through quickly to their nesting grounds, local Sanctuary residents like the Mallards and geese were already hatching young. The first brood of Mallards were seen on May 16th. Surprisingly the ducklings appeared to be already a week old. Evidently the mother hen did a great job keeping her babies well hidden and protected.

Just as I thought the excitement was over in the shorebird world, we had three Wilson's Phalarope appear in West Field from May 19th to May 21st. What a treat to be able to see both Phalarope species sporting their breeding plumage this year. Both species look somewhat similar, as they both have rusty red and grey colours. I find the best way to tell them apart in their breeding plumage is that Wilson's Phalaropes have a lighter grey cap, a white eyebrow, and a black stripe running through their eye like thick "eyeshadow". The "eyeshadow" wraps around to the back of their head and fades into a rusty red colour, which is vibrant along the back of the neck to their upper back, but this colour fades into a light orange in front of their neck and chest. As for the Red-necked Phalaropes, their face is overall a one uniform tone of grey, with a little white eyebrow, and they have a smaller patch of white mostly limited to the throat. The rusty red on their neck wraps all the way around with crisp edges between contrasting colours of white and grey on their body. When the phalaropes are typically seen at the Sanctuary in late summer, they have already molted their breeding plumage for their subdued black and white feathers, which makes it harder to tell them apart.

By the end of May, one of the least expected to be seen birds around here are the Snow Geese. Much to our surprise, a visitor had seen of a small flock of five Snow Geese offshore. Most of them have departed for the north by late March or early April. I wonder if they are the same flock that stuck around from last

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year? A couple of Eastern Kingbirds were seen off and on during the week of May 30th. The pair was seen and reported to be hanging out by the metal Tower in the foreshore and then on South West Trail just behind House Pond. Much like the shorebirds, their visit was very short and eluded many birders who went out to search for them. To finish up the month, on May 31st, the Wilson's Phalaropes made an appearance in the Tower Field once again. This time there were seven individuals seen.

June

In June we recorded 101 species of birds. Bird activity typically quieter as nesting season is in full swing, and most birds have either moved through or they hunker and quiet down while they raise young.

The Eastern Kingbirds continued to be seen until June 2nd, along with the Wilson's Phalaropes in West Field. One Golden-crowned Sparrow was seen hopping along Inner Grassy Trail on June 2nd, which is unusual for this time of the year. Golden-crowned Sparrows are not seen in the Sanctuary over the summer since most of them migrate inland and up the mountains for nesting season. On June 4th, a Mourning Dove was seen strutting down the trails of the Sanctuary. Although Rock Doves and Eurasian Collared Doves are commonly seen in the Sanctuary, it is not often we see Mourning Doves around. At a first glance, they might look like every other pigeon to some, but they are noticeably smaller compared to the other two species of dove and they sport beautiful soft peachy orange-coloured feathers. When they fly away, they show off their white-trimmed tail feathers that form a distinctive diamond shape.



Spotted Sandpiper in House Pond Photo: Evan Gogal

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During the summer, House Pond seems to sometimes attract some of the "rarer" species of birds. On June 7th, much to our surprise, a Green Heron made a quick pitstop. Unfortunately, the heron only stuck around for about 10 minutes before it took off again in the direction of Southwest Marsh, never to be seen again after. Then a few days later on June 10th, a Spotted Sandpiper was seen foraging on one of the small islands. As the name suggests, Spotted Sandpipers have a chest spotted with black dots when they are sporting their breeding plumage. They also have a noticeably distinctive behaviour compared to other shorebirds of their size, in which they make a continual bobbing motion when they are standing still.

Summer time generally is a quiet time for a variety of waterfowl, as most of them migrate out of the Fraser River Estuary for their summer breeding grounds. However, a few of them seem to have stuck around for in low numbers. On June 11th, a small flock of Greater White-fronted Geese were seen flying over the Sanctuary, and a flock of ten Snow Geese were also seen flying offshore from on the 13th. Both species of geese are typically in their breeding grounds of Northern Canada and Alaska by now, so it was odd to see them into late spring. Perhaps some of the Snow Geese are the same individuals seen in May.

On June 16th, the local Great-horned Owl pair made an appearance on East Dike after months of absence. The pair appeared with three juveniles in tow, each of them scattering at the sight of visitors. They are always fun to watch at this age. They are cute and fluffy, and slightly clumsy as they seem to still be learning how their wings and legs work.



Green Heron in House Pond

Photo: Evan Gogal

To wrap up the month, the Sanctuary was hit with a couple of one-day wonders. On June 24th, a Black Phoebe was seen busily flitting around the wooden viewing platform. On the 25th a Ruddy Duck was seen swimming in Southwest Marsh. Unlike some of the other elusive birds, fortunately, the Great-horned Owl family was consistently seen since the 16th out and about, flying to different parts of the Sanctuary. Each day growing more confident and looking less fluffy. Summer feels like its coming to an end once you start to see the young birds acting more like adults.

Text: Marissa Sasaki
Sanctuary Biologist



Juvenile Mallards

Photo: Kristina Breit



Adult Great-horned Owl

Photo: Dan Parlee

The Volunteer Corner

Special thanks to:

- ◆ Mary Taitt for leading our Sunday Bird Walk.
- ◆ Jim Martin and Brian Self for their year-round hosting of visitors on weekends.
- ◆ John Chandler, Carmen Prang, Janice White, Ron Flipp, Kevin Zhou, Lucas Pan, Paige Gardiner and Jim Lowood for helping with trail maintenance during the week.
- ◆ Brian Self, Peter Candido, Ben Lambert, Janice White, Dirk Fleming, Bernice Kajoba, Sabine Jessen, Grant Edwards, Mona Meighan, and Lelah Zimmerman for helping with bi-weekly bird surveys.
- ◆ Clara and Mason Shi for monitoring nest boxes.
- ◆ Margaret Gorham for hosting visitors at the museum every Sunday.
- ◆ Our hard-working volunteer Directors.
- ◆ Brian Self, Carmen Prang, Ron Flipp, and Margaret Gorham for their help in the annual bat survey.

Annual Admission Benefits

- FREE admission for a year to the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary .
- Access to quarterly issue of the BCWS publication “Marshnotes”.
- A 10% discount on purchases in the Sanctuary Gift Shop.
- Support 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 supporters; 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.

The Killdeer Diaries: 28 Days in the Parking Lot

Quiet, well guarded, and convenient access to the grocery store... Is probably what is on every Killdeer family's checklist when they are looking for nesting real estate. During the unexpected three-month closure, when the Sanctuary was absent of visitors, it seems that the empty parking lot ticked off all the boxes for this expecting Killdeer family.

On March 12th, one of the staff spotted an irregular pattern in the gravel. It's one of those things where you think you can see something different but your eyes can't quite make out what it is. Upon further inspection, lo and behold, it was a beginning of a Killdeer nest which already had a two eggs nestled within it. The camouflage of their nest is amazing. The nest is a simple depression lacking any sort of lining. At a first glance, one would think nothing of it without the eggs. Even then, the eggs are just barely distinguishable from an average beach rock. The eggs are dusty grey in colour with darker brown and black specks of various sizes scattered over the shell. Perfect camouflage for blending into rocks. Nearly invisible up close, and entirely invisible even if you were only meters away from it. It was like playing 'Where is Waldo' everyday with the nest despite it being marked with cones (so vehicles wouldn't run it over). Without the cones, all you would see is a pair of worried parents shuffling around and away from the nest hoping that they will provide enough of a distraction so you won't see the nest.

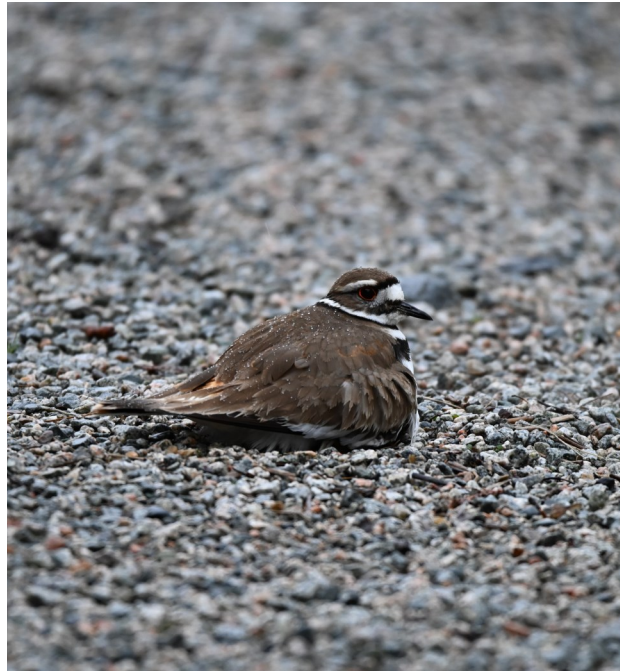
Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) are a species of a



Killdeer nest in the parking lot Photo: Marissa Sasaki

shorebird, which are easily identified by their long legs, brown back, and a white tummy that has two black bands that run parallel across their chest. They are also very noisy birds. They can be heard often making vocalizations that sound supposedly like they are shrieking "killdeer!". Despite being a shorebird, no shores or bodies of water is required for this bird. Killdeer are often seen running through gravel parking lots and grassy fields where they forage for food and nest. Killdeer are one of the most commonly seen shorebirds across North America, but it is not often that one gets the privilege to observe the full nesting cycle of a Killdeer.

While it is not uncommon for us to see several Killdeer families with their chicks suddenly appear somewhere in the Sanctuary, it is not common for us to see their nests out in the open like this one. One might think that this bird made a poor choice (and with vehicles moving about, it certainly is), but when you look at their eggs you can see exactly why they decided to nest in the parking lot gravel. Their preferred nest sites include little to no vegetation, which supposedly helps them detect predators. Once a nest site is selected, both male and female bird will partake in the "scrape ceremony", where the pair will take turns to scrape a nest out of the substrate. Once satisfied, the pair copulate and lay up to four eggs in the scrape. Eggs are laid one at a time, a day or two apart. Once all of the eggs are laid, the male and female will take turns incubating the eggs for 21 to 28 days so all eggs will hatch around the same time.



One of the Killdeer parent sitting on the nest
Photo: Kristina Breit



Killdeer parent keeping the chicks warm, also known as “brooding”

Photo: Kristina Breit

Nesting season for Killdeer typically starts in late February or early March, or may start even later depending on the region.

Killdeers are very dedicated parents. If they feel that their eggs may be in danger, they perform the iconic “broken wing” display. The parent bird holds one of their wings outward on an angle, almost dragging the feathers on the ground to appear injured. The “broken wing” display is very stunning as well as also alarming, but that is intended. The bird then shrills and walks about to grab the attention of the suspected predator and tries to divert attention away from their nest. A few lucky visitors may have been able to observe this fascinating behaviour in our parking lot not long after our re-opening.

For the first few days after reopening, whoever was on nest duty performed the “broken wing” display when cars or people approached. But it seemed the pair accepted the presence visitors quickly and began to relax. They seemed more determined to incubate rather than put on a performance. Incubation is a very important job since it involves keeping the eggs at just the right temperature for the whole duration of egg development. Depending on the surrounding temperature, it is the incubator’s job to keep the eggs perfectly warm or cool. To warm the eggs the parent will simply sit on it and warm the egg with their body temperature but cooling is a little trickier. To cool the eggs the parent stands over the nest to allow air flow or the parent will wet their chest with water to wet the eggs to cool them down.

After 28 days of carefully tending to the eggs, on April 17th the Killdeer family successfully hatched four young. The chicks remained under the wings of one of the parents after the first day of hatching. After

that nothing could stop the chicks from wandering off to where their hearts desired. All four chicks scattered across the parking lot in different directions like dust bunnies in the wind. I wonder if there are any levels of parental guidance to this madness or if the parents simply hope for the best.

Unfortunately, the story of this Killdeer family ends only a few days after hatching. The family quickly gathered their chicks and moved into the farm field behind the picnic area. What happened after that remains a mystery... At least we got to witness the family successfully hatch their young and adorably run around for a few days. I’m wishing them the best of luck on the other side of picnic area.

Text: Marissa Sasaki
Sanctuary Biologist

Reference:

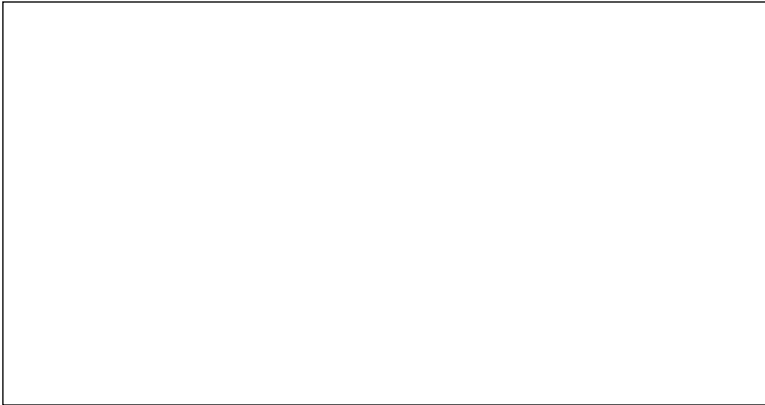
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The parking lot Killdeer young Photo: Kristina Breit

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Goose Pinch © Dan Parlee