

# british columbia–yukon region



## JACK BOWLING

**H**ot, dry weather ruled over southern British Columbia through the first three weeks of August, with occasionally showery weather farther north. From late August through the end of October, the increasing amplitude of the current warm ENSO (El Niño–Southern Oscillation) episode fueled the release of a fantastic amount of weather energy. During this period, an active western Pacific basin typhoon season saw several cyclones re-energize as they were swept into the westerlies, eventually impacting the British Columbia coast with wind and rain. The eastern Pacific basin was also active with hurricanes, *Nora* in late September being possibly implicated in the highly unlikely mid-November appearance of a Xantus's Hummingbird in southwestern British Columbia, Canada's first.

A ridge of high pressure in late September provided some respite from the wind

and rain, but it was nothing compared to the massive blocking ridge which dominated most of November. This feature provided unseasonably mild and dry conditions Regionwide through the month, and allowed many birds to linger record late into the season. Noteworthy this season was not only the expected El Niño-influenced northward push of Brown Pelicans, but also unexpectedly large southbound flights of several tundra breeding birds.

### Abbreviations:

B.C. (*British Columbia*); Iona (*Iona Island, Richmond, B.C.*); Ok. (*Okanagan*); p.v. (*pending verification by responsible Bird Records Committee*); Q.C.I.

(*Queen Charlotte Islands*); Reifel (*Reifel Waterfowl Sanctuary, near Ladner, B.C.*); Rocky Point (*Rocky Point Banding Station, s. Van. I.*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Vic. (*Victoria*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

### LOONS TO HERONS

Pelicans of both colors made news in inside waters. An Am. White Pelican spent September wandering around the Greater Van. area. First seen at Reifel Sept. 2, it was tracked to Brunswick Pt. Sept. 3 (†JAM, HNM), then Iona, Burnaby L., and finally Serpentine Fen Sept. 20 on (m.ob.). An unprecedented invasion of Brown Pelicans into s. coast waters occurred, starting with a single bird at San Simeon Pt., s. Van. I., Aug 25 (KR). The invasion peaked Oct. 4 at Rocky Point when 68 birds were counted (MM, JDT), a record one-day tally. A few made it across Georgia Strait to the Van. area, with singles seen from Iona (RTo), Crescent Beach (MTo), and the Tsawwassen Jetty (D. McKay) during September. The

last was observed at Reifel Nov. 10 (JI), in flight with a flock of Trumpeter Swans!

Still only an irregular visitor to the Region, a **Great Egret** visited the Saanichton Bay area, s.e. Van. I., Sept. 4–9 (NH, BRG). Cattle Egrets staged a better-than-average invasion into s. B.C., the earliest observed at Kelowna Oct. 11 (CH, MG). Subsequent sightings, about 12 birds, came from Tofino (D. Banks, m.ob.), Duncan (DM), Somass R. (SMcR), Princeton (MS, RJC), Skookumchuck (BJ), Edgewood (JP, BKO), Kaslo (LM), and McLure (RRH) during the first 2 weeks of November, about one month later than last year.

### WATERFOWL TO CRANES

A good-sized flock of 300 Greater White-fronted Geese at Running R., Yukon, Aug. 20–23 (CE, PS) presaged a heavier-than-usual interior passage, with 1000 at Creston, W. Kootenays, Sept. 21 (BKO), a new interior high. The Creston Valley area routinely hosts the greatest numbers of this goose in the Region.

Quite local in Yukon, an Osprey was at the Beaver R., s.e. Yukon, Aug. 16 & 19 (BrB), while singles were at Teslin L. Sept. 27 (CE, PS) and again Oct. 5 (CE, PS), the last sighting tying the record-late date for the species. Davidson reports an almost total breeding failure of Osprey nesting along the 55 km of power poles between Fauquier and Nakusp in the W. Kootenays. Only two young from 30 nests fledged in 1997, compared to 15 to 20 young fledged in 1995. Declining food fish levels caused by falling nutrient levels in the nearby reservoirs are thought to be the main reason.

Broad-winged Hawks were conspicuous by their relative absence this fall, with one passing over Rocky Point Sept. 28 (MGS, BGI, LKW, RAG) constituting the only report. Most interesting was the dark-morph ad. Swainson's Hawk at Sea I. near Van. Airport Aug. 19 (MKM); coastal sightings of this species are rare.

Unprecedented numbers of Sandhill Cranes were observed this fall on s. Van. I.: a flock of 42 overflowed Rocky Point Oct. 2 (MM, JDT), and 80–100 spent the night of

Oct. 4–5 in the Mt. Newton Valley area near Vic. (Ted. Clayards).

#### SHOREBIRDS

Three Am. Avocets discovered at the mouth of the Serpentine R. at Boundary Bay Oct. 19–Nov. 19 (DCR, SER, m.ob.) were joined by two more Nov. 20 on. Another avocet present farther west along Boundary Bay Oct. 24–26 (WCW, m.ob.) may have been a separate bird from this group. There are only 2 previous October or later records for the Region. Probably the best-ever fall flight of Upland Sandpipers w. of the Rockies occurred this season, especially with the initial pulse of young birds in mid-August. Sightings included one each at Prince George (†SK, LL) and Iona (RTo, KeK) Aug. 16; another juvenile at the e. end of the main runway at Van. Airport Aug. 19 (†MPr, ph. EWH); and another at Fort St. James, c. B.C., near the local rail yard Aug. 20 (RRa). The final Upland was heard in flight at Iona Sept. 2 (†MPr).

Two juv. Hudsonian Godwits, rare in the fall, were at the foot of 112th St., Delta, Aug. 19–22 (MKM, m.ob.). A **White-rumped Sandpiper** at Running R., n. Yukon, Aug. 19 (†CE) provided one of only a few Yukon records. A Pectoral Sandpiper along the Yukon R., Whse., on the incredibly late date of Nov. 11 (GW, MW) initiated discussion on whether it was a late straggler or had been blown up from the south during high winds the previous day. There was a higher than usual number of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers noted, including single juveniles at the Nisutlin Delta Sept. 7 & 28 (ph. †CE, PS), the latter a new late date for the Yukon. Farther south, young Sharp-taileds showed up at Reifel Sept. 13–27 (SO, m.ob.); two at the foot of 96th St., Delta, Sept. 20–21 (m.ob.); and several singles from Iona Sept. 20 (BS), Sept. 25 (TP, RTo), Sept. 27 (MPr), and Oct. 6 (MPr).

Blowing away all previous high single-location counts of Stilt Sandpipers for any season were the tallies of 50+ at Iona Aug. 17 (MPr) and again Aug. 21 (MWy), and 58 at Reifel Aug. 18 (BGS). Five Stilt Sandpipers, rare in s. Yukon, were at the Nisutlin Delta Aug. 31, with three more there Sept. 7 providing the 2nd September Yukon record (CE, PS). Elusive in the Region, but most expected in n. Yukon, single Buff-breasted Sandpipers touched down at Running R., n. Yukon, Aug. 17 & 20 (ph. CE, PS); in s.w. B.C., another was observed at the foot of 104 St., Delta, Aug. 22 (RTo). Five Ruffs were observed, with three in the Greater Van area—one at the foot of 96th St.,

Delta, Aug. 21–Sept. 13 (m.ob.) and Oct. 18 (MF), and one at Reifel Sept. 12–13 (JAM, HNM). Two were on Van. I., one at Combers Beach near Tofino Aug. 26 (AC), and another at Oak Bay, Vic., Sept. 17–28 (B. Schmore, m.ob.).

In recent years, Red-necked Phalaropes have been sparse off s. Van. I. waters. However, the 4000 off Edey Pt. Sept. 4 (BMG, A. Williams) were reminiscent of days gone by. Inland, the 250 Red-neckeds at Glenmore Landfill, Kelowna, Aug. 25 (JW) represented a very high concentration for the interior. A **Red Phalarope** at Beach Grove, Delta, Nov. 23 (R. Worona) was unusual by apparently not being a storm-driven wreck.

#### GULLS TO WOODPECKERS

A very late Parasitic Jaeger was southbound off Daniel Pt., Sunshine Coast, Nov. 9 (DoB). Young **Little Gulls** continued to be seen across the s. coast, including one frequenting a golf course in Parksville, s.e. Van. I., Sept. 13–15 (DM); other ones were seen in Active Pass Oct. 2 (HNM, JAM) and Nov. 7 (BD), and off Pt. Roberts, WA, Oct. 9 (PD) & 18 (DGC, MPr). The 2nd-summer Slaty-backed Gull—Yukon's first-ever—observed July 30 in Whse. was last seen Aug. 2 (ph. †CE, m.ob.). Unusual inland, a Black-legged Kittiwake was at Kalum L. near Terrace, B.C., Oct. 18 (DVG). Although only a shadow of last fall's record Sabine's Gull migration, this season produced several sightings. Inland Sabine's included two immatures at Nulki L. near Vanderhoof, c. B.C., Sept. 6 (CA, NK), an adult at Proctor, s.e. B.C., Oct. 5 (Bko, LM), and another at Tranquille, Kamloops, Oct. 30 (SyR). The coastal passage was brief and well-defined, with single adults at Crescent Beach, e. Boundary Bay, Sept. 13 (FC, BoS), and in mid-Georgia Strait Sept. 14 (KeK, KrK, MPr); while an immature passed by Iona Sept. 15 (RTo, MWy).

The anticipated Elegant Tern influx into the s. coast of B.C. was a bust. There were only two birds reported (without †) in Van. Harbor Oct. 4. Why the birds streamed into Washington State but stayed out of Canadian waters is unknown.

The waters of Juan de Fuca Strait between Vic. and Race Rocks often host large numbers of seabirds. Of particular note this fall were the 5000+ Ancient Murrelets observed Nov. 21 (BRG). Four Horned Puffins were seen between Louscoone Pt., Moresby I., and Anthony I. off the s.w. tip of the Q.C.I. Sept. 3 (ES); perhaps the species is gradually increasing in numbers there.

The famed migrant trap of Tofino on

the s.w. coast of Van. I. drew in the Region's 4th **White-winged Dove** Nov. 17–26 (ph AD, m.ob.); the previous sightings were all from s. Van. I., the most recent from just down the road in Ucluelet in the fall of 1994.

Long-eared Owl sightings away from s. B.C. are generally restricted to single birds, as typified by the one at the Lower Blaeberly Valley, c.e. B.C., Nov. 8 (DL). Astonishing, then, was the discovery of a roost on Trueman I., Quesnel, c. B.C., Oct. 23 (A&D Leather), initially of four birds, six–eight Oct. 29, and three Oct. 29. There were 2 large flocks of migrating Com. Nighthawks noted: 100–200 near Haines Jct. Aug. 15 (J McIntyre), the largest nighthawk concentration ever recorded in the Yukon, and 300 s. of Penticton Aug. 30 (RJC). A Black Swift nest with one young, always a tough find, was discovered near Nelson, W. Kootenays, in mid-August (LVD). The season's farthest wandering Anna's Hummingbird turned up at a Terrace, B.C., yard Nov. 3, 11 & 12 (DVG), where it frequented tubular flowers which were still in bloom due to unseasonably warm weather.

**SA** The bird of the season, and the one given the “least likely to repeat” honor by many, had to be the **Xantus's Hummingbird** which showed up at the Pattersons' yard in Gibson's, s.w. B.C., Nov. 16 (L. Levy, L&G Patterson). The bird was identified to species Nov. 20 by Tyson. The word was passed around quickly and it became one of the most visited and photographed B.C. vagrants ever, thanks to the Pattersons' interest and generosity. With only 2 California sightings, this endemic imp of s.e. Baja has shown little penchant for wandering. The 3 possible human-assisted transportation scenarios—escape from captivity, illegal importation, and ship-assisted passage—will have to be addressed by the Bird Records Committee. However, the fact that hurricane *Nora* tracked northward just off the w. coast of the Baja peninsula Sept. 24–25, packing 60–80 knot winds before moving inland, lends support to the possibility of an initial weather-related impetus. The bird was variously identified as a female or a young male, something that could ultimately be determined with time if it stayed around long enough. It was still there at season's end.

An ad. male Red-naped Sapsucker observed at Benjamin Pt., Moresby I., Q.C.I., Sept. 5 (ES) was the archipelago's first; previous offshore records were all from s.e. Van. I.

**FLYCATCHERS TO FRINGILLIDS**

Captures from Rocky Point suggest that many species may be moving through somewhat later than previously thought. A juv. Willow Flycatcher was captured there Sept. 13 (MGS et al.) and recaptured Sept. 16 (COB et al.). A Pacific-slope Flycatcher was netted Oct. 10 (COB et al.), and a Hammond's Oct. 12 (MGS et al.). A very late Olive-sided Flycatcher was at Naramata, S. Ok., Sept. 27 (T. Lowery).

An Ash-throated Flycatcher was present at Blackie Spit, Surrey, B.C., Oct. 5 (*vide* HNM). Fall visits by this species are becoming more regular. There were 7 sightings of likely three–four **Tropical Kingbirds** from the Tofino and Ucluelet areas on s.w. Van. I. Oct. 5–Nov. 29 (p.v., AD, RP, †DGC, AC, m.ob.). Another bird fitting the description of Tropical Kingbird was observed feeding along the shore at Whiffin Spit, Sooke, s. Van. I., Oct. 12 (p.v., Emma, Theresa & Bill McMillan, JH).

The mild fall allowed several species to linger later than usual in the s. interior, including a Barn Swallow at Pentiction Nov. 20 (ILR), a Cliff Swallow at Nakusp Nov. 11 (GSD), a MacGillivray's Warbler at Vernon Oct. 4 (CS), a Nashville Warbler at Nelson Oct. 19 (BKO), a Wilson's Warbler at Kamloops Nov. 23 (N&S Saemerow), and a thus far unidentified **Empidonax** flycatcher at Pentiction Nov. 6 & 7 (ILR). A **Brown Creeper**, Yukon's 2nd documented bird, was at Haines Jct. Nov. 21 (†TH).

Two Winter Wrens, very rare in the Yukon, were present along the Beaver R., s.e. Yukon, Aug. 14 (BrB); another was well-described from Marshall Cr. Sept. 7–8 (†LA). A Gray Catbird, Vic.'s first, was at Rithet's Bog Nov. 9–12 (SE, m.ob.). A N. Mockingbird appeared at Castlegar about Oct. 11, staying until at least Nov. 2 (A. Jones). A count of 700 Dark-eyed Juncos at Teslin Sept. 13 (CE, LC) was indicative of a significant movement at that time, and provided the largest tally on record for the Yukon.

An ad. male **Hooded Oriole**, the Region's 3rd in 1997, showed up at a Terrace, B.C., feeder Nov. 19 (ph. S&G Thomas, †DVG) and was still there at the end of the period. Two Bullock's Orioles turned up in Tofino: an ad. female Oct. 16–23 (AD, RP) and an immature Oct. 25–26 (AD, DGC);



Rare so far north, but surprisingly the third one of the year for this Region, was this male Hooded Oriole at Terrace, British Columbia, on November 23, 1997. Photograph/Garnet Thomas

the species is very rare on the outer coast. Stormy weather caused a big fallout of Savannah Sparrows on the Q.C.I., with 85 at Sandspit Sept. 26 and 150 at Masset Sept. 28 (MH, PH).

**Initialed contributors and sub-regional editors (in boldface):** Libby Anderson, Cathy Antoniazzi, Bruce Bennett (BrB), Doug Brown (DoB), Linda Cameron, **Richard J. Cannings** (RJC), **Donald G. Cecile** (DGC), Fred Cooke, Aziza Cooper, Linda van Damme (LVD), **Gary S. Davidson** (GSD), Phil Davis, Brent Diakow, Adrian Dorst, Cameron Eckert, Sue Ennis, Mike Force, Mark Gardiner, Brian Gates (BRG), D. Val George (DVG), Ryan A. Gill (RAG), **B. Max Gotz** (BMG), Bev Glover, **Tony Greenfield**, **Helmut Grunberg**, Clemens Hackenberg, **Peter Hamel**, Todd Heakes, Margo Hearne, Norma Holmes, John Horchik, Richard R. Howie (RRH), John Ireland, Sandra Kinsey, Ken Klimko (KeK), Kris Klimko (KrK), Burke Korol (BKO), Nancy Krueger, Bob Jamieson, Laird Law, Doug Leighton, Jo Ann Mackenzie (JAM), Hue N. Mackenzie (HNM), Martin K. McNicholl (MKM), Sandy McRuer (SMcR), Derrick Marven, Mitch Meredith, Libor Michalak, Colleen O'Brien (COB), Stan Olsen, Rory Patterson, Tom Plath, Jim Prentice, Michael Price (MPr), Randy Rawluk (RRa), Karen Reid,

Syd Roberts (SyR), David C. Robinson (DCR), I. Laurie Rockwell (ILR), Susan E. Rothstein (SER), Madelon Schouten, Brian Scott, Brian G. Self (BGS), **Michael G. Shepard** (MGS), **Chris Siddle**, Pamela Sinclair, Bonnie Stout, (BoS), Ed Swan, Mike Toochin (MTo), Rick Toochin (RTo), **Danny Tyson** (DTy), Wayne C. Weber (WCW), Jason Weir, Gerry Whitely, Mary Whitely, Evelyn Whiteside (EWh), Mark Wynja (MWy).

**Jack Bowling**, RR1-514-C41, Prince George, BC V2N 2H8. (jbowling@direct.ca)



Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 21.