

# British Columbia/ Yukon Region

## JACK BOWLING

The incessant westerly storm track which predominated through spring decayed only slowly through June. Storms diminished gradually in frequency, but not necessarily in intensity. Generally cloudy, showery weather in June prevailed across most of British Columbia, while Yukon and the northeast corner of British Columbia remained a bit warmer and drier. The storm track finally moved northward and subsided through July, with the first heat wave of the summer kicking in during the last ten days. Lake and river levels remained well-above seasonal normals through the period, although flooding was prevented by the gradual warmup during June. Many pond-nesting birds in the interior were affected by the high water. Vagrants of note included Whooper Swan, Snowy Plover, and Acorn Woodpecker on the coast; and wandering Caspian Terns in the interior.



Abbreviations: a.t. (*audiotaped*); BBS (*Breeding Bird Survey*); B.C. (*British Columbia*); D.C. (*Dawson Cr.*); F.S.R. (*Forest Service Rd.*); Ok. L. (*Okanagan L.*); Ok. Vly (*Okanagan Valley*); NWT (*Northwest Territories*); P.G. (*Prince George*); p.v. (*pending verification by responsible Bird Records Committee*); S.T.P. (*Sewage Treatment Plant/Ponds*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Vic. (*Victoria*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

## Loons to Rails

Three Red-throated Loons at Kinney L., Mt. Robson P.P., June 1 (MPh) were the first ever recorded in the park. A pair of Horned Grebes discovered on a nest containing 6 eggs at the Hominka Marsh, 130 km n.e. of P.G., June 10 (SK, LL) provided the first nesting record for the P.G. checklist area. The W. Grebe colony at Salmon Arm, B.C., had a record-breaking nesting season with 177 young produced (FK), welcome news for a beleaguered species. Also summering at the colony were two ad. Clark's Grebes (FK). One, a male by behaviour, was seen helping a ♀ W. Grebe feed young and may have been the father of a mixed parentage brood. Several procellariids were seen nearer shore than normal. Observed in Canadian waters at the mouth of Juan de Fuca Strait between Van. I. and the Olympic Peninsula, WA, from the NOAA ship McArthur (BT) were a Laysan Albatross July 5 and a Flesh-footed Shearwater July 6. A single N. Fulmar was seen

in Juan de Fuca Strait from the ferry M.V. Coho July 14 (BRG). Most interesting was an Am. Bittern seen at a pond s. of Great Central L., s.c. Van. I., June 16 (BSI, RC); the species had previously been regarded as absent from the area. Two Great Blue Heron nests found near Port Clements, Q.C.I., in early June (J. Hageman) and visited again June 9 (PH, MH) were the first for Graham I. Previously discovered nests were from the s. end of the archipelago. At least six Great Blues were at the Eaglet L. Marsh, 30 km e. of P.G., June 23 (HA, MPh), suggesting local breeding. A Great Egret at Somenos L., Duncan, June 24 (DM) was the season's only reported sighting of this occasional

spring irruptive. A Whooper Swan at Seal Bay, Comox, e. Van. I., July 26 (p.v., ph. †D&MI, BMS), potentially the Region's first, was subsequently seen by many observers. Rare so far north was a pair of Gadwalls at Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T., on the Arctic coast June 11 (PJ). A Sharp-shinned Hawk nest with 5 eggs found in the Aleza L. Research Forest, 50 km e. of P.G., June 11 (MPh) became the first nest of this accipiter ever found in B.C.'s c. interior. A Cooper's Hawk seen e. of Vanderhoof, c. B.C., July 18 (NK, SPh) provided one of about 10 records for the P.G. checklist area, and the first for the Vanderhoof area since June 1952.

Indicative of the slow increase of Broad-winged Hawks in B.C. over the past several years, there were 3 sightings of adults away from their historical range in the Peace R. area: a light morph June 13 (†MPh, SPh) and a dark morph June 20 (HA) in the Eaglet L. area, 30 km e. of P.G., likely a mated pair; and a light morph in the lowlands around Revelstoke June 16 & 19 (DPo). In the Peace R. area itself, the suspected locus of expansion, 3 Broad-winged nests were found in July (RWC). Under Ministry of Environment scrutiny after the massive poisoning on their wintering grounds in Argentina this past year, it was encouraging to hear of 3 active Swainson's Hawk nests being found in the Vernon, n. Ok. Vly, area June 9 (CS, JCo), 2 in typical undisturbed Ponderosa pines, but another in a Manitoba maple overhanging a busy golf course.

Uncommon in the Yukon, two dark-morph Swainson's Hawks were observed at km 434 and 444 of the Dempster Hwy June 15 (PJ). Providing only the 2nd record for the local checklist area was one-two calling Virginia Rails at the Eaglet L. Marsh, 30 km e. of P.G., June 23 (HA, MPh).

## Shorebirds to Woodpeckers

An apparent ad. ♂ Snowy Plover at Roberts Bank Causeway, Delta, June 18 (p.v., †GAP, HP, †BB, EM, m.ob.) constituted a potential 9th Regional sighting and the first since May 1989. An Am. Avocet at Rithet's Bog, Saanich, June 4-7 (L. Durda, †MOS, †BRG, ph. DFF, m.ob.) was likely a migrant. Otherwise, shorebird migration was generally steady and on time. A Greater Yellowlegs nest with 4 eggs found in a recent clearcut in the Niteal Cr. area, 250 km s. of Ft. Nelson, June 10 (ph. TG) provided the northernmost confirmed nesting of the species in British Columbia. However, breeding records exist for the Yukon. An unaged Willet in the Tofino area July 2-3 (MGe)

provided only the 2nd local record. An apparent juv. Wilson's Phalarope at the Tofino S.T.P., July 27–31 (AC, v.t. BSI, AD) provided the first record for the w. coast of Van. I. An evening boat ride along Teslin L., July 27 became very exciting when two Long-tailed Jaegers, a species at home on the Arctic tundra but only rarely seen in the s. Yukon, appeared and followed the vessel for 15 minutes (MG). Six S. Polar Skuas were at the mouth of Juan de Fuca Strait off s.w. Van. I.: two adults and one immature July 5, and three unaged individuals the next day (BT). This is a high total for the area and season. With only one previous record for the Yukon, an ad. Franklin's Gull was a highlight of a trip to Toobally Lakes, s.e. Yukon, June 13 (ph. †CE, HG, PS). An ad. Glaucous-winged Gull and a 3rd-summer Glaucous at the Whse. landfill July 15 (CE) provided first local summer records for both species.

**SA** The Caspian Tern expansion continues. They are now a regular summer visitor to the s. coast of B.C., with the highest concentration at the mouth of the Fraser R., as evidenced by the 289 loafing on the Iona I. South Jetty June 30 (MPr, KI, m.ob.), a new high single-location count. The s.e. Van. I. compiler notes "numbers continue to build in the area, however, most birders have stopped reporting them..." High counts for s.e. Van. I. included eight at Price Bay July 6 (J. Day), and four in Juan de Fuca Strait July 13 (DP). The species is justly famous for its wanderings, which are ever-widening in this corner of its range. This season there were reports from: Vernon—two June 8 (CS); Whitehorse—one June 9 (AG), first record for the Yukon; Port Alberni—four June 26 (DGC), the 2nd local occurrence; Fort St. James, c. interior B.C.—two July 20 (SK, ph. NK, LL, SPh), first local record; and P.G.—two July 26 (EL), 2nd local record and possibly the same two Fort St. James birds seen previously. Observers are asked to continue to note all occurrences of this species, especially those involving breeding activity.

Perhaps due to a failed nesting attempt, an ad. Com. Tern found its way to Tofino, s.w. Van. I., June 29 (MGe). Up to six Arctic Terns, all in sub-ad. plumage and possibly summering in the area, were spotted at the mouth of Juan de Fuca Strait from the NOAA vessel McArthur July 3–6 (BT). Black Terns were displaced from many of their traditional breeding



Caspian Tern is expanding its numbers and range in the northwest. These two, at Fort St. James, British Columbia, July 20, 1996, furnished a first local record. Photograph/Nancy Kreuger.

marshes in the n. half of B.C. by high water levels, e.g. Neilson L. and Arctic Loon L. near Prince George. With only 3 previous Yukon records involving one–two birds each, the discovery of a breeding colony of approximately 50 Black Terns at Blind L., 25 km e. of Watson L., June 16 (CE, HG, GM) was astonishing. Barn Owls which nested at Hovey Rd., C. Saanich, s.e. Van. I., were seen numerous times through the period (BB, BWh). Of the seven nestlings, at least six fledged. A Flammulated Owl heard calling at Newgate, s.e. B.C., along the United States border June 1 (RJC) provided one of very few records for the E. Kootenays. In the dry s. interior, W. Screech-Owls are restricted to wetter valley habitats. Census work by Cannings turned up one adult and three juveniles at Kearns Cr., near Oliver, and a pair at Trout L., Summerland, July 31 (RJC, IM). Farther east, another at Granby R., Grand Forks, June 15–16 provided one few records for the Kootenays.

There were a couple of N. Hawk Owl sightings in the Yukon, one 60 km w. of Dawson City June 22 (NK, BoK, BrK, SH), and another at Shadow L., Whse., July 21–22 (BrB, DRu, KRu), where there are only a few summer records. A Short-eared Owl winging over the marshes of Swan L., June 23 and July 1 (HG) provided a rare summer record for s. Yukon. There were 2 huge flocks of the enigmatic Black Swift observed, one of 520 at Nulki L., 15 km s. of Vanderhoof, July 19 (NK, MPh, SPh), and another of 200 at Port Alberni Aug. 2 (DGC). Other than the fact that large congregations seem to be tied to the low ceilings associated with bad weather, there is much about this species

to be learned by the intrepid researcher. A probable sub-ad. ♂ Acorn Woodpecker at Maple Ridge, 30 km e. of Van., June 15 (p.v. H&G Carelse) and present the next day (†DSB, R. Kenzie, A. Newman), provided a potential first record for Canada. An ad. ♂ Red-naped Sapsucker was in the cold spruce forests of Kinney L., Mt. Robson P.P., June 1 (MPh), representing a first park record and somewhat out of habitat. Williamson's Sapsuckers seem to be expanding their range. Several nests were found in larch forest along the e. edge of their range near Greenwood, e. of Osoyoos, in June (JCo); and another nest with young was found near Isabel L., n. of Kamloops, June 2 (CS, RRH). A pair of White-headed Woodpeckers was glimpsed near Naramata, s. Ok. Vly, June 21 (Ray Wershler). As usual, this was a will-o-the-wisp appearance, with subsequent attempts to relocate the birds fruitless. Likely the same Pileated Woodpecker as seen in May in Watson L., Yukon, was seen again there June 26 (BrB).

### Flycatchers to Waxwings

A Willow Flycatcher at Dowitcher L., 40 km s.w. of P.G., June 23 (a.t. SK, LL) provided the first record for the P.G. checklist area. A well-documented Dusky Flycatcher, formerly considered accidental on Van. I., was observed at Sooke Potholes P.P., Sooke, s. tip of Van. I., June 21 (p.v. †JAM, EH). This constitutes a potential 3rd sighting for Van. I. within the past 2 years. Pacific-slope Flycatchers appear to be increasing in the P.G. area, with one just s.w. of downtown P.G., July 6 (MPh SPh), and a high total of six calling males in mature cedar forest along the Sugar-bowl Hiking Trail, 80 km e. of P.G., July

27 (NK, LL, SPh). As last summer, a pair of E. Phoebes was seen carrying nesting material to a location under the La Biche R. Bridge, extreme s.e. Yukon, June 26–July 6 (CE, PS). This is the only known location of this species in the Yukon.

Extralimital **Western Kingbirds** made their way to Whse., June 1 (ph., JMcC, PN, HT) for a first Yukon record, and to the Salmon Vly, 25 km n. of P.G., June 9 (SK, LL), the P.G. checklist area's 2nd. A Blue Jay was heard at Birch Rd., N. Saanich, July 15 (BD), and another was seen in the vicinity July 20 (BB). A single Am. Crow overflying the muskeg of Niteal Cr. near the Sikanni Chief R., 250 km s. of t. Nelson, June 1 (TG), in addition to a flock of about 30 eating grasshoppers at the Ft. Nelson Airport July 31 (JB), were indicative of the species' increase in n.e. B.C. over the past 10 years. Two–three crows all summer used to be the norm around Ft. Nelson. A family group of Chestnut-backed Chickadees at Penny, 120 km e. of P.G., June 29 (MPh, SPh) provided the first breeding record for the P.G. checklist area and the first n. of 52N latitude. Winter Wrens are tied to the moister regimes in the interior and are rare in the Yukon. One was observed at McDonald Cr. near Watson L., June 3 (BrB, WN), and another was at the La Biche R., s.e. Yukon, July 2 (CE, PS). A ♂ and ♀ **Northern Wheatear** taking food into a crevice in a rocky roadbank one km e. of the Alaska border June 22 (BoK, BrK, NK, SH) provided the first probable nesting record for the Yukon's Top of the World Hwy (WN, *vide* NK). A **Gray Catbird** was completely lost when it turned up singing at Old Masset, n. Q.C.I., June 17–20 (MH, †PH), the first record for the Charlottes. A Sage Thrasher was observed at White L., Oliver, June 18 (a.t. B. O'Dear), and four adults and one juvenile were at Chopaka along the Washington State border July 22 (BKo). This species is a rare but regular summer visitor to the sagebrush flats of extreme s. British Columbia. A Cedar Waxwing made it up to Toobally Lakes, s.e. Yukon, June 15 (CE, HG, PS), and a flock of 11 was at the La Biche R., s.e. Yukon, June 26 (CE, PS), where the species appears to have a significant foothold.

### Vireos to Blackbirds

Two Solitary Vireos were heard on the Rancheria BBS in s.e. Yukon June 10 (HG), and one was still there June 20. This is perhaps the westernmost sighting of the species in the Yukon. A Red-eyed Vireo heard in Watson L., June 17 (WN,

PS), and another nearby June 17–19 (CE, HG), were 250 km w. of the species' stronghold in the La Biche R. area of s.e. Yukon. A **Nashville Warbler** seen near Wolfe L., Zeballos, w. Van. I., July 16 (†MKM) provided one of only a few Van. I. records. Three ad. ♂ Cape May Warblers, a s.e. Yukon specialty, were on territory along Siwash Cr. near Toobally Lakes June 12 (CE, HG, PS). The same observers found Bay-breasted Warblers to be quite common in that area in mid-June (CE, HG, PS). This extends the species' known Yukon range 100 km westward. And the discovery of a Bay-breasted nest at the La Biche R., extreme s.e. Yukon, July 2 (PS) provided a first breeding record for the Yukon. A **Black-and-white Warbler**, accidental on Van. I., was reported from Currie Cr., L. Cowichan, June 16 (p.v., MGS). If accepted, this would provide Van. I.'s 2nd record. A ♀ W. Tanager attending a tiny fledgling near the La Biche R., s.e. Yukon, July 5 (CE, PS) provided the first confirmed breeding record for the Yukon. Known as breeders only e. of the Rockies, a ♂ **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** watched singing at the Shelley Oxbows, 10 km e. of P.G., June 6 (MPh, SPh) was joined by one–two other males June 14 (NK, SPh, SH). The birds were active in the area for a few weeks. A **Brewer's Sparrow**, likely on its way NW, was watched singing along the Mossvale E.S.R., 40 km n.w. of P.G., June 3 (†LL), a first record for the P.G. checklist area. Restricted as breeding birds in the Ok. Vly to a small and very local population, five Grasshopper Sparrows at White L., Oliver, July 1 (SGC, LR), and one at the W. Bench, Pentiction, July 2 (RAC) were good finds. A Le Conte's Sparrow carrying food near the La Biche R., s.e. Yukon, July 2 (CE, PS) indicated probable nesting. Generally considered one of the Region's rarest birds, Campbell discovered no fewer than 52 Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows, including several nests, in suitable habitat n. of D.C. during field work in July (RWC). It appears the only accurate way to census this species is by flushing the birds. A singing **White-throated Sparrow** at Whse., Yukon June 24 (MJ) provided a first record for the area. This bird, possibly joined by another, stayed in the vicinity through early July (JeB, HG). Campbell discovered many dead and dying broods of marsh-nesting birds during a month of field work in n. B.C. beginning mid-June. Icterids such as Red-winged Blackbirds and Com. Grackles were especially hard hit in some marshes. It is believed that the cool spring and early summer weather had decreased available insect prey, leading to

starvation (RWC). Could the high water also have contributed to this next weird tidbit? During an early July census near Swan L., D.C., the same observer found Com. Grackles nesting in the following structures: the lower part of an active Bald Eagle nest; a flicker cavity; the top of a willow stub overhanging water; and in live willows! The Yukon's first documented pair of Brewer's Blackbirds, discovered near Upper Liard, s.e. Yukon, May 29 (TD), was joined by another pair June 9 (CE), and a single male was there June 17 (WN, PS).

### Corrigendum

In *AFN* 50:2, the initials KJ should have translated into Kelsi Jonsson.

### Initialed contributors and sub-regional

**editors (in boldface):** Helen Antoniazzi, Daniel S. Bastaja (DSB), Jeremy Baumbach (JeB), Barbara Begg, Bruce Bennett (BrB), R. Wayne Campbell (RWC), Richard J. Cannings (RJC), Robert A. Cannings (RAC), Sydney G. Cannings (SGC), **Don G. Cecile** (DGC), Aziza Cooper, John Cooper (JCo), Rela Cripps, Brent Diakow, Adrian Dorst, Terry Doyle, Cameron Eckert, **David F. Fraser** (DFF), Margaret Garolitz, Bryan R. Gates (BRG), Martin Gebauer (MGe), Alex Gray, **Peter Greenfield**, **Helmut Grunberg**, **Tony Hamel**, Margo Hearne, Steve Hibbard, Else Holzken, Richard R. Howie (RRH), Doug and Marion Innes (D&MI), Karen Irving, Paul Jones, Marylene Jules, Frank Kime, Sandra Kinsey, Burke Korol (BKo), Bob Krueger (BoK), Brenda Krueger (BrK), Nancy Krueger, Elsie Lafreniere, Laird Law, Eric MacBean, Jo Ann Mackenzie (JAM), R. Doug McRae (RDM), Jeanette McCrie (JMCC), Ian McLaren, Martin K. McNicholl (MKM), Derrick Marven, Geoff Morrison, Patu Nash, Wendy Nixon, Marie O'Shaughnessy (MOS), David Pearce, **Mark Phinney** (MPh), Stan Phippen (SPh), Doug Powell (DPo), G. Allen Poynter (GAP), Helen Poynter, Michael Price (MPr), Leah Ramsay, Don Russell (DRu), Kelsey Russell (KRu), Barbara M Sedgwick (BMS), Michael G. Shepard (MGS), **Chris Siddle**, Pamela Sinclair, Brian Slater (BSL), Heather Thompson, Bill Tweit, Bruce Whittington (BWh).

—*Jack Bowling, RRI-S14-C41, Prince George, BC V2N 2H8. E-mail: jcbowling@mindlink.bc.ca*