

NEWSPACKET

January-February 2023

Journal of the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club

**Black-capped
Chickadee**

**photographed by
Margaret MacKenzie**



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North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)

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2022 Christmas Bird Count 73rd Annual Count Sunday, December 18

by Scott Thomson, Coordinator

FINAL numbers have come in, and I would like to thank everyone for your participation on a particularly cold and snowy day. In total 80 species were observed [the lowest total since 2009 - editor], and 13,428 individuals. A total of 53 people participated. We drove a total of 751.3 km and walked 88.4 km.

The Christmas Bird Count has been held continuously in Vernon since 1950!

As per the votes of participants the Bird of the Count was a Harris's Sparrow, observed by Judy Stockdale.

The runner up was a Gray Catbird, spotted by Glen Goerzen and Larry Kerwin.

Notable misses in this count: Barrow's Goldeneye. Last time it hadn't been seen on a CBC was 1996.

Gadwall. Last time it hadn't been seen on the CBC was 11 years ago.

California Gull. 2nd year running with no CBC sightings.

Hairy Woodpecker. Only the 2nd time it has not been recorded on count day, the other being 1998

Pileated Woodpecker. Last time it hadn't been seen on the CBC was 1976.

Pine Grosbeak. Usually seen more often than not; this year was a not.

Notable lows:

There were many lows, likely due to the cold, snow and wind on the day of the count. However, there are still some worth mentioning.

Ring-necked Pheasant, 30. New all-time low.

Northern Harrier, 1. Last time it was this low was 1984.

Great Blue Heron, 1. Lowest total since 1974.

Rough-legged Hawk, 4. 2nd lowest total since 1968.

American Kestrel, 2. Lowest total since 1974

Black-capped Chickadee, 166. Lowest total since 1978.

Mountain Chickadee, 5. New all-time low.



above photo: American Robin, observed on Turtle Mountain and photographed by Harold Sellers

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Christmas Bird Count continued

Notable Highs:

Iceland Gull (Thayer's), 5. New all-time high.
 American Robin, 506. 2nd highest total in the past 20 years.

Varied Thrush. The previous record, 53, was from 1968. We almost doubled it, with 96.

Spotted Towhee. Last year we had a record high of 12. The previous record was 9 from 2002. Well folks, this year we saw 38!

Complete list of count day species seen:

Blackbird, Brewer's	51
Blackbird, Red-winged	1,249
Bufflehead	1
Catbird, Grey	1
Chickadee, Black-capped	166
Chickadee, Mountain	5
Coot, American	418
Creeper, Brown	1
Crossbill, Red	56
Crow, American	205
Dove, Eurasian collared	134
Dove, Mourning	168
Duck, Ring-necked	9
Duck, Wood	1
Eagle, Bald	36
Finch, Cassin's	2
Finch, House	482
Flicker, Northern	149
Goldeneye, Common	10
Goldfinch, American	118
Goose, Canada	835
Grebe, Horned	7
Grebe, Pied-billed	12
Grebe, Red-necked	10
Grebe, Western	2
Grouse, Ruffed	1



photo above: Varied Thrush, by Jack VanDyk

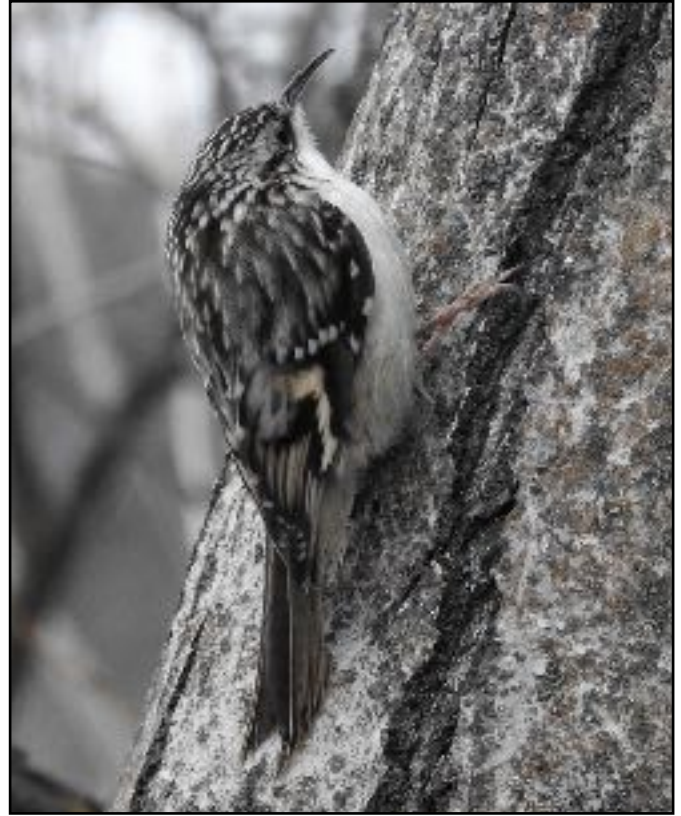
Gull, Glaucous-winged	8
Gull, Herring	94
Gull, Iceland (Thayer's)	5
Gull, Ring-billed	9
Harrier, Northern	1
Hawk, Cooper's	5
Hawk, Red-tailed	49
Hawk, Rough-legged	4
Hawk, Sharp-shinned	2
Heron, Great Blue	1
Jay, Steller's	4
Junco, Dark-eyed	977
Kestrel, American	2
Kingfisher, Belted	2
Kinglet, Golden-crowned	9
Kinglet, Ruby-crowned	1
Loon, Common	4

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Christmas Bird Count continued

Magpie, Black-billed	219
Mallard	3,989
Merganser, Common	78
Merganser, Hooded	68
Merganser, Red-breasted	1
Merlin	3
Nuthatch, Pygmy	45
Nuthatch, Red-breasted	15
Nuthatch, White-breasted	2
Owl, Barred	1
Owl, Great Horned	2
Quail, California	939
Pheasant, Ring-necked	30
Pigeon, Rock	331
Raven, Common	121
Redhead	85
Robin, American	506
Scaup, Greater	9
Shrike, Northern	4
Siskin, Pine	7
Solitaire, Townsend's	19
Sparrow, American Tree	18
Sparrow, Fox	1
Sparrow, Harris's	1
Sparrow, House	183
Sparrow, Song	107
Sparrow, White-crowned	44
Sparrow, White-throated	7
Starling, European	329
Swan, Trumpeter	12
Teal, Green-winged	4
Thrush, Hermit	1
Thrush, Varied	96
Towhee, Spotted	38
Waxwing, Bohemian	781
Wigeon, American	1
Woodpecker, Downy	14 🌿



above: Brown Creeper, by Claire Christensen

below: Song Sparrow, by Harold Sellers



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Hummingbirds of the North Okanagan

THE British Columbia hummingbird banding and educational program is under the auspices of the Rocky Point Bird Program in Victoria, B.C., and guided by Dr. Alison Moran.

In the North Okanagan, our program includes two banding sites that we visit every two weeks. The site north of Lumby is a 5 hour monitoring session. Our other site is off of Westside Rd, right on Okanagan Lake and it is a 2 hour monitoring session.

LUMBY – We have been banding at this site for 12 years, which gives us good site data for the area.

NUMBER OF BIRDS BANDED -

2020 — 63 (53 adults & 10 juveniles)
 2021 — 102 (92 adults & 10 juveniles)
 2022 — 37 (21 adults & 16 juveniles)

2020 – was the beginning of COVID - and our team was kept to a dedicated group of 4 volunteers.
 2021 – was our disastrous fire season as well as record high temperatures.
 2022 - we had a cool late spring with late vegetation and late arrival of the birds (April 23rd). Possibly due to birds fledgling later, but there were a few juvenile stragglers.

At our North Lumby site, logging had started in 2021 and continued through the 2022 banding season, definitely affecting the nesting hummingbirds. The estimate of the private land logged is between 40 and 50 acres (20 hectares). The logging is taking place within approximately 300 meters from the property line.

WESTSIDE ROAD – we have been at this site for 10 years and this also gives us good site data for the area as well.

NUMBER OF BIRDS BANDED -

2020 — 16 all adults
 2021 — 28 — 22 adults & 6 juveniles
 2022 — 37 — 21 adults & 16 juveniles

2020 — Only 2 sessions
 2021 — A major fire swept through the area destroying vegetation and property. This site had a fire come within ¼ of a mile of the cabin.
 2022 – A late cool spring brought the birds in later with much fewer numbers.



above: collecting urine

There is a major concern about the overall low number of birds in 2022.

- could the 2021 fires have possibly caused a reduction in food availability as well as nesting sites.
- was it the cool wet spring with delayed vegetation, causing birds to not migrate as far north as they would usually do?

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Hummingbirds continued

- was it lack of vegetation on the migration north due to the fires the year before?
- or other unknown factors?



above: the Working Table

Dr. Alison Moran has started a public education program in B.C. and is wanting to get the message out to everyone about the decline in hummingbird numbers, as well as educating children in schools of the benefits of having hummingbirds in our lives and in our environment.

My last hummingbird seen, an Anna's female was on November 3, 2022. Terry Hurst had a hummingbird, an Anna's female, on December 10th. It has since disappeared.

Gail Loughridge, Bander
Louise Breneman, Statistician

Province adds more items to B.C.'s recycling system

January 6, 2023

Newly accepted blue-box items include:

- plastic plates, bowls and cups;
- plastic cutlery and straws;
- plastic food storage containers;
- plastic hangers (that come with clothing);
- paper plates, bowls and cups (with thin plastic lining);
- aluminum foil;
- aluminum-foil baking dishes and pie plates; and
- metal storage tins (thin gauge).

Examples of flexible plastics now accepted at depots only:

- plastic sandwich and freezer bags;
- plastic shrink wrap;
- flexible plastic drop sheets and covering;
- flexible plastic bubble wrap (no bubble wrap-lined paper);
- flexible plastic recycling bags (blue, clear bags, or yellow or blue bags used for curb-side collection); and
- flexible plastic carry-out shopping bags (reusable).

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Wild Turkeys in B.C.*by Chris Siddle*

FOR those of you who recently received BC Nature magazine for Winter 2022 you may have noticed that the magazine's cover is graced by a painting by Robert Bateman of a male Wild Turkey in full display. This is the posture that a male adopts when he is attempting to impress a female turkey into mating with him.

*right:
male Wild Turkey
(source Google)*

That long dark brown tassel that hangs down his chest is known to turkey people as the male's "beard". Because the male is huge with his body mass awkwardly positioned far forward blocking his downward sight, some ornithologists have suggested that the "beard" functions as a kind of avian plumb bob, enabling the male to place himself squaring atop the female increasing his chances for successful insemination. After all, genetic material, as one source euphemistically calls sperm, is the male's entire contribution to fatherhood.

While I'm on the subject of turkey sex, here's a gem of a fact you can share with close friends or with strangers that you never want to see again: present a

randy male turkey with the headless body of a female turkey, and he is completely uninterested, apparently not recognizing her decapitated corpse, even if it is set up in a life like accepting pose. However, show him just the head of a female (no body needed) and suddenly he's ready to party and may attempt to mate with the detached head.



At this point you may be thankful that Wild Turkeys are not native to British Columbia. In indigenous America prior to European contact, the Wild Turkey was native to what are now the extreme southern Ontario and the eastern, south-eastern and south-western United States. The species was wily, but provided the successful hunter with a bounty of delicious meat, compared to smaller gamebirds. Many researchers think that Spanish missionaries and soldiers returning from Central America to Europe in the 1500s brought back turkeys that Central

American tribes had domesticated. Turkeys rapidly very popular throughout Europe. In England, for example, East Anglia quickly became famous for the turkeys its farmers raised which once a year were herded to London markets. So, in view of Europeans' increasing familiarity with the turkey, it's not surprising to learn that the Pilgrims brought their domestic turkeys with them when they landed at Plymouth Rock.

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Wild Turkey continued

While domestic turkeys flourished under European management, Wild Turkeys were rapidly being wiped out in the Thirteen Colonies, Florida, the south-west, and Spanish-America. Back in the Old World game was often deemed the property of aristocracy, with ordinary people banned from hunting it. The New World was devoid of aristocrats but full of game. Settlers from the Old World revelled in North America's abundant and seemingly inexhaustible wildlife. Almost immediately a new attitude that hunting was a basic human right emerged. Once cities were established capitalists emerged eager to supply city dwellers with fresh game. The commodification of game resulted in the massive overkill of Passenger Pigeons, Great Auks, Heath Hens, Labrador Ducks, and Carolina Parakeets which resulted in their extinction. Other wild creatures including grizzly bears, wolves, cougars, bison, beavers and even the ubiquitous White-tailed Deer suffered such losses that they became endangered species. The Wild Turkey was among them. Survivors retreated into the wilderness. By the mid-19th Century, the eastern Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*) was extirpated from New England, with a few flocks hanging on in remote areas of Appalachia, Cumberland, the Ozarks and Gulf States. In the face of hunting and habitat loss, the other five Wild Turkey subspecies did poorly too.

A more positive attitude towards wildlife slowly began to evolve in North America just as the last parakeets and Passenger Pigeons were dying out. In an attempt to repair some of the damage done to wild

species, people began to try to re-introduce game and implement hunting limits. Most of the earliest re-introductions failed. For example, the following gamebirds were introduced to British Columbia between 1860-1961: Wild Turkey, Greater Sage Grouse, Gray Partridge, Chukar, Bobwhite, California Quail, Mountain Quail, Ring-necked Pheasant, Black Game, and Capercaillie. Most of these attempted introductions eventually failed, with the exceptions of Gray Partridge, California Quail and Ring-necked Pheasant. Wild Turkey introductions to British Columbia on Vancouver Island and the North and South Okanagan ultimately failed, except for occasional observation of a few long-lived individuals.



above: female Wild Turkey

However, beginning in the late 1960s reports appeared of Wild Turkeys on both sides of the British Columbia-Idaho border. Introductions to parts of Idaho had resulted in a wild population breeding successfully enough that "scout" turkeys

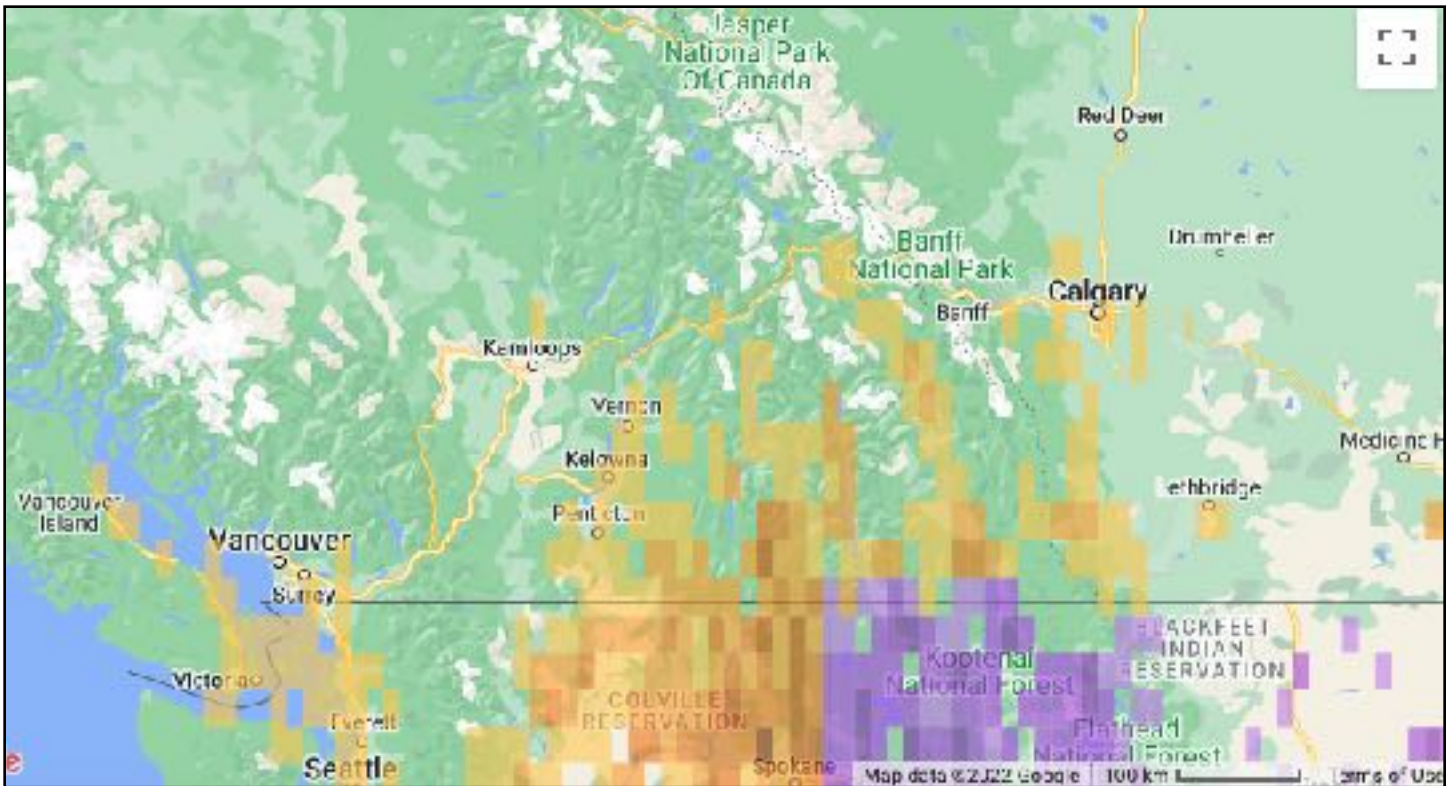
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Wild Turkey continued

were showing up around Creston. By 1983 it was common knowledge among birders in the know that a flock of Wild Turkeys could often be found around a certain church in Creston. At the same time the last Wild Turkeys were dying out from an ultimately unsuccessful reintroduction n.w. of Armstrong.

just learned that in about the year 2000 the Ocoala Game Club of Winfield released turkeys onto private land in Lake Country. These birds are more likely to be the source of the Wild Turkeys we are now seeing around Vernon. Wherever Wild Turkeys have come from, they are currently doing well in the Kootenays and Okanagan and can be legally hunted in designated areas during three set seasons.



E-Bird map showing the range of Wild Turkeys into British Columbia

By about 2000 a few reports of Wild Turkeys as far west as Penticton and as far north as Vernon were appearing annually in the emails of BC birder groups. At the same time it was becoming quite clear that turkey numbers in the south-west Kootenays were increasing dramatically. Although I had assumed for several years that Okanagan Wild Turkeys were spreading from the Kootenays I have

In Montana, where the Wild Turkey was successfully introduced and is now “harvested” annually to the tune of 4900+ birds a year, the species inhabits open Ponderosa Pine forests interspersed with shrubby and grassy opening and brushy hardwood draws. Turkeys feed along the “ecotone,” the edge where

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Wild Turkey continued

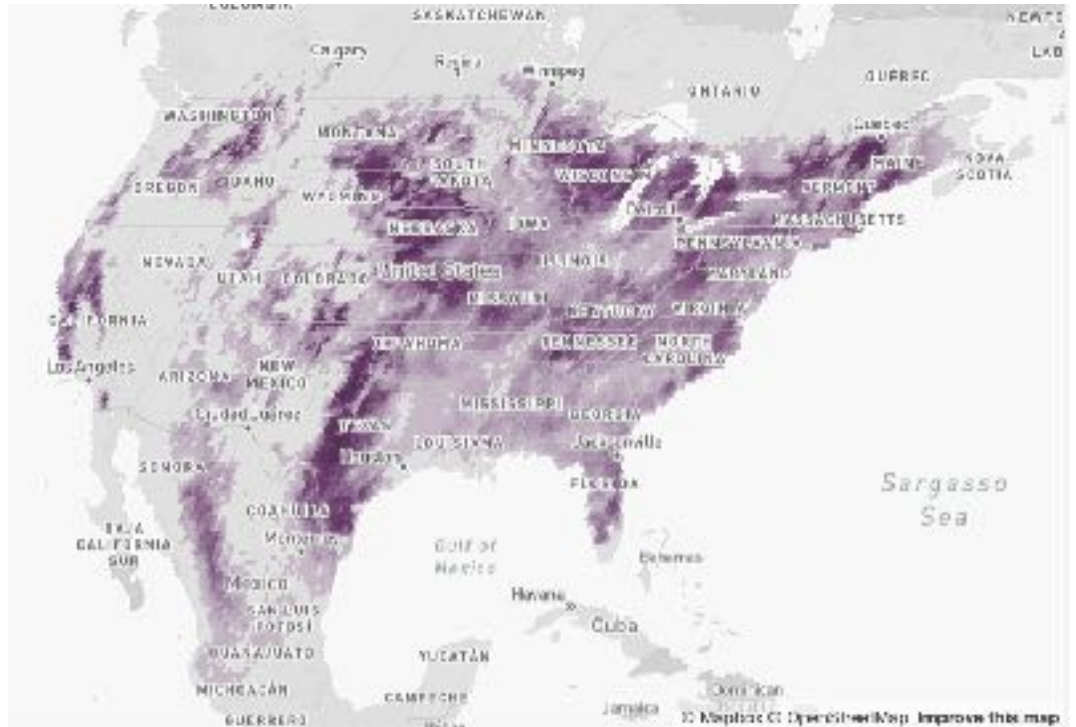
the forest meets the grassland. Birds roost at night in large pines and Green Ashes. Such tall tree roosts are critical to turkey survival. Turkeys also forage in grain fields and livestock feedlots in fall and winter.

A detailed description of preferred Wild Turkey habitat doesn't seem to exist for B.C. However, the turkey's preference for a forest-grassland edge habitat can take the form of

a liking for the backyards and gardens of country folk who live near the woods. In the North Okanagan flocks of Wild Turkeys are often encountered atop the Commonage near Predator Ridge and in the open woods around Tompson Lake as well as along Rawlings Lake Road. Other locations of past sightings include The Allan Brooks Centre, and Kokanee Road off Eastside Road. Young turkeys, known as poults, have been seen with attendant females so

evidently the Wild Turkey now breeds in the North Okanagan. A female soon to lay eggs departs from her flock to scrape a shallow depression scantily lined with handy leaves and other plants in a well-hidden site such as the base of a forest tree. She lays between 8-12 eggs. Although precocious like chickens, the poults are most vulnerable during their first 10-14 days when they can't fly to the safety of a tree roost.

Will Wild Turkeys survive in British Columbia, or will populations crash in the face of climate change which can produce conditions like long lasting deep snow that can cause turkeys to starve? In domesticity, turkeys are highly susceptible to avian influenza. With avian influenza currently present in British Columbia, will Wild Turkeys succumb? My money is on turkey survival. The Wild Turkey has proven to be, at times, a highly adaptable species. 🌿



*above: Abundance Map from e-Bird
Relative abundance is depicted for each season along a color gradient from a light color indicating lower relative abundance to a dark color indicating a higher relative abundance. Relative abundance is the estimated average count of individuals detected by an eBirder during a 1 hour, 1 kilometer traveling checklist at the optimal time of day for each species.*

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Christmas Bird Count Incident

story and illustrations by Margaret MacKenzie

WHAT a cold, snowy morning to begin our day for the annual 2022 Christmas Bird Count. Our first stops out in the open fields in the Ranchlands area on Vernon Hill were so windy that we neither saw nor heard a thing. Driving along Buchanan Road snow was being whipped up and blowing and nothing alive could be spotted. We pulled into the parking lot at Morphet Dog Park with the hope of maybe finding a few huddled Juncos or Chickadees and were astounded to see two birds about the size of Robins chasing each other at high speed in and out of the tall trees. I thought, what are they doing!..... playing in this weather !..... and at this time of year.... Suddenly, only several feet in front of our car, a Northern Shrike plummeted to the ground with a Junco underneath him!

*right:
Northern Shrike
photographed by
Jack VanDyk*

We are used to seeing these grey-coloured birds with black masks sitting innocuously on top of a shrub or tall mullein plant and they are rather handsome, even cute. They sing nicely at times too. We know they eat small animals and birds as we see their end products, often a vole impaled on a rose thorn or hanging on a barb from a barbed wire fence. However, this Northern Shrike was huge looking,

standing tall and threatening with it's fierce stance and one leg planted firmly on the breast of the Junco. The Shrike made a few repeated stabs with it's beak to the nape of the Junco's neck and at the same time seemed to be shaking it back and forth with it's foot.



In seconds it seemed, the Junco was dead. The Shrike then appeared to notice us for the first time, quickly picked up the Junco with it's foot, tucked it under its body, and flew out of sight across the parking lot and into some dense shrubbery.

Later, and curious as to what had so surprisingly happened in front of us, I did a sketch in an attempt

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Shrike continued

to capture the moment. (There was no time for photos!). Then I did some research and learned that Northern Shrikes are rare among songbirds for their lifestyle of hunting and killing animals. Although they don't have talons like hawks and other raptors, their foot is strong and capable of grasping prey.

Shrikes often chase and attack small birds in the air. Flying swiftly, they can capture and force a bird to the ground with their feet where they then use their hooked bill to kill them. The upper edge of their bill has a pair of pointy projections called "tomial teeth" The lower edge of the bill has indentations where these 'teeth' fit perfectly. The Shrike stabs its hooked bill into the neck of the bird or animal and the tomial teeth cut through the vertebrae to paralyze the spinal cord. Shrikes also hunt by sitting quietly in dense shrubbery waiting for unsuspecting prey, then sneak stealthily through the branches to pounce on the unsuspecting bird or rodent.

Some facts about Northern Shrikes:

- although Northern Shrikes usually tackle prey smaller than themselves, there have been incidents where they have attacked larger birds such as Robins, Jays, and Doves.
- they often kill more prey than they need at one time and cache it for later by impaling it

on thorns or barbed wire, thus earning the nickname "butcher birds."

- the thorn or wire that the prey is impaled on acts as an anchor so they can pull the prey apart easily with their bill.
- hawks, accipiters and falcons also have



tomial teeth and use their bills to kill prey as well as their sharp talons.

- Shrikes are stealthy hunters and skulk through dense brush, patiently watch mouse holes and pathways, and check nests of other birds carefully in order to determine the best time to raid them.
- Northern Shrikes breed in the far north and we see them in migration. A few overwinter here and they can set up a winter territory where we might see them from time to time, for example, around Swan Lake and along the Grey Canal above Buchanan Road. 🌿

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From Lawn and Vegetable Garden to Forest and Bird Sanctuary

story and photos by Jack VanDyk

I HAVE been asked by many birders and nature lovers over the years what I have done to our yard that results in having so many birds and animals visiting here.

It all started after we moved to our current location in the south B.X. in August 1986 from Waterdown, Ontario, just north of Burlington, where we lived for nineteen years.

After moving in during September, there were only a few spruce trees beside the ditch, one large Blue Spruce beside the house and a tall Lombardy Poplar in the far corner of our half acre lot. There was a large vegetable garden with a long row of Raspberry plants and the rest in lawn.

The vegetable garden we took out after two years. While it was nice having fresh produce, we spent too much time pulling weeds and watering so this had to go and an idea took hold.

I was born in a big city but always envisioned of living someday in a forest, and if that was not possible I decided to create a forest myself right here, and if I remember correctly it was not until 1989 when I started planting many trees and shrubs over the years that followed.

Beside a few Scotch Pine all other trees and shrubs are native species. The plant list includes: Western Larch, Ponderosa Pine, Lodgepole Pine, White Spruce, Douglas-Fir, Western Redcedar, Mountain Ash, Saskatoon berry, Hawthorn, Choke Cherry, Birch, Thimbleberry, Prickly Rose, Oregon Grape, Mock Orange, Blue Elderberry, Snowberry, Kinnikinnick, Yew's and spreading evergreens for



great ground cover that the birds do love. We also have native wild flowers and a few invasive species that I let stand for the seed heads over the winter.

Of course over the years we had several big trees cut down that were either getting too big or created a mess.

After many years a lot of bird species discovered our yard and became regulars, including a Barred Owl

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Forest and Bird Sanctuary continued

— that I call my buddy — that has been coming back for many years now and spends the winters here.

Besides birds, our yard has attracted many animals



too, from Northern Long-tailed Salamander, frogs, chipmunks, squirrels, raccoon, skunk, coyote, Bobcat, and even one winter, a Cougar as I noticed paw prints around the house leading into the backyard where I found very little left of a raccoon carcass, and some distance away a big scat.

Over the years watching all the different birds feeding in our yard gave us great pleasure. Even from our windows we can see them on our feeders from the living room and some first hand raptor hunts from the Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Red-tailed Hawk and even one day many years ago, a Bald Eagle right by our side window

with its talons gripping the window sill and spreading its wings right against the window. That scared the heck out of us, until it just flew away across the road.

In our backyard we have several brush piles that a lot of birds like for cover and shelter, the only drawback is the many cats that are lurking here too. I wish people would keep them indoors.

Our berry-loving birds find food in our yard, but most of the birds we see here love the black oil sunflower seeds. We have many feeders and four birdbaths, two in winter with a birdbath heating unit. Nyjer seeds are loved by Pine Siskins and finches and on occasion I spread some wild-bird seed mixture for doves, quail, pheasant and sparrows. Suet blocks are loved by woodpeckers, nuthatches and several other species. We do feed the birds all year round.

We also had several requests from local birders, and some from out of town, that would like to see a particular bird species seen on my eBird postings. Even a birder from Spain stopped by last summer, 2022, on a trip of the Rockies. He wanted to see Evening Grosbeaks and a Black-headed Grosbeak in our yard, which he had seen on my eBird posting after his arrival in Canada.

For those that are not familiar with eBird, this is a scientific program compiling data from all over the world about the status of our bird population and distribution. It is run by Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Utica, New York State.

Our total bird species observed in our yard stands right now at seventy-four. 🌱

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Newspacket is published five times per year, in January-February, March-April, May-June, September-October and November-December.

Thank you to Wayside Press of Vernon which prints our hard copies of Newspacket.

Copy for publication should be sent to Harold Sellers, Editor, by e-mail hikerharold@gmail.com.



MONTHLY MEETINGS

On the first Wednesday of the month (September through May), we hold a meeting for members and visitors at the Schubert Centre. Start time, 7:00 pm. Guest speakers, club news, refreshments.

NONC MEMBERSHIP

Clip or copy this form to begin or renew a membership with the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club. The form is also available on our website. Annual dues are \$35 for an individual, \$20 for a student and \$50 for a couple or family. Every member should also complete a Waiver form, available at our website membership page.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

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