

# BIRDFINDING IN CANADA - January 1981

## Birth Announcement

"BIRDFINDING IN CANADA" STARTS OFF  
WITH SHAKY LEGS BUT HOPEFUL HEART

We sincerely believe that our very first paragraph should be devoted to thanking all those whose faith and tangible support have made it possible to initiate this publication.

Most of the responses to our original "get-acquainted" letter were very encouraging. This was greatly appreciated.

### WORD OF MOUTH IS BEST MEDIUM

In compiling our mailing list for the purpose of telling birders about our intent to launch BIRDFINDING IN CANADA, we tried to include all those we thought would be interested and whose addresses we had on file. Undoubtedly we have left many uninformed who would have liked to know about our idea. To help remedy this situation, it would be much appreciated if you would tell your birding friends about this new publication. Thank you.

### VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS NEEDED

One thing we're going to need at least for a while is a flow of voluntary articles on finding birds. If you have a pet birding spot, or if you're aware of where to find some normally hard-to-locate bird, let us know. Include specific instruction on how to find the area and identify the time of year it should be visited, etc.

One of our prime objectives is gathering information and passing it on to our subscribers.

### SUBSCRIBERS KEY TO SUCCESS

We are committed to broadening our subscription base as this is indeed the major factor on which success will depend.

### SO - AWAY WE GO!

So, like the guy said as he backed his car out of the garage, setting out on a trip around the world, "Not very exciting so far, but it's a start."

## To Structure or Not?

Before we go any farther, let's clear up one very important item.

Regardless of what direction BIRDFINDING IN CANADA may eventually take, we do not feel we have any business intruding into certain areas already being handled competently by various Ornithological Records Committees, Museums, etc. We refer mainly to the compilation of scientific checklists and formal rulings on acceptability of identifications.

We envision this publication being oriented and committed to the interests and needs of amateur birders. These are the girls and guys whose hobby relates to seeing and enjoying lots of birds, hopefully of a wide variety of species. They are informed and interested people who have spent hundreds, if not thousands, of hours studying bird identification.

Mainly because of this reasoning, we said in our questionnaire about personal lists, "If you consider it wild, you count it. If you don't, you don't count it."

We don't think this stand conflicts with Records Committees' affairs because their goals are of a scientific nature - even though there is bound to be some overlap between the worlds of the professional and the amateur bird student.

However, our opinion has certainly not gone unchallenged. A number of subscribers suggest that perhaps some more structured milieu is necessary and that we should have formal rules on wild vs. escape, etc.

We invite opinions on this, or indeed any other subject relating to finding, watching, identifying or listing birds.

Meanwhile we'll continue as is.

# 1980 WAS GREAT YEAR FOR STRANGERS

If the future is simply a continuation of the past, we can expect a steady succession of rare species and unheralded stragglers to show up in 1981 coast-to-coast.

In 1980, there were black-necked stilts in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Mountain bluebirds showed up in midwinter at Point Pelee and in midsummer in the Orillia sector of Central Ontario.

Vancouver had both a male and female tufted duck in March. In late April a black phoebe was in Stanley Park. Then in late summer an ash-throated flycatcher appeared on Sea Island (near Vancouver airport) and stayed most of September to the delight of those who came from far and near to add the bird to their appropriate lists.

In early summer there was a pink-footed goose at St. Anthony, Nfld. No sooner did news of this wanderer die down than a European redwing was found in the same area.

A scissor-tailed flycatcher was at Pinawa, Man. in June and another one turned up in Ottawa (Nepean to be exact) in late October.

A little egret from either Africa or Southern Europe was at Cacouna, Que. for much of the summer and, just when it seemed this must surely be voted straggler of the year, a little stint was sighted at Grand Manan, N.B. The egret was initially discovered by someone checking on a report of an American oystercatcher.

Southern birds vacationing in Canada included a fulvous whistling duck which stayed for about three weeks around Rodney in Southwestern Ontario. And, just north of Dartmouth, N.S. in July, there were 9 snowy egrets, a little blue heron and a yellow-crowned night heron.

No list of the year's unusual species would be complete without mentioning the ivory gull that stayed at least two weeks in January around the ice-fishermen's huts on frozen Lake Simcoe, Ont.

The Ross' gulls that nested at Churchill, Man. were probably native Canadians but they're sensational items just the same. This also applies to the wheatear at Arnprior, Ont. in mid-September. And, isn't it unusual that in the past few years, we've had at least three autumn wheatears along the south side of the Ottawa River in a 100-mile stretch?

A spotted redshank appeared briefly in the Vancouver area in late November where there already had been sharp-tailed sandpipers seven weeks earlier. And, while on the subject of shore-birds, another candidate for find of the year was surely the Eskimo curlew observed for three hours at Lake Manitoba on May 21st.

A shore-bird at the Strathroy, Ont. sewage lagoons which, even after being photographed, left experts unsure of its identity, may have been the bird which prompted Grace Ellis of Castleton to send in this bit of ornithological doggerel:

Today I saw a bird so rare he  
Isn't in the dictionary.

Haven't we all seen a few of these in our time?

We hope that BIRDFINDING IN CANADA will assist in finding ways of advising subscribers more quickly when rarities show up. In a near future issue, we'll be talking at length about Hot Lines and Rare Bird Alerts. Hopefully, the result will be a significant improvement in these types of communications across the Canadian birdfinding network.

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## Winter is Dovekie Time

One way to see dovekies is to take a midwinter ferry trip from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland. It's the right time of year to see these far northerners and getting offshore greatly improves your chances.

We made this trip in January of 1980 taking the ferry from North Sydney, N.S. to Port-aux-Basques, Nfld. (The crossing from North Sydney to Argentia does not operate in winter.)

This is a two-day trip which leaves each terminal at 11 A.M. local time. It takes a little over six hours to complete the 160-kilometre trip. There was daylight for all but the last hour.

The ferry is operated by CN Marine. Advance reservations are preferred but we doubt if this is necessary for pedestrian passengers in winter. If you are taking a vehicle it would certainly be wise to reserve. Call 1-800-565-9411 or write to CN Marine Reservations Bureau, P.O.Box 250, North Sydney, N.S., B2A 3M3.

Overnight in Newfoundland, we stayed at the Hotel Port-aux-Basques (1-709-695-2171) and found it clean and modern with an efficient, licensed dining room.

In the morning, a couple of hours can be spent walking in the moor-like terrain looking and hoping for willow ptarmigan. Lots of luck!

From the ferry, we saw dovekies both days - not many - and always in flight - but enough to satisfy our quest for this little alcid. Due to their small size, they are quite easy to identify as they whirr past.

### Kittiwakes were numerous

Our most numerous bird away from land was the black-legged kittiwake. There were dozens, maybe hundreds, in sight several times. Other birds, in much lower numbers included fulmar, murres (mostly unidentified because of distance and waves) a few razorbills and black guillemots. At this season, puffins are not to be found.

Around both ferry docks, birders not familiar with Atlantic birds in winter, will be surprised at the high numbers of glaucous and Iceland gulls. Black-headed gulls may also be seen on the Nova Scotia

### DOVEKIES - cont'd.

side. Great black-backed are abundant. Great cormorants are often in sight. We saw a few common eiders and one red-throated loon.

The biggest problem with birding from the ferry at this time of year was that, due to salt-encrusted windows, you must be out on deck for optimum visibility. Because of the cold, this can be done only in brief, repetitive stages. You must also hope it's not foggy. A good idea is to plan enough days to make more than one two-day trip.

A word of caution about seasickness prevention may be in order. If you take the type of medicine that works by sedating the patient (e.g. Dramamine) go easy on the dosage. One can easily get so sluggish that concentration on birds becomes difficult.

For accommodations on the Nova Scotia side, stay at the Holiday Inn in Sydney and take the bus to North Sydney in the morning. Our stay was at the Isle Royale and there will not be a second time..G.B

## Govenlock Sage Grouse

In Dec.1979, a Christmas Bird Count was conducted in Saskatchewan with the ghost village of Govenlock as the centre.

And what do you think they found?

One hundred and six sage grouse!

To those of us who have been under the impression that the only place in Canada to expect this bird is the area south of Manyberries, Alta., this comes as good news equal to finding gold in the back yard. We had also been taught to think the birds could only be found when carrying on mating displays.

This area is close to Maple Creek where there is an excellent Government-operated camping site just off the Trans Canada Highway.

The Govenlock count also included a golden eagle. But 106 sage grouse. Wow!

# STATISTICAE CANADENSIS

As one would expect, Information Sheets filed by subscribers to BIRDFINDING IN CANADA have created an instant data bank of extremely interesting statistics.

To anyone who studies Canadian birders as diligently as birds, it will come as no surprise that Norm Chesterfield's life list of 5340 species is far and away the Number One figure in World totals. Norm has observed birds in over 100 countries - in fact, almost as many sovereign states as there are United Nations members.

Lou Marsh, who is second highest in this department, has not been idle over the years by any means. His birding visits to Europe and Africa plus several trips to the Neotropics have produced a life total of 2915 species. This figure (which is just 2425 behind Norm's!) may not appear competitive but it's a figure which, obviously, all but two of our subscribers have yet to attain. Lou's quote, "It's like a Belgian work horse finishing second to Secretariat," has a ring of eloquent equestrian hyperbole.

A total of 11 birders reported life lists of more than 1000 species.

Norm Chesterfield	5340	Ron Scovell	1371
Lou Marsh	2915	Gerry Bennett	1333
David Stirling	1977	Fred Bodsworth	1328
Barry Attridge	1649	Luke Fazio	1308
Hue MacKenzie	1480	Hugh Currie	1004
Jo Ann Murray	1385		

Chronologically, Arn Dave was the first subscriber to BIRDFINDING IN CANADA, a record that can never be beaten or tied. The first completed Information Sheet was filed by Alan McTavish.

And who has recorded the most species in Canada? Some guy named Norm Chesterfield with a high of 464. Thirty-eight birdfinders reported Canada lists above the 325 minimum figure suggested on the questionnaire. This includes a few who didn't turn in a Canada total but who had more than 325 on a provincial list so must have at least that many in Canada. The 38 are:

Norm Chesterfield	464	Doug Kragh	373
Alex Gray	443	Don Gunn	369
Eric Tull	443	Bill Smith	366
Gerry Bennett	437	Marylee Stephenson	363
David Mark	434	Jo Ann Murray	362
Paul Pratt	431	Bill Crins	361
Roger Foxall	429	Hugh Currie	359
Luke Fazio	423	David McCorquodale	359
Terry Pratt	423	Tony Mason	358
David Stirling	421	Richard Cannings	357
Mark Gawn	420	Don Perks	356
Dan Brunton	415	Dave Fidler	349
Hue MacKenzie	414	Edge Pegg	348
Ron Scovell	403	Robert Anderson	343
Alan Wormington	395	John Kelley	337
Lou Marsh	392	Peter Gilchrist	335
Larry Neily	384	William Zufelt	332
Richard Poulin	374	Ronald Harcourt	331
Fred Bodsworth	373	Anne Macdonald	329

Several others reported Canada lists of between 300 and 324 species.



STATISTICS - cont'd.

Looking at some of the Provincial totals, it becomes clear that for several provinces we need many more observers.

Those reporting life totals above our suggested minimums for various provinces and territories are:

British Columbia

David Stirling	360
Richard Cannings	326
David Mark	318
Brian Kautesk	309
Doug Kragh	285
Eric Tull	230
Kathleen Collins	276
Roger Foxall	269
Paul Pratt	260
Alex Gray	258
Larry Neily	258
Dan Brunton	245
Gerry Bennett	238
Luke Fazio	232

Alberta

Eric Tull	295
Dan Brunton	252
David Stirling	252
Luke Fazio	201
Paul Pratt	186

Saskatchewan

Guy Waple	265
Richard Poulin	221
Eric Tull	204

Manitoba

Eric Tull	239
David Mark	204

Nova Scotia

Robert Anderson	293
Larry Neily	240
Eric Tull	200
Luke Fazio	197

New Brunswick

Eric Tull	248
Brian Dalzell	233
Richard Poulin	191

Newfoundland

Luke Fazio	169
Eric Tull	150

P.E.I.

Eric Tull	154
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Quebec

Richard Poulin	270
Roger Foxall	267
Luke Fazio	265
Mark Gawn	255
Hue MacKenzie	254
Jo Ann Murray	248
Dan Brunton	226

Yukon

Richard Cannings	130
Eric Tull	130

Northwest Territories

Alan Wormington	167
Eric Tull	144

As the "most-travelled" birder, Eric Tull is in a class by himself. He has life lists above our suggested minimums in 11 of the 12 provinces and territories -- and missed the 12th by only one species! Luke Fazio qualified in 6 of the 12.

Ontario's figures will be reviewed in the March issue. If you wish to report any increases in your Ontario numbers since filing your questionnaire, please do so by February 10th.

There is a significant number of subscribers who did not receive our original mailing package so were not aware of our Information Sheet. If there is anyone who would like to receive one, please let us know as quickly as possible. Plans are to update list totals every six months and "most-wanted" species once a year. However, if you have significant changes in any category we'd like to be advised at any time.

## Who needs a boreal owl?

The Claireville Conservation Area, just northwest of Metropolitan Toronto, has become well known among birders as the place to find boreal owls in late winter.

Every year for at least the last ten, one or more of these seldom-seen north-erners has turned up in this area. Often they stay for a week or more thus giving birders a fair chance of finding them.

These little predators do not sit out in the open. Instead, they seek out thick tangles such as Virginia creeper canopies so one has to look sharp to find them.

To locate the area mentioned above, go to the intersection of Highways 7 & 50. Turn south and drive 1.4 kilometres. Here, to your right, you will see a road leading in to the eastern side of the Conservation Area. The barrier on this road will likely be closed so, park here, step around the gate and walk to the west. In a few minutes you will come to a gully with a narrow creek bed. The creek will likely be frozen. Walk north (to your right) up this ravine. There are steep slopes on both sides of the creek. On the east slope, near the ridge, are several thick tangles which should be explored. Walk right under them and look up into the branches. Continuing, you will soon be surrounded by more vine-covered shrubs and trees, each of which should be well examined.

Optimum time of year is from Feb. 20 to March 15. Probably the best days are Saturdays and Sundays when other birders are there with the same objective. The more eyes the better the chances.

The owls seldom fly assuming the observer uses common sense in viewing them quietly and with respect. No flash bulbs, please.

This is also a popular spot for saw-whet owls and, at the same time of year, in the same area, it is not unusual to find three or four of them.

The whole general area offers good winter birding. Some years, to the south west of the ravine described above, two or three feeding trays are maintained and these are always worth a look.

## Tell Us About Ferries

Although some pelagic birds such as fulmars and shearwaters are among the most prolific and plentiful species in the world, many Canadian birders have never seen even one of them.

Unless one makes a point of getting out on the open ocean, there is limited likelihood of seeing these birds.

The most convenient and economical way to get offshore is to take a trip on one of the many ferries that operate in Canadian waters.

We would like to collect data on as many of these ferries as possible so that a comprehensive summary could be included in a future issue of BIRDFINDING IN CANADA.

If you have taken a ferry trip in Canadian coastal waters in the past few years, it would be greatly appreciated if you'd drop us a line outlining what birds were seen, along with numbers, dates and ferry information.

Some of the ferry crossings which come to mind are:

Souris, P.E.I. to Magdalen Islands.

Wood Islands, P.E.I. to Caribou, N.S.

North Sydney, N.S. to Argentia, Nfld.

North Sydney to Port-aux-Basques, Nfld.

Strait of Belle Isle, Nfld. to Labrador.

Yarmouth, N.S. to Bar Harbor, Maine.

Yarmouth, N.S. to Portland, Maine.

Digby, N.S. to St. John, N.B.

St. George, N.B. to Grand Manan.

Queen Charlotte Is. to Prince Rupert, B.C.

Victoria, B.C. to Port Angeles, Wash.

Port Hardy, B.C. to Ocean Falls, B.C.

The above is not intended to be a complete list. No doubt there are quite a few others.

## WHAT TO DO ON A VISIT TO THE VANCOUVER AREA

Anyone visiting Vancouver for a few days should be able to find an interesting variety of west coast birds even if only two or three hours a day are available for birding. Your list will, of course, vary considerably depending on the time of year.

Ideally, plans should be made to include visits to Stanley Park, Mount Seymour, the Reifel Bird Sanctuary and Sea and Iona Islands. Except for the Stanley Park outing you will need a car and a map of the area.

On arriving in Vancouver, you should first dial 734-4554, the local Bird Alert service operated by the Vancouver Natural History Society. This provides instant awareness of any unusual birds. Have a pad and pencil handy before you dial.

### Stanley Park - Beaver Lake - Lost Lagoon

Stanley Park is in downtown Vancouver at the north end of West Georgia Street, just a 20-minute walk from the Hotel Vancouver. Weather and time permitting, the 10-kilometre hike around the perimeter of the Park is a priority item. Side trips along trails such as the one to Beaver Lake are also recommended. Bewick's wrens and chestnut-backed chickadees are resident birds. Under the Lion's Gate bridge marbled murrelets and pigeon guillemots are possibilities. In fall and winter, large rafts of surf scoter add up to more of this species than an inlander would see in a lifetime. At the Georgia St. entrance to the Park is Lost Lagoon which should be closely examined. Although some birds (such as the black swans) are captives, most of the waterfowl here are wild and free-flying. Almost anything might show up such as the tufted duck of a few years ago. Depending on the season (fall is probably best) between 50 and 75 species can be listed in a few hours.

### Mount Seymour Provincial Park

Construction of a paved road to the top of Mount Seymour on the eastern edge of North Vancouver has provided a convenient way to look for blue grouse. From early spring to at least late June they can be heard hooting. By driving up this highway, and making frequent stops, one may sometimes see them along the road. Much of Mt. Seymour is a Provincial Park. It is reached by driving across the Second Narrows bridge, taking the Mount Seymour Parkway, then making a left turn at Mount Seymour Road. The dining room of the Seymour Golf and Country Club, which is at this turn, is an excellent place for lunch or dinner. Although it appears to be a private club, cash customers are welcome. There is also a snack bar at the top of the mountain. Eating there is an adventure in epicurean mediocrity. The blue grouse is not the only prize on Mt. Seymour. Pygmy owls live there too and a band of excited chickadees and kinglets should always be investigated in case one of these tiny predators is the cause of their alarm.

### Reifel Bird Sanctuary

To visit the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, drive southward out of Vancouver over the Oak St. bridge. Continue through the George Massey Tunnel under the Fraser River. As soon as you exit from the tunnel, turn right into the town of Ladner. Follow Ladner Trunk Rd. to 47A St. Then turn left and pick up River Road West. Continue, following signs (some not too obvious) that lead to the Sanctuary. Inside the gates, walking trails provide easy access to birding areas. There is a small admission fee. Attendants are well informed about local birds. The Refuge is about an hour's drive from downtown Vancouver and is an enjoyable place for anyone new to the Pacific coastal area to spend a few hours and see some new birds.

If you are visiting Reifel, watch also for signs to the Alaksen National Wildlife Area. Just before making the final turn to Reifel, you may instead (but only on week-days) proceed directly to the Alaksen Administrative Offices. Here, you'll

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see a double row of cedars in which barn owls often roost. If they are not there, you may be able to get permission to look in the barns on the property.

### Sea & Iona Islands

All of the areas described so far are clearly marked on any good street map of the Vancouver district. Not so, however, with Sea and Iona Islands now that the area has been earmarked for airport expansion. Street signs have been removed; residential areas razed and some streets closed by roadblocks. Here is the exact route to follow.

Proceed to Sea Island via the Oak St. bridge which is plainly shown on your city map. Do not take the new and seemingly more direct Arthur Laing bridge. Get into the right hand lane and take the Airport Exit. Just after crossing a bridge with a marina on the right and the high-rise River Inn (formerly Richmond Inn) on your left, turn right on a paved road that winds back under the Laing bridge. When you are under the bridge, take an odometer reading. From here, streets are not marked although they are still referred to locally as Grauer's, McDonald, Ferguson, etc. As you continue, you should see the CPAir hangar over to your left. At 2.6 km from the bridge, the road turns right and so do you. About 500 metres from this turn, park and walk in the area to your right. This is where both an ash-throated flycatcher and a mockingbird turned up late in the summer of 1980. Being once a residential area, there are lots of ornamental trees, hedges, old flower gardens and weedy yards. Barn owls may be looked for in the rows of conifers that stand awaiting the bulldozer's blade. If you have time, wait until dusk and you may see the owls in flight or standing on overhead wires. In fall and winter, there may also be short-eared owls here.

Resuming the trip, at 3.3 kms from the Laing bridge, turn left and drive to Iona Island which is a little more than 3 kilometres from the left turn. You'll soon have open water on both sides and will see the Administration building of the Iona Island Sewage Treatment Plant ahead. The lagoons are just past the building. There is a visitors' register to sign but no admission fee. Be sure to examine the register for reports of recent bird sightings. Birders are welcome but only from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. on week-days. In the past few years an occasional sharp-tailed sandpiper has shown up here in late summer or early fall. Long-billed dowitchers and western sandpipers are sometimes seen here (also at Reifel) in large numbers. The 8 to 5 time restriction applies only to the Iona Is. lagoon area. The rest of Iona and all of Sea Island is open territory at any time.

### Where to Find a Crested Myna

On the way back to downtown Vancouver, if you have not already seen a crested myna, turn east on Marine Drive (after recrossing the Oak St. bridge) and proceed to Fraser St. A few minutes of searching in this area should surely produce these birds. They can also be found along Cambie St. anywhere from Marine Drive to 10th Avenue. Look on lawns, television antennae and curbsides. They sometimes are seen with starlings.

### Time Well Spent

If you have not done much Pacific coast birding previously, you will find the agenda outlined above will produce excellent and entertaining birding with surely a few life birds.

A report to BIRDFINDING IN CANADA outlining what you saw, where and when, would be most welcome.