



AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2010

OVER THE HILL: PROMISING RESULTS AFTER THE 3RD SEASON...

After the third field season of the BC Atlas, there is no sign of slowing down. In fact, we had already completed and entered more point counts by mid-October than we did all last year. I'm actually happy to hear that many people haven't entered their data yet – that means there's more to come over the winter! With over 5000 point counts entered already this year we have managed to reach (and in some cases, greatly surpass) some regional point count targets (e.g. Robson Valley, Revelstoke, Peace). Approximately half of the regions are on or ahead of target for point counts needed. That still leaves many regions needing more help, which can be greatly aided by getting groups of volunteers together for Atlas blitzes where needed. Small teams that target a region can make a big difference and like every year, additional funding is required by the atlas project to aid groups and individuals who go out and give it their all. The effectiveness of funding can clearly be seen in the surge in data this summer. For example, funding from the Sustainable Forestry Initiative for work in

the Peace Region (41) completed a whopping 200% more squares than in 2009. In the Burns Lake Region (32) nearly the whole point count target was completed in this year alone! Once again, the Baillie Memorial Fund provided travel subsidies to groups to complete some remote atlassing.

With the Greater Vancouver region (15) nearly completed, Regional Coordinator George Clulow decided to stretch his atlassing wings and travelled with Carlo Giovannella and Dale Jensen to help in the Chilcotin Region (26); a remote region with lots to discover and in need of outside help. And did they ever discover! His group covered over 4000 km and found rarities including Least Sandpiper, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and very surprisingly, Yellow Rail. Two other groups headed into the Chilcotin, including Regional Coordinators John Woods and Phil Ranson who rustled-up some birders to horseback into the Itcha Mountains; see inside for the full

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Top "Point Counting Regions" - Regions that have completed the most 5-minute surveys:

41. Peace	926
5. South Okanagan-Boundary	651
18. Victoria-Southern Gulf Islands	564
12. Lillooet-Lytton	522
21. Comox Valley-Campbell River	517
29. Robson Valley	460
15. Greater Vancouver	472
26. Cariboo	441
8. Princeton-Nicola	389
28. Golden	358
9. Thompson	358
40. Fort Nelson	351

Top "Atlassing Regions" - Regions that have recorded the most survey hours:

5. South Okanagan-Boundary	2259
18. Victoria-Southern Gulf Is.	1845
15. Greater Vancouver	1618
4. West Kootenay	1381
41. Peace	1205
9. Thompson	1144
8. Princeton-Nicola	1079
25. Chilcotin	992
12. Lillooet-Lytton	968
26. Cariboo	933
33. Bulkley Valley	855
16. Squamish-Whistler	818



Photo: Christopher Di Corrado

Regional Coordinator Jack Bowling; Atlassers Gloria and Peter Candido

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Photo: Ian Routley

continued 'Third Season'

been confirmed as breeding in BC. While Eurasian-collared Doves are now entrenched across the BC landscape, page 3 details the confirmation of a new species you may not have even imagined!

I was able to travel to two different corners of BC this summer with Atlas teams to some remote and under-atlased areas. Funding from the Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative to reach the famous Flathead Valley, Cranbrook Region, helped greatly augment BC's most south-eastern corner. The atlas team included Dean Nicholson, Kevin Knight and the Livseys from Fernie and Mike Bentley from Calgary, who enjoyed the Nature Conservancy of Canada cabins at the south end of the valley as a field base. The team found Tennessee Warblers throughout the valley, possibly at the southern extent of their breeding range in western North America. In north-eastern BC, our team consisted of Jack Bowling, Brien McGaughey and Nancy Krueger from Prince George and Gloria and Peter Candido from Vancouver (who even spent their anniversary with us!). This trip mapped out eastern specialties like Ovenbirds, Black-and-White Warblers, and even red-listed Philadelphia Vireos, plus gave us a chance to look for the "old" Winter Wrens (no Pacific Wrens were found), and to look for MacGillivray's and Mourning Warblers, between swatting bugs and dodging wandering bison and bears!

We're grateful to all the funding agencies and foundations (listed on the back cover) and are happy to note that the Baillie Fund is now a Gold Sponsor and the

Columbia Basin Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program is now a Platinum Sponsor. Our biggest supporters are the volunteers to the project and particularly the Regional Coordinators who help lead in planning, data review and surveying across the province. This year started with a meeting for atlas staff and regional coordinators to plan for the coming summer and years ahead. A major goal was to re-energise come the mid-way point, and to identify priorities and opportunities for atlas survey coverage by region, and methodology that will facilitate coverage of tricky-to-access squares. A well-attended evening event featured four entertaining and thought-provoking presentations from the early beginning of the Atlas to already thinking ahead to after project completion. Regional Coordinators were also treated to some downtime for coastal birding, including a visit to Brunswick Point to view the migrating Western Sandpipers. Now with winter's arrival and migratory birds having moved on to warmer climates, planning for the next summer is already underway.

Christopher Di Corrado



Photo: Brenda Lee

Don't forget to get your records into the Atlas over the winter months. You may have some great records in your backyard. Some groups like woodpeckers, hawks, owls, and water birds (ducks, rails, bitterns) might easily be missed due to their daily activity, relative rarity, or specialised habitat. Contact your Regional Coordinator with a list of what's around.

ATLAS PROJECT CONFIRMS PARASITIC JAEGER NESTING IN BC (PAJA-NY!)

by David F. Fraser, Victoria, BC (photo/sketch: David Fraser)

It was June 29, 1998, on my third trip down the Tatshenshini and Alsek rivers, that I saw my first Parasitic Jaegers in the Alsek River Valley in British Columbia. We were camping west of the confluence of the Alsek River and the creek that drains the melt water of the Reynolds Glacier. I watched a total of 16 Parasitic Jaegers fly past over the course of the day. Six birds landed on a large gravel bar upstream of camp and sat scattered over the gravel bar for many hours over the next two days. I was intrigued as this behaviour strongly suggested breeding in BC. Unfortunately, river rafts without engines don't allow travel upstream and the water in the Alsek is too cold and swift for swimming, so exploring these gravel bars was not an option. I resolved to document nesting on a subsequent trip, not knowing how many years that was going to take.

On June 18, 2001 when we stopped on a gravel bar to gather firewood our rafting group was repeatedly stooped upon by a Parasitic Jaeger, which also feigned a broken wing and flopped on both the ground and in the river (DD in atlas shorthand). I enlisted the help of the guides and guests, and 18 of us searched about a half of the gravel bar but were unable to find an egg or chick.

Leah Ramsay and I checked for this nest on a subsequent trip in July of that year, but rising river levels had broken the gravel bar into many segments and we could not find any sign of a nesting jaeger, although we did see one

Parasitic Jaeger elsewhere in the valley.

The following year, 2002, a downy nestling was found on July 12. Unfortunately it was so close to the border I could not tell if the gravel bar was in BC or Alaska. Two fledged young were being fed by four adults on a gravel bar June 28, 2003 and another chick on another gravel bar that was fledged or nearly fledged further suggested breeding. While unlikely, it was possible that they could have hatched in Alaska and flown to the BC side of the valley. Frustratingly, I found another unfledged jaeger chick in July of 2003 on a gravel bar on the border, and again we could not tell if the nest was in BC or Alaska - life is a lot easier now that I travel with a GPS unit! More sightings by Laurence Turney and I were gathered in July of 2004 and June of 2005 but no nests or chicks were encountered.

On July 17, 2010 I found an unfledged Parasitic Jaeger chick and an adult on a gravel bar in the Alsek River, directly in front of the Netland Glacier - this time unequivocally in the BC portion of the valley and a confirmed breeding record for the atlas! Persistence rewarded!

Many thanks to Neil Hartling, Chris Ford and Johnny Mikes, current and past owners of Canadian River Expeditions for making it possible for me to go along on these trips as a naturalist and the BC Breeding Bird Atlas and the Baillie Fund for defraying some travel costs for my 2010 trip.





Regional Coordinator Spotlight!

ANN NIGHTINGALE: VICTORIA-SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS (18)

As a grown-up (yeah, right) in the mid-1990's, I had two life regrets: that I couldn't identify very many birds and I knew even fewer constellations. I'd bought binoculars and field guides, and could identify the obvious backyard birds like Steller's Jays and American Robins, but I just hadn't made the leap to "birder". In 1995, I had the great fortune to meet and work with Alan MacLeod, birding mentor extraordinaire. He offered to take a group of us out birding one day, and I jumped at the opportunity. To use one of his

phrases, he "knocked my socks off" by identifying birds by SONG!!! Who knew??? I thought that I would never be able to do that, but within a year, I knew the songs of most residents, and within a few years, most of the migrants. Since then, birding has become a very important part of my life and the person that I have become. I truly enjoy showing others the wonders of our local birds, and have become deeply involved in the science as well through banding at Rocky Point Bird Observatory.

The Breeding Bird Atlas has been a terrific way to re-ignite the enthusiasm in a lot of more experienced birders and to create interest among the new birders as well. I'm delighted to be a part of this wonderful project. The constellations will have to wait until after 2012!



ALAN BURGER: PRINCETON-NICOLA (8)

Bird atlassing is a wonderful way for me to combine several of my major interests: birding, biology and bashing around in the wilderness. I've worked as a seabird biologist for 30 years and it is a refreshing challenge to be coordinating the bird atlassing in an inland region (Princeton-Nicola). Birding for the sake of ticking new species on one's life list can be fun but it doesn't really contribute much to knowledge or conservation of birds. With atlassing, I love the fact that a great day's birding can also contribute valuable biological information and it is really satisfying to see the BC atlas database build up each summer.

As many of us are discovering, atlassing is also a great way

to discover what is in your neighbourhood – going to all the different habitats in a square can lead to interesting discoveries, like species I never knew were nesting close to my home. The Princeton-Nicola region is a great place to be atlassing too, since it covers such a wide range of habitat from coastal forests in Manning Park through high alpine, dry interior forests, and the sagebrush and grasslands of the Merritt and Douglas Lake areas. Atlassers in our region have already discovered several new nest sites of Lewis's Woodpeckers and Williamson's Sapsuckers to aid in the conservation of these threatened species.



MARGO HEARNE: HAIDA GWAI (36)

Irish-born Margo Hearne settled in Masset, Haida Gwaii, in 1974 and began serious birding in 1983. She kept bird records while fishing aboard the troller/gillnetter Lady Julia for 17 years and was an active advocate for social and environmental justice.



Margo writes regular columns on birds and fish for local papers, and used her communication skills to help

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GARY DAVIDSON: WEST KOOTENAY (4)

My interest in birding began almost accidentally. I was hiking with a friend of mine near Pemberton. A bright yellow 'flash' zipped across the trail in front of us. We were able to get a good look at it, but being "city-dwellers" we had never seen anything like it. Later that night we were able to find a copy of the old Golden field guide. We went through it page by page and were excited to find an identical image; we had seen a MacGillivray's Warbler. Now that we had the book, we spent the rest



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continued "Margo Hearne"

raise more than \$1 million to build a bridge to restore the Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary to its original estuarine status in 1995. Her articles appear in *American Birds* and *BC Nature*. Her stories have been in *Guardian Weekly*, *Canadian Women's Studies*, *The New Morningside Papers* and *Northword* magazine. Margo ran her own weekly community newspaper *The Morning Star* for a year and, as executive Director of the Delkatla Sanctuary Society, raised \$350,000 to build the Nature Centre at Delkatla in Masset.

Margo and Peter Hamel, her husband, continue to monitor the birds of Haida Gwaii through atlas work, Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Bird Counts and regular surveys of Hecate Strait from BC Ferries. She is presently developing an educational program about Species at Risk on Haida Gwaii.

She is the author of *Small Birds Cling to Bare Branches: Nesting Songbirds of Haida Gwaii* which features the songbirds of Haida Gwaii. She and Peter work out of their home in Masset on Haida Gwaii off Canada's northwest coast.

continued "Gary Davidson"

of our trip locating birds and looking them up. A few years later (1974), when I was teaching high school in Fort Nelson, I had the good fortune to meet Anthony (Tony) J. Erskine. I credit Tony with turning me into a "real" birder. He introduced me to birding by ear, the importance of keeping notes, and Breeding Bird Surveys. Later that year I organised the first Christmas Bird Count in Fort Nelson.

In 1975 I moved to Nakusp and have lived there since. I have coordinated the Nakusp CBC since 1975 and have conducted from one to three Breeding Bird Surveys each year. I continued my teaching career and spent 30 years at Nakusp Secondary School before retiring in 2005. Twice during this period I participated in the teacher exchange program.

In 1987 I taught in Mackay in north-eastern Australia, and in 2004 I returned to Australia to teach for a year in Tasmania. In 2001 I spent the summer working at a birders' lodge in northern Australia. My "job" was to take the lodge visitors out to see the local birds! My wife and I have made two other trips to Australia and will almost certainly be returning someday soon.

ROCK WRENS ON SALT SPRING ISLAND

by Karen Ferguson, Region 18 (Southern Vancouver Island) (photo: Simon Henson)

I had the surprising and enjoyable experience of observing a pair of Rock Wrens on a private Salt Spring Island property. The high elevation location was an open habitat of grass, rock outcroppings and a large boulder field. I was able to get to the site on five different occasions: June 23, 24, 29 and again on July 15 and lastly on August 30.

The male was easily located due to his continuous and delightful singing. Soon after a second Rock Wren (I assumed to be female) flew up from the grass and began to explore the crevasses and gaps between the boulders. The male flew towards her and she joined him in the air where they tussled in flight and fell to the ground, where they disappeared in the tall grass for about five seconds. The male flew out first, landed on a rock and resumed singing. The female appeared soon after, perched on a rock and bobbed up and down with those deep knee bends, so distinctive of the species.

The following evening I observed the pair as they walked, hopped and climbed amongst the boulders. This was the last time I saw both birds. Up to and including July 15 the male was singing and maintaining a territory in and around the boulder area. I hoped to observe adults carrying food



into a nest site but alas I didn't. I searched but didn't find external evidence of a "pavement" or "walkway" leading into a nest cavity in the boulders which is, curiously, often built by Rock Wrens out of flat stones and other objects.

On August 30 one adult was observed foraging and preening. There were no signs of the second adult or young. The Breeding Evidence for this occurrence record is Probable with a "T" for Permanent Territory. The only nest record for Rock Wren for this area was in 1970, when a pair successfully reared five young near Duncan on Vancouver Island. Maybe next year?

SAFETY ALERT: NOGO NY!

By Mark Phinney - Atlas Steering Committee, Peace (41) Regional Coordinator (photos and video stills: Mark Phinney)



I decided to take one more look around, covering an area a bit farther north and west from my original search. As I broke through some underbrush, I looked up and saw a large stick nest on the side of a pine about halfway up the tree. This had to be it! The topography of the area allowed me to walk slightly uphill and get a better look at the nest. I then noticed the female stand up and reposition herself. Confirmed goshawk nest! WOOOO HOOOOO!! The first for my region! I quickly left the area - followed by the scolding male, who swooped at me one final time in protest.

Several weeks later on June 25, I was in the same area and figured I should check up on the goshawk family to see if I could determine the nest contents, as well as taking a GPS point at the location. The assault began almost immediately. Although the nest was only about 80m off

A quick look at the BCBBA species map for Northern Goshawk shows that the species has thus far been found only sporadically during the atlas project. I was therefore quite pleased when I stopped my ATV along a seismic line on May 12 and heard a goshawk calling as it flew toward me. As it perched in a nearby tree, I noticed it was carrying a dead bird. I then heard a second goshawk call, and I realized I was witnessing a prey exchange. The male had captured something and called to the female, who left the nest, called in response, and arrived to take the prey. Within a few seconds of the female's departure, the male noticed me....and he was not happy.

The scolding began immediately. Judging from the behaviour I had just witnessed, I figured the nest couldn't be too far away, so into the woods I went. Goshawks have a reputation for being aggressive around the nest, and I've had my share of experience with them over the years, so I expected to be dive-bombed a few times. This bird did his best to uphold that reputation. As I strolled through the mixed pine-aspen forest, the male followed me constantly and swooped at me often. I noted the area where he seemed most upset, but despite my efforts, I couldn't find the nest in 10 minutes of searching. Admittedly, my efficiency was much reduced by keeping one eye on the bird. I returned to the seismic line, somewhat perplexed. The nest must be there somewhere. I had even found a handful of moulted wing and tail feathers scattered through the woods.



the trail, it took almost 10 minutes to reach it. The male goshawk was relentless...it was calling constantly, and dive-bombing me every 10 or 15 seconds. And this time it wasn't pulling up six feet away...it was taking direct aim at my head! I switched my camera to 'video' mode and tried to capture some of the excitement.



It's rather comical to watch the clips now, but at the time I was somewhat concerned for my health! I hid in the underbrush and dashed from tree to tree, using the trunks as protection as I tried to keep an eye on the bird. Eventually I made my way to the nest and could see at least one partly feathered youngster. I took a GPS point

and started back towards my ATV.....and then the female showed up.....

Avoiding the male was exciting, but now things were bordering on dangerous. The female (about 1/3 larger than the male) was equally aggressive, and the pair worked together; each perching on opposite sides of me. As I watched one, the other would attack from behind – and so it went for my entire retreat. My heart was racing and I was sweating profusely as I chose my moments and ran, stumbling and bumbling to the next tree or thicket. With two birds now strafing me, there was no place to hide. Caught between trees, I dove to the ground just in time to feel the breeze of goshawk wings as one of the birds missed me by inches. As I neared the trail, I burst from cover and jumped on my ATV, started it up and jammed it into gear. I took off as fast as I could, and looked over my shoulder to see a goshawk in pursuit! The bird pulled up just as I cleared an overhanging tree, but I could hear its angry calls fading behind me as I barreled down the trail. Phew! I've been around a fair number of goshawk nests in my time, but I'd never run into a pair so ferociously defensive of their nest. No need to bother them again (or risk my well-being), so I avoided the area for the next few weeks.

Curiosity eventually got the better of me, and I wanted to know if the nest was successful – so on August 4, I headed back to the danger zone. It was late in the nesting season, and I figured that even if the nest was successful, the family may have left the area. As I approached the parking spot, I heard a goshawk calling right beside the trail. My heart



the ATV and started into the forest towards the nest – more calling and a second juvenile bird! They were quite vocal and either fearless or curious; following me for a short distance. I quickly went to the nest tree and confirmed it was empty, and then back to the ATV, snapping a couple



pictures of the youngsters. The adults seemed to be away hunting, which was just as well – I didn't want to test their protectiveness of fledged young.

jumped and I looked around wildly...are you kidding me??!! I saw the bird approaching and I prepared to bolt out of there, when I realized it was a juvenile. I hopped off

I'll check the nest again next spring to see if it's being used....but I think I'll bring an umbrella for protection...

BIRD ATLASSING IN KAKWA PROVINCIAL PARK

By Bev Ramey - Atlas Steering Committee

I confess that atlassing was secondary to exploring the outstanding beauty of Kakwa Provincial Park. As I learned over the past two years' backpacking trips for atlassing in remote parks (Snowy Mountain and Big Creek), it is often difficult to combine the representative habitats in which to do off road point counts with the necessities of locating campsites, and then reaching the point count area before 9:30 am, even when one rises at 5:00 am! In addition there are the weather limitations, such as "don't do point counts in unusually cold weather" (hmm, those freezing early mornings in the alpine), or "don't do point counts in windy conditions strong enough to make small trees sway".

Or unexpected events such as surprising a sow grizzly with three cubs when heading for a rocky ridge where we expected to find ptarmigan, but which caused us to respectfully reroute in the opposite direction! Needless to say, it's more rewarding to focus on the exploring and fit in the atlassing whenever possible. But the atlassing certainly gets us up early, when that dawn light casts such a wonderful hue on the landscape.

were on the east side of the Rocky Mountains, but still in BC (we were that far north).

We weren't the first exploratory trip into this area. The turn of the century (a hundred years ago) saw real interest in the area from the Alpine Club and mountaineers enticed by the stunning peaks of Mt Sir Alexander and Mt Ida, as seen from Mt Robson. Those two peaks are the most northern Rocky Mountains over 10,000 feet. Trip participants enjoyed pre-reading the 1914 journals of Samuel Prescott Fay (*The Forgotten Explorer*, ed. Charles Helm and Mike Murtha) and Mary Jobe's account in the *Canadian Alpine Journal* of 1916. Those explorers, of course, followed routes of the First Nations.

Fay's 1914 tour involved twenty horses and food for four months, and focused on "hunting and collecting" for the Biological Survey of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That mainly meant big game, but he did record 15 bird species in the Kakwa area. More recent information was provided by BC Parks background studies (52 bird species, entire park) and Carolyn McGhee (41 species around



Group on top of Mt Ian Monroe, with Mt Sir Alexander in background

Kakwa (meaning porcupine) Provincial Park is located in the northern Rockies, northwest of Jasper National Park and Mt Robson Provincial Park. We hiked up the McGregor River 23 km, over the Rocky Mountain divide, and 5 km downwards to our destination at Kakwa Lake. Yes, we

Kakwa Lake, 2004). Together with Park Hosts John and Joan Vogt's hiking guide, and Rob Vogt's map, we were set.



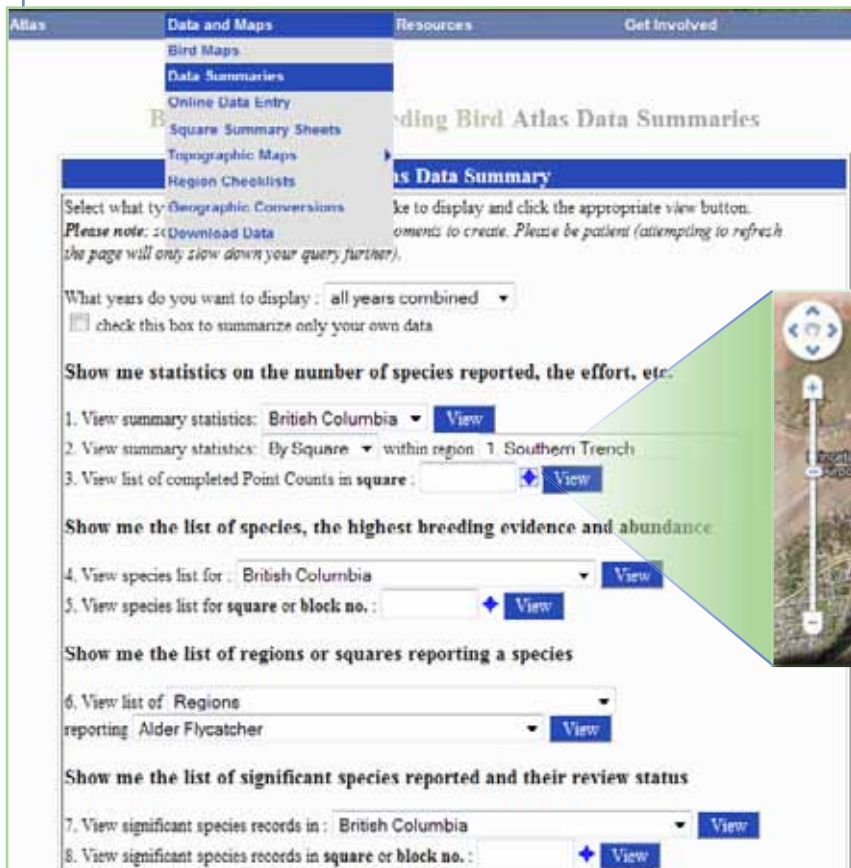
We were blessed with a low snow pack year for the area and in early June, BC Parks reported that the access road was passable. The hope was that the ford of Buchanan Creek, located 12 km along the trail, would be passable. We had been warned that it was often not passable in early July (the last date to do point counts), but with the low snow pack, we optimistically set off. The cool (freezing at night) weather leading up to our week in the park kept the mosquito population down, although those pesky critters did increase in number over the week of enjoyable sunny, hot weather. The sunshine well compensated for the increase in mosquitoes as the alpine flowers responded with stunning beauty! And Buchanan Creek was fordable.

Despite the increasing mosquitoes during the week, Kakwa was a wonderful landscape in which to undertake bird counts and observations, or to search, unsuccessfully, for the American Pipit nest -- but based on the bird's behaviour, we're sure it was there. For me the highlight was the frenzied 'song' of the Wilson's Snipe, heard when falling asleep in the late evening and periodically throughout the night, from our tent pitched in the willow/sedge meadow. We recorded 67 species with breeding evidence. Our atlasing focused mainly on one square

within the park; there are 14 more squares to cover in that Provincial Park!

BC Nature backpacking group members: Cathy Koot (atlassing leader), Margie and Rob Shepherd, Carol Fairhurst, Rick Gee, Eileen Sowerby, Jules Thomson, Terry Gagne, Bill & Bev Ramey.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE: HOW DO I REVIEW THE BIRD LIST IN MY AREA IF I DON'T KNOW THE SQUARE NUMBER?



It's now easier than ever!

- On the Atlas website, click on "DATA and MAPS" from the blue header bar
- Click on "Data Summaries" and the data summary page will appear (as on the left)
- Click the blue symbol beside "View" in line #5
- A map of BC will appear. You may move around the province and use the + to zoom into your town



- When you have found your area on the map view, click "transfer" and the square number will automatically be entered in the box.
- Finally click "View" to see the Bird List.
- View what's missing in your area.
- Call or email your RC to add important data, or enter data online
- More Tips and Instructions can be found in previous Atlas newsletters online: www.birdatlas.bc.ca/english/newsletter.jsp or call or email the atlas office to request copies

LESSONS LEARNED DURING EASTERN BC ATLASSING

by Mike Boyd, Atlasser

What started as an idea to do a bit of atlassing while on vacation morphed into an adventure across eastern BC full of back-country roads, lessons to share, and, most importantly, interesting birds.

After finishing our Common Poorwill monitoring in the Okanagan, Jeremiah Kennedy and I began our overnight trek to the Beaverfoot Valley, located just east of Golden. The drive went slower than expected as a wild storm system dumped rain on us for most of the trip. We soon realized that we were only going to get an hour of sleep before starting our first point count, but, after a long rainy night of driving, any amount of sleep would have been welcome. However, we forgot about the invisible boundary dividing Pacific and Mountain time that we passed near Golden. Fortunately we got to our first point count station just in time for surveying. Lesson One: Before setting out on an atlassing adventure, always check your time zones.

Our adventures in the Beaverfoot continued as we bounced along logging roads deep into the valley for three more atlas squares. The boreal bird life was spectacular with Blackpoll Warblers and Solitary Sandpipers in the wet spruce forest, Spruce Grouse and Chipping Sparrow in the uplands, and American Pipits flying overhead. On our way back to Golden to get some much needed rest, a brief burst of blue flew by the car and Jeremiah called out "Indigo Bunting!", a rare sight in BC. This was an unexpected end to our first morning, so we took it as a good omen. Lesson Two: When searching for birds, always expect the unexpected.

The next day we plunged deeper into the valley where few birders have been before... and then we found out why. At around kilometre 47 we bottomed out my Volkswagen Golf one too many times and cracked the oil pan! It wasn't a great way to start the day, but we are dedicated birders who were determined to complete our atlas squares for the day. We finished a few point counts around the broken-down car before starting

the long walk back to civilization. Luckily the road was still new territory and we were able to finish another two squares that morning and find our first American Three-toed Woodpecker nest. We managed to walk about 26 km before a logging truck picked us up and took us to the highway so we could call for a tow-truck and retrieve the car. Lessons Three, Four, and Five: make sure you have a proper vehicle for your surveys; always bring extra water bottles; and, don't let something like a broken-down vehicle get in the way of completing your atlas squares and finding some amazing birds.

The next day we finished point counts for our remaining three squares and were off to northeastern B.C. via the famous Icefields Parkway through the Rocky Mountains.

The switch to eastern species in the Peace Region both amazed and challenged us as we adapted to the new songs and calls. Wet areas turned up Swamp and Le Conte's Sparrows, in deciduous forest we picked up Baltimore Oriole, Ovenbird, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and we had Cape May and Black-throated Green Warblers in the coniferous forest.

After adjusting to the eastern birds, we were surprised with how quiet the area was. We knew we were near the end of the breeding season, but thought we should be hearing a forest alive with bird song. Apparently breeding was underway earlier than usual this year due to warmer weather at the start of the breeding season, so we decided to cut our losses and head back a couple of days early. Lesson six: try to find clues about the timing of the breeding season in your atlas squares.

Despite the quiet birds, we made sure to do some atlassing on the way back to the Okanagan. We were rewarded with a Great Gray Owl west of Fort St. John and, a short ways further along the road we found a nesting pair of Harlan's Hawks. This dark subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk is supposed to be found further

towards the Yukon and Alaska, but it has recently been found nesting in northeastern BC and northwestern Alberta.

On our last morning of atlassing, while waiting on road construction traffic, we finally heard a bird I had been hoping to hear all trip - a Winter Wren (not a Pacific Wren which we had been hearing everywhere else on our trip). Who'd ever thought sitting in traffic could be so great! Lesson 7: Always keep your ears open.

For a lot of people atlassing can be all about the birds, but I would have to say it's at least as much about the experience that can make it all worthwhile. With one fixed car, a few lessons learnt, and many kilometres later, we are ready and excited for our next atlassing adventure.

Photo: Mark Phinney

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE PARTNERS WITH NATIONAL ATLASES

by Peter Davidson, BSC - BC Program Manager

For the first time in Canadian history, this summer there were four concurrent Breeding Bird Atlases running across the country - in the Maritimes (final year), Quebec and Manitoba (both in their first year), and of course BC. The Breeding Bird Atlas program is now truly national in scope. Much of Canada's landscape is Crown forest, managed for harvest. Forest industry increasingly respects and partners with Bird Studies Canada in many parts of the country, including on the incorporation of biodiversity values into forest certification schemes, exemplified by our new 3-year partnership with the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). SFI is one of three major forest certification schemes (FSC and CSA being the others), to which participating companies and land acquisition or management agencies contribute a fee, and adhere to a common set of standards that improve the way our forests are managed. These standards include provisions on the management of biodiversity, which is where the national Atlas program comes in. There are more than 240 companies and other groups either officially participating in, or associated with the SFI Standard across North America, many of which are active in Canada. We are beginning to work with some of these groups, e.g. Louisiana Pacific Ltd, West Fraser and BC Timber Sales in BC and Manitoba, and Abitibi Bowater, Hawkesbury-Newpage and others in the Maritimes, to provide them with basic data, such as detailed species lists for their land holdings, and detailed georeferenced

Species at Risk locations, to help them achieve regulatory compliance with respect to the provisions of the Species at Risk Act, and work towards best management practices.



Much of SFI's financial support for the national Atlas program goes towards completing point count surveys in more remote forest areas that are less accessible to volunteers. We have made an effort to focus on SFI program participant lands where possible in BC, but SFI also recognises the value and importance of obtaining data from the wider landscape to provide the context for the SFI-certified portions. As it happens, in BC there is a huge swath of SFI-certified forests; it is the certification scheme that best suits the unique conditions of BC's landscape. Over the next two and a half years, we will be working with many of these forest companies to find out precisely what their information needs are with respect to biodiversity, and developing new tools and map products that will meet those needs, which will likely result in new tools for atlassers to explore and visualise the data too! We made a presentation on the national Atlas program at their 2010 Annual Conference in Vancouver, which generated lots of interest, and no less than six companies came up to us afterwards asking how to get involved! You can find out more about the SFI program at: www.sfiprogram.org.

GETTING READY... FOR SPRING

by Christopher Di Corrado, Atlas Coordinator (photos: C. Di Corrado/ R. Butler)

Before we know it, the birds will be back from their winter homes, barely leaving us time to get ready for the summer. Late last winter, I was used to hearing wintering Dark-eyed Juncos singing on the trails around the office. It had been a week since the first migrant Yellow-rumped Warblers greeted me until I heard its trilling song. A few seconds passed before I realised, "hey, that's not a junco!" Happy to still have discerned a different species, I realised they'd all be back before long. Would I remember all the songs – likely not. Much field work has been completed this summer since that time. How did I get ready for the coming summer? There were a few tools, training, and tasks that got me and the atlas project ready for the summer and motivated to atlas.

I first started off online with Dendroica (<http://www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/>). Here I could make lists and listen to those (many) bird songs that I had forgotten over the winter. It's free for everyone and a great training tool. I can make a list of the confusing or similar species and test myself. The program designers are working on producing point count tests where novice birders can test themselves and atlasers might learn enough to complete point counts in the last years of the BC Atlas project. If

you have

bird songs or photos, you can submit online to help build the repertoire.

Then for a few weeks, I got back into banding. Years ago

I was in charge of a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity & Survivorship) banding station when I started off as a biologist. While I was a bit rusty after some time, it was time to get back on the "Banding-wagon." I was invited by Mike Boyd with Pacific Northwest Conservation at the Iona Island Bird Observatory to join him at their new banding station. It's a great way to learn about the finer details of bird ID. I often handle common birds and find colours or markings I never really noticed before. The Atlas had me really watching the birds for their behaviour, but banding helps me focus on finer detail that helps in quicker and more accurate ID.

At the beginning of May, we had a gathering of some of the best birders in BC. We had 27 Regional Coordinators attend a weekend meeting to work out prioritising in their regions over the next 3 years, amongst many other items. We planned to help you, the atlasers, get to remote and under-atlased squares over the next few years. On Saturday evening, we invited the partners, sponsors and all birders to join for an evening of talks and images about the atlas, with wine and hors d'oeuvres, and socialising.



Regional Coordinators met in Delta to plan for the future surveys



Photo: Paul Levesque

After the meeting, I attended the Bird Monitoring and Banding Workshop (<http://www.birdvancouver.com/workshops.html>) offered in Burnaby by the Vancouver Avian Research Centre (VARC). It involved a great lesson in the fine detail and theory of bird identification and life habits, plumages, molt sequences. It made me think of: "know your molt limit, band within it." If you're a bander, you might have a laugh. Now, not only can I ID birds, but it may even be possible to age the birds that I see through my binoculars; you don't always have to have them in the hand!



Derek Matthews showing the finer details of bird plumages at VARC banding station

Finally, a great prep for the summer season is a birding "Big Day." This year I decided to do the Big Day on a little Island - Westham

Island. I had a few friends and staff from the Pacific Wildlife Research Centre join me for the Bird Studies Canada Baillie Birdathon (<http://www.birdscanada.org/support/>



Pablo Jost and Mike Boyd:
Baillie Big-Day Biking duo

birdathon/) which encompassed Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Alaksen National Wildlife Area, and the rest of Westham Island. We couldn't resist a stop over at Brunswick Point and the ferry terminal jetty.

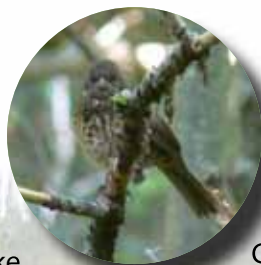
Nothing works as well as getting into the field for the summer. Birding with regional experts is a great way to learn local dialects. In the Flathead Valley of south-eastern BC, Dean Nicholson from Cranbrook pointed out that the "black-throated green" sounding warbler I heard was in fact a Townsend's Warbler dialect I had never heard before. And Jack Bowling pointed out the regional sound of the MacGillivray's Warblers in the Northern Rockies. I'm planning with birders, and looking around the province for opportunities to help get them into places they might not always go. Let's hope I don't forget too many songs over the winter. Soon enough they'll all be back and there will be more to learn.

ATLASSING HAIDA GWAII

by Margo Hearne, Region 36 (Haida Gwaii) Coordinator (photos: M. Hearne)

Black Oystercatchers nest along the beach at Sandspit where they take grave risks with their choice of open space and where, one day to our excitement, we found three nesting pairs. Later in the season, a young eagle sat quietly on a beach log being repeatedly attacked by a pair of oystercatchers. It seemed a little nonplussed by all the clamour, but after it flew away we saw two youngsters with the parent birds.

Yes, an eagle will take young, but these chicks were such meager morsels we don't think the eagle even saw them. Further down the beach, at least four pairs of Semipalmated Plovers sat on nests. We don't know how many survived, but as late as August a pair of chicks ran away from us on the high beach.



From the beach to the muskeg bogs. The Queen Charlotte Lowlands harbour nesting Sandhill Cranes, Red-throated Loons, Sooty Grouse, Fox Sparrows and other nesting birds. It's a distinctive habitat, unique on Haida Gwaii. Much of it is inaccessible and it's easy to

get lost. When the fog comes down, everything is as silent as tomorrow. We know of people who have been lost for days, and when they were found their feet had rotted. Two tips: always flag your way in and the compass never lies.

Atlassing, while giving an overall view of what birds nest where, doesn't tell the whole story. Whether or not chicks hatch, whether they return to the same place yearly, how large is the clutch, how much do they weigh, will they return - all require detailed, annual research. We can only capture a brief moment in time. It's a valuable beginning.



BOOTS, SADDLES, AND BIRDS:

HOLIDAY ATLASING IN THE ITCHA MOUNTAINS

by John G. Woods, Region 25 (Chilcotin) Coordinator

(photos: John & Marcia Woods)

The BC Breeding Bird Atlas provides a great motivation to visit new country—to explore those blank places on the map where little is known about birds. In July, 2010 as part of an Atlas-inspired holiday expedition by packhorse, I fulfilled a dream to visit one of these voids in my experience: the Itchas Ranges north-east of Anahim Lake in the Chilcotin.

Part plateau and part mountains, the Chilcotin Atlas Region sprawls across 4,830 km² of much-loved country. Here dry grasslands and dense forests of pine and spruce reach westward from the Fraser River to wind-swept alpine tundra along the eastern margin of the Coastal Range. This also is volcano country. Evidence of past lava-flows can be seen in the dissected cliffs along the Fraser and Chilcotin rivers. Hole-riddled lava rock is everywhere. Part of a volcanic belt stretching eastward from the coast, the Itcha Range is an isolated shield volcano rising above the surrounding plateau-lands. Roadless and high elevation, the Itchas offered both an adventure by horseback and a chance to learn about birds in an area rarely visited by bird-watchers.

Our party of seven arranged this bird-atlasing trip to start literally at the end of the road at the Six Mile Ranch, home base for the Itchalgatchuz Mountain Outfitting. For hosts Wanda Dorsey and Roger Williams, the atlasing team was a bit of a novelty combining cowboy boots with binoculars and volunteering an endless stream of bird names.

The trip started with introductions (to our horses) and adjustments to our gear (do I keep my binoculars around my neck or in my horn-bag?). Full of anticipation, we set off for the high country on the morning of July 2nd complete with three guides, and twenty horses! While Roger & Wanda kept us en route through a maze of forest and wet meadows to our first campsite, our GPS units provided us with the essential information for



bird-atlasing: the coordinates of the atlas squares we were passing through.

After a long first day in the saddle, we stopped at “Lester’s Camp” (named after Wanda’s father) and were treated to the sight of a single caribou making inquisitive forays into the meadow below us. At Wanda’s camp kitchen the coffee pot was always on and no-one has ever gone hungry. Later that evening, two Grey-Cheeked Thrushes began singing from the edge of camp. This was my first experience with this northern species and I have a vivid memory of a unique combination of

Gray-Cheeked and Hermit Thrush songs drifting through the tent as I slipped in and out of sleep that first night.

In a pattern that repeated itself for the next six days we eased into a routine of early-morning point counts around camp followed by riding through the spectacular volcanic alpine of the Itchas each day. After two nights at a campsite, we travelled through mountain passes to a new location that

combined forage and water for the horses within easy reach of the alpine.

While the bird-watching and bird-listening could sometimes be challenging—think wind, snow, rain, flies, and restless horses, we were treated to many moments of



Cariboo Region Atlas Coordinator Phil Ranson aboard “Rocket” joined us for the Itchas trip



We rode by a female White-tailed Ptarmigan with chicks as we arrived at this little lake

she had been hearing a “dove or owl” hooting or cooing around camp throughout the day. I assured her that we were too high for pigeons and doves (a mistake) so we concentrated on trying to figure out what type of owl it might be. That is, until the next morning when Wanda excitedly pointed to the bird above our heads—a Eurasian Collared-Dove. While I’ve had widespread reports from across the Chilcotin of this species, finding one in this remote wilderness setting was a major surprise.

One of the challenges of alpine bird-atlasing across the province is timing. To gather data on breeding birds we need to be afield early enough to overlap the breeding season (June through early July), but late enough for winter snows to have melted from the passes (late June). Our trip (July 2-8) may have missed peak singing activity as many species appeared to be well-advanced in their breeding cycle with just-fledged young. But luckily for us, alpine bird song continued throughout the mornings with the precipitous fall-off in activity happening in the early afternoon.

discovery. Singing Savannah Sparrows and Horned Larks frequented the open tundra (I had no idea that “savannahs” could be so common in the alpine). On several occasions we spotted or heard ptarmigan—both white-tailed and willow. Although rumoured also to live in these mountains, Rock Ptarmigan eluded us and we are still searching for our first Rock Ptarmigan Atlas breeding-record in the Chilcotin.

Of course our horse-birding was interrupted each day by a healthy lunch break—typically in a sheltered copse of evergreens with wind-swept krummholz margins. As we sipped coffee and munched lunch-goodies, pure-toned Golden-crowned Sparrows provided the entertainment in an abundance that I’d never before experienced.

While our goal was simply to learn about birds in a roadless area while contributing to the Atlas and enjoying a packhorse holiday, surprises are always fun. Probably the highlight “find” of the trip was a small colony of American Golden-Plovers with flightless young in a high-elevation basin—a first record for the Atlas and an example of the value of exploring “blank places” on the map.

Another bird highlight taught me a lesson in keeping an open mind. Late one afternoon soon after we returned from a long day-ride in the alpine, Wanda reported that



John Woods & Phil Ranson enjoying a hot coffee on a cool day

Like the majority of British Columbia, easy access in the Chilcotin is mostly limited to major highways and logging roads at mid to low elevations. You can clearly see this when you look at the bird maps on the Atlas website. Bird records are concentrated along Hwy 20 and major logging roads. This leaves many areas, especially alpine areas, in need of attention over the last two years of the Atlas survey period (in 2011 and 2012).

Opportunities to combine adventure holidays with much-needed atlasing abound in the Chilcotin. Backpacking is possible in a number of areas and several back-country lodges offer cabins—a warm fire is very welcome after a chilly morning of point counts. Several packhorse outfitters organize trips to remote places and may be willing to arrange a special bird-watching trip for you and your Atlas-minded friends.

There also are great opportunities for floatplane access into lakeside cabins located in or near the alpine.

We are already organizing another Atlas-holiday by packhorse in 2011. This time we’ll explore the Ilgatchuz Range—another isolated shield volcano to the west of the Itchas...

PACIFIC WRENS AND WINTER WRENS IN WESTERN CANADA

In northeastern British Columbia, near the town of Tumbler Ridge, Darren Irwin and Dave Toews have found a contact zone between distinct western and eastern forms of winter wrens. These forms differ dramatically in songs and genetics, and the two forms are reproductively isolated.

In 2010 the American Ornithologists' Union officially recognized two distinct species in North America: the Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*) and the Winter Wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*), both now distinct from the Eurasian wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*).

You can help map the ranges of the two species: If you live in northeastern BC (or western Alberta) pay attention to the songs to map the two species in the Atlas. Darren and Dave would appreciate it if you could identify whether it is singing a western or eastern song and let them know the location of the bird. Please let them know by sending an email to Darren Irwin. Even better, a recording of the bird could be very useful. Contact and more info, and songs on their website: <http://www.zoology.ubc.ca/~irwin/wrens.html>

Top: Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*)
Bottom: Winter Wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) (photos: Darren Irwin)



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