

## FEATURE ARTICLES

### NOTEWORTHY DISTRIBUTIONAL RECORDS OF BIRDS FROM THE MACKENZIE REGION OF CENTRAL BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1995-2009

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#### **Abstract**

New distributional records of birds for British Columbia, from bird banding, monitoring, and bird watching activities in the vicinity of Mackenzie from 1995 through 2009, are presented for 25 species. Some occurrences are first records for the Mackenzie region while others are significant range extensions for the province.

#### **Introduction**

Mackenzie, a small community in north-central British Columbia, is located at the south end of Williston Lake, the largest man-made reservoir in North America. It lies in the Parsnip River trench which has the Rocky Mountains to the east and the Omineca Mountains to the west, and is about 185 km (120 mi) north of Prince George. The town is situated at 701 m elevation and supports a district population of about 5,000 people.

Although the explorer Sir Alexander Mackenzie camped near the present townsite in 1793, the community was only established in the 1960s when the community was established to serve a large pulp and lumber industry. The forest industry is still the primary economic source for Mackenzie.

Until the 1990s, the region's ornithology was little known but was suspected to be a transition zone between northeastern and western avi-fauna in the province (Campbell et al. 1990a, 1990b). In 1995, a bird banding and monitoring station was established at Mugaha Marsh about 14.5 km northwest of Mackenzie (55° 23' 55" N, 123° 12' 30" W; Figure 1) in the Rocky Mountain trench and since then the knowledge of birds in the region has blossomed. Mackenzie Nature Observatory (MNO) organizes the station's activities, as well as other birding activities in the Mackenzie region.

Bird banders and participants at the MNO have confirmed hybridization zones for many northeastern bird species that are expanding their ranges into those of more widely distributed western species. For example, hybrids have been documented for Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) and Red-breasted Sapsucker (*S. ruber*), Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*) and Black-capped Chickadee (*P. atricapillus*), subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco (*Juncus hyemalis hyemalis* x *J. h. oregonus*), and subspecies of Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus auratus* x *C. a. cafer*; Figure 2). The Mackenzie region is also an area where the Cassin's (Solitary) Vireo (*Vireo cassinii*) and Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) both occur sympatrically. In some cases an individual bird may show a combination of plumage traits that make identification questionable.

Many species of birds recorded in the Mackenzie region represent significant range extensions or noteworthy records for British Columbia. The purpose of this article is to highlight some of the more notable records and compare their occurrence with published literature. Copies of all images have been catalogued (e.g., BC Photo Numbers) and deposited in the *British Columbia Photo File for Wildlife Records*, a provincial repository established in 1970 for documenting and archiving, the occurrence of rare vertebrates by photograph (see Campbell and Stirling 1971).



**Figure 1.** The amount of water in Mugaha Marsh, an important wetland in the Mackenzie region of British Columbia, fluctuates annually and seasonally as reservoir water levels are controlled in Williston Lake. The upper 1.5 m (5 ft) to 1.8 m (6 ft) of the reservoir impacts the amount of water retained in Mugaha Marsh. At 670 m (2,199 ft), water from Williston Lake starts to enter the part of the marsh where the bird banding station is located and when levels reach 672 m (2,203 ft) much of Mugaha Marsh is flooded. In August 2005, water levels were at 672 m (2,204 ft) providing habitat for wetland birds. (David Lambie).



**Figure 2.** This male Northern Flicker intergrade shows the red malar stripe of the “Red-shafted” Flicker and has the red nape patch and yellow underwings and yellow undertail typical of a “Yellow-shafted” Flicker. Mugaha Marsh, B.C. 19 July 2007 (Vi Lambie). BC Photo 3732



**Figure 3.** Aerial view of the wetland and forested habitat surrounding the bird banding station established at Mugaha Marsh (Mackenzie), BC in 1995. 14 August 2007 (Roy Rea ).

### *Annotated Species List*

#### **Great Egret - *Ardea alba***

Great Egret, like many Ciconiiformes, disperse and wander great distances after breeding from their normal range in the United States to widely scattered locations throughout North America. This primarily northward dispersal, consisting largely of juveniles, occurs mainly from June through October (McCrimmon et al. 2001).

Before 1990, the species was reported at

#### ***Study Area***

The Mackenzie Nature Observatory’s bird banding station at Mugaha Marsh (Figure 3) is located in the Rocky Mountain Trench, with the Rocky Mountains to the east and the Omineca Mountains to the west. The Parsnip Reach of Williston Lake (Reservoir) lies just west of Mugaha Marsh. The marsh is impacted by the reservoir when the water backs up into it as it nears full pond.

widespread locations throughout the southern interior of British Columbia, with the northernmost occurrence at Stum Lake in the Chilcotin region (Campbell et al. 1990a). By 2001 the species had been seen in the Prince George region of central British Columbia (Prince George Naturalists Club 2002).

On 6 and 8 June 2008, a single bird was present at Mugaha Marsh, about 14.5 km northwest of Mackenzie. It was photographed on the latter date (Figure 4). This represents the most northerly occurrence for the province.

There is a record for central Yukon Territory on 18 and 19 May 2002 (Eckert and Sinclair 2001).



**Figure 4.** Great Egret at Mugaha Marsh, BC. 8 June 2008 (John and Vi Lambie). BC Photo 3700.

### **Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis***

Like Great Egret, Cattle Egret wanders widely throughout North America as a vagrant and has a well-recorded post-breeding dispersal from a still-expanding breeding range mainly in the United States (Telfair 1994). In northern parts of the United States and across Canada, the bird's occurrence is unpredictable and may not occur every year. As Hancock and Kushlan (1984) mention, the species may temporarily colonize an area, exhibit repeated incursions, and retreat, depending on conditions.

Most records in British Columbia are from the south coast but occurrences are well scattered across the southern interior (Campbell et al. 1990b). Northern

records are from the Kispiox valley, Arras, and Fort Nelson (Campbell et al. 1990b, Phinney 1998).

On 12 October 1996, a Cattle Egret (Figure 5) appeared at the Mackenzie airport and over the next two weeks was seen by Alan and Sandy Simcoe, Jim and Cynthia Tuck, and Vi, John, David, and John Lambie. This was a first occurrence for Mackenzie.

Despite its well-known tendency to disperse long distances, Cattle Egret had not been recorded in the Yukon Territory through 2002 (Sinclair et al. 2003).



**Figure 5.** Most interior records of Cattle Egret in British Columbia are from the autumn period (September to November) so the bird photographed at Mackenzie, BC in mid-autumn occurs within the provincial pattern. 12 October 1996 (John A. Lambie). BC Photo 3701.

### **Whimbrel - *Numenius phaeopus***

The western population of Whimbrel, a long-distance migrant, travels along the Pacific coast, or across the ocean, between Arctic breeding and wintering grounds as far south as southern South America (Skeel and Mallory 1996). While it is a common transient on the coast of British Columbia, the species is rarely seen in the interior and then only during spring passage. A few linger into June in some years (Campbell et al. 1990b).

There are three spring records for the Mackenzie region: 26 May 1999, a single bird was seen by Jack Bowling at the airport; 25 May 2007, a bird was observed by John and Vi Lambie and photographed feeding on a mudflat at 22 Mile, Alexander

Mackenzie Landing on Williston Lake, (Figure 6); and 31 May 2009, a single bird seen by John, Vi and David Lambie at the Abitibi Mill site. There are fewer than 25 records for interior British Columbia (R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).



**Figure 6.** Whimbrel is a very rare spring transient through the interior of British Columbia with fewer than 25 records. Near Mackenzie, BC. 25 May 2007 (John Lambie). BC Photo 3703.

#### **Ruddy Turnstone - *Arenaria interpres***

Ruddy Turnstone, a long-distance migrant, moves to and from Arctic breeding grounds, and its main South American wintering grounds, primarily at sea and to a lesser extent along marine coasts. Much smaller numbers use inland routes (Nettleship 2000). In British Columbia, the species is an uncommon to common spring and autumn transient along the coast and is very rare inland where most records are from the late summer to early autumn period (Campbell et al. 1990b).

A single Ruddy Turnstone was found and photographed (Figure 7) at the causeway on Williston Lake on 27 August 2005 by Jukka Jantunen.

#### **Buff-breasted Sandpiper - *Tryngites subruficollis***

Buff-breasted Sandpiper migrates to and from Arctic breeding grounds and South American wintering grounds primarily through central North America (Lancot and Laredo 1994). Birds occurring



**Figure 7.** Ruddy Turnstone, primarily an oceanic migrant, is a rare occurrence anywhere in the British Columbia interior. Williston Lake, BC. 27 August 2005 (Jukka Jantunen). BC Photo 3734.

in British Columbia are vagrants from this wide corridor. Most records are from the late summer to early autumn period (Campbell and Gregory 1976, Campbell et al. 1990b).

A single Buff-breasted Sandpiper was found at the causeway on Williston Lake on 27 August 2005 by Jukka Jantunen. The following year a juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper was observed and photographed (Figure 8) at Williston Lake on 30 August 2006.



**Figure 8.** Juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Williston Lake, BC. 30 August 2006 (Jukka Jantunen). BC Photo 3704.

### Arctic Tern - *Sterna paradisaea*

During the spring and autumn seasons, Arctic Tern migrates mainly at sea off both the west and east coast of North America (Hatch 2002). Although primarily a pelagic species during the non-breeding seasons, there are widespread reports from interior parts of the continent including British Columbia. Here, the species is rare in spring and more common in autumn but still rarely observed (Campbell et al. 1990b). The species breeds locally in northwest regions of the province.

Between 2005 and 2007, small numbers of Arctic Terns have been reported by Jukka Jantunen at the causeway at the south end of Williston Lake. Sightings for the three years are: 2005 - 15 birds counted in the course of a day on 30 August, three birds on 31 August, and one bird on 2 September; 2006 - three adults on 10 August, three juveniles on 28 August, and one juvenile on 30 August; and 2007 - one juvenile on 4 September (Figure 9) and two birds on 5 September.

It appears that a small, but regular, movement of Arctic Terns may occur annually in late summer and early autumn along portions of Williston Lake. It should be noted that recently two disjunct breeding sites of single pairs have been reported for northeastern (Fireside) and Chilcotin (Eagle Lake) regions of British Columbia (see Campbell et al. 2009).

Villaseñor and Phillips (1994) suggested that there might be a small, high overland flight of Arctic Terns in autumn in western North America on their way to southwestern Mexico.

### Parasitic Jaeger - *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Parasitic Jaeger migrates between its breeding range in Arctic and Subarctic areas of North America and wintering range in tropical and southern temperate oceans, usually far at sea. Some of the population migrates near coasts and much smaller numbers may fly overland (Wiley and Lee 1999).

This migration pattern also occurs in British Columbia with over 99% of records from the marine environment (Campbell et al. 1990b). The sighting of a Parasitic Jaeger anywhere in the interior is



**Figure 9.** Juvenile Arctic Tern in flight over Williston Lake, BC. 4 September 2007 (Jukka Jantunen). BC Photo 3705.

noteworthy, and most records occur in the autumn passage.

There are three autumn records for the Mackenzie region, all seen by Jukka Jantunen from the vicinity of Williston Lake: 17 September 2000 - two birds, 1 September 2001 - one bird, and 18 September 2007 - one bird (Figure 10).

### Eastern Phoebe - *Sayornis phoebe*

British Columbia is at the western limit of the breeding range for Eastern Phoebe in North America (Weeks 1994). This flycatcher breeds throughout northeastern portions of the province with an isolated nesting in southeastern British Columbia at Spillimacheen (Campbell et al. 1997). There are at least 20 vagrant occurrences throughout the province (R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).

The first and only record for Mackenzie was a breeding attempt. On 7 June 2002, John and Vi Lambie observed a nest with an incubating adult

on an electrical cable (Figure 11) on the side of the electrical building at Mugaha Marsh. The bird remained into July but the nest was not successful.



**Figure 10.** It is suspected that some Parasitic Jaegers may use an overland migration route each year in North America so all interior records from British Columbia are noteworthy. Williston Lake, BC. 18 September 2007 (Jukka Jantunen). BC Photo 3707.



**Figure 11.** A nesting attempt by an Eastern Phoebe at Mugaha Marsh, BC was unsuccessful. June 2007 (Martina Frey). BC Photo 3708.

#### **Ash-throated Flycatcher - *Myiarchus cinerascens***

This western North American flycatcher is a vagrant in British Columbia although the northern limit of its breeding range on the Pacific coast

extends into south-central Washington (Wahl et al. 2005). Records for the province, mostly from the south coast, span the period 29 May to 14 November with most reported in September and October (Hatler et al. 1978, Campbell et al. 1997,). There is a single interior record from Ainsworth in the southeast corner of the province on 15 June 1944 (Campbell et al. 1997). Cardiff and Dittmann (2002) suggest these occurrences are spring migrants that overshoot their normal breeding range, non-breeding “pioneers”, or wandering postbreeders.

On 26 August 2008, Ken Burton banded (No.1931-27315) a hatch-year bird (Figure 12) at Mugaha Marsh bird banding station near Mackenzie. Fortunately the bird bander was from California and familiar with the species.



**Figure 12.** The most northerly occurrence of Ash-throated Flycatcher in British Columbia was a hatch-year bird banded near Mackenzie on 26 August 2008 (James Bradley). BC Photo 3709.

#### **Philadelphia Vireo - *Vireo philadelphicus***

Philadelphia Vireo occurs in northeastern British Columbia, which is the western limit of its breeding range in North America (Moskoff and Robinson 1996, Campbell et al. 1997). The species probably arrives and departs British Columbia through migration corridors in northwestern Alberta.

On 4 August 2000, an adult female (Figure 13) was banded (No. 2160-70062) at Mugaha Marsh by

Jukka Jantunen. The female was accompanied by two fledged young, but only the adult was captured. The location is about 200 km west of the vireo's normal range in the province.



**Figure 13.** This out-of-range adult female Philadelphia Vireo was banded near Mackenzie, BC on 4 August 2000 (Jukka Jantunen). BC Photo 3710.

#### **Clark's Nutcracker - *Nucifraga columbiana***

Clark's Nutcracker is resident in mountainous country in western North America, including the interior of southern British Columbia. It is not considered a migratory species but does move altitudinally between seasons and periodically irrupts to immediate areas outside its year-round range (Tomback 1998, Campbell et al. 1997).

There are two records. John A. Lambie found a lone bird at Mugaha Marsh on 21 September 1996; a single bird was observed on 20 August 1999 on Morfee Mountain, northeast of Mackenzie, by John, Vi, and David Lambie and Joe and Diane Rever. Campbell et al. (1997) list only two other records for the entire northeastern portion of the province.

As with the sporadic records for northern British Columbia, Clark's Nutcracker occurs only infrequently in the Yukon Territory. None has been reported since 1986 (Sinclair et al. 2003).

#### **Mountain Chickadee - *Poecile gambeli***

Mountain Chickadee is a year-round resident in montane forests of western North America from southern Yukon Territory to the southern United States (McCallum et al. 1999). It breeds throughout much of the southern interior of British Columbia, becoming less common northward. There are many other records for the northern half of the province in spring and summer and only one for the autumn period (Campbell et al. 1997).

On 19 September 2008, a hatch-year bird (Figure 14) was banded (No. 2490-44822) by Julian Hudson at Mugaha Marsh. This was the fourth record for the bird banding station but the first one that was actually captured and banded. Earlier in the season hybrid Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) and Mountain Chickadee were captured.



**Figure 14.** Bird banding stations scattered throughout British Columbia are helping fill in distributional records for many species, like Mountain Chickadee, that otherwise may not be recorded. Mugaha Marsh, BC. 19 September 2008 (Julian Hudson). BC Photo 3714.

#### **Chestnut-backed Chickadee - *Poecile rufescens***

Present year-round in mixed coastal forests from southeast Alaska to central California. Breeds inland in coniferous forests from southeast British Columbia to northeast Oregon. Elsewhere in British Columbia it is an irregular post-breeding wanderer to northern

parts of the province (Dahlstein et al. 2002).

The first Chestnut-backed Chickadee banded at Mugaha Marsh was a hatch-year bird that Paul Prior banded (No. 2140-49670) on 19 September 1998. Pierre Goulet banded a hatch-year bird (No. 2400-01411) on 13 September 2004. Four Chestnut-backed Chickadees were banded at Mugaha Marsh in 2008. Single birds were banded on 14 and 20 September and two hatch-year birds were banded 19 September (Figure 15).



**Figure 15.** The Chestnut-backed Chickadee has slowly been expanding its breeding range in interior locations of British Columbia over the past 50 years. Mugaha Marsh, BC. 19 September 2008 (John D. Lambie). BC Photo 3715.

There have been other records of Chestnut-backed Chickadees at feeders in Mackenzie: 13 March 1999 - Jim Tuck; 27 October 2004 - John and Vi Lambie; 11 November 2004 - Rob Weaver; 6 and 11 January 2005 - John and Vi Lambie; 14 January 2005 - Wendy Heater; and 18 and 23 January 2009 - John and Vi Lambie.

The only other record in the vicinity is from Germansen Landing on 23 October 1983 (Campbell et al. 1997).

There are two published records for Yukon Territory. A single bird was seen at a feeder in Haines Junction in September 1999 (Sinclair et al. 2003) and another at Teslin Lake Bird Observatory on 17 September 2008 (Schonewille 2008).

### **White-breasted Nuthatch - *Sitta carolinensis***

White-breasted Nuthatch is a resident species in North America that is widely distributed in mixed forests from southern Canada through much of the United States (Pravosudov and Grubb 1993). In British Columbia, the species was previously restricted to south-central and southeastern regions of the province. Starting in the 1970s, however, it has become a rare resident in northeastern British Columbia where it is still expanding its range (Campbell et al. 1997, Phinney 1998, C. Siddle pers. comm.).

In Mackenzie, White-breasted Nuthatch has been reported twice: a single bird in October 2004 was observed on Summit Crescent by Rob and Betty-Jo Weaver and one was seen regularly in town (Figure 16) from October 2007 until January 2008 by John and Vi Lambie, Rob and Betty-Jo Weaver, and Wendy Heater. On 1 November 2007, another White-breasted Nuthatch was observed at Windy Point, 29 km south of Mackenzie on Highway 97, by Vida Tattrie and Ray Yeo.

These records further expand the nuthatch's westward movement by about 200 km.

There are no records for Yukon Territory (Sinclair et al. 2003).



**Figure 16.** White-breasted Nuthatch at 53 Omineca Crescent, Mackenzie, BC on 8 November 2007 (John D. Lambie). BC Photo 3716.



### **Western Bluebird - *Sialia mexicana***

Western Bluebird breeds throughout much of western United States, reaching its northern limit in south coastal and south-central British Columbia (Guinan et al. 2000). Populations in the interior have expanded their breeding range due to nest box programs, and vagrant occurrences are being reported more regularly as far north as the Cariboo region (Campbell et al. 1997).

Between 13 and 27 May 2006, a Western Bluebird was seen by John, Vi and David Lambie and Jukka Jantunen and photographed (Figure 17) at the old M & T mill site in Mackenzie, the most northerly occurrence for British Columbia.

There are no records for Yukon Territory (Sinclair et al. 2003).



**Figure 17.** Western Bluebird at Mackenzie, BC. 15 May 2006 (John D. Lambie). BC Photo 3717.

### **Palm Warbler - *Dendroica palmarum***

Palm Warbler breeds mainly across central Canada with northeastern British Columbia is the western limit of its range (Wilson 1996). In British Columbia, the species only breeds in the northeast corner and there are numerous vagrant occurrences throughout the rest of the province (Campbell et al. 2001).

On 21 September 2008, a hatch-year Palm Warbler (Figure 18) was banded (No. 2490-44827) at Mugaha Marsh by Julian Hudson. It was determined to be the “Western” Palm Warbler subspecies (*D. p. palmarum*).

The only other record for the region was a bird seen by Alan Simcoe on the Twin Lakes/Tudyah bird monitoring transect on 28 May 1994.

Palm Warbler is casual in Yukon Territory (Sinclair et al. 2003).



**Figure 18.** Most extralimital occurrences of Palm Warbler outside its breeding range in British Columbia are during the autumn period. Mugaha Marsh, BC. 21 September 2008 (John D. Lambie). BC Photo 3718.

### **Bay-breasted Warbler - *Dendroica castanea***

Bay-breasted Warbler breeds in a narrow band mainly across central Canada; northeastern British Columbia is the western limit of its range (Williams 1996). In British Columbia, the species only breeds in the northeast corner where it is very local. There are few vagrant occurrences as the species probably arrives and departs through the Peace River region of northwestern Alberta (Campbell et al. 2001).

On 7 August 2008, a hatch-year bird (Figure 19) was banded (No. 1881-00979) by Stefan Jungkind at Mugaha Marsh. This is one of less than 20 extralimital occurrences for the province and the first for the Mackenzie region (R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).



**Figure 19.** Hatch-year Bay-breasted Warbler held after banding at Mugaha Marsh, BC on 7 August 2008 (John D. Lambie). BC Photo 3719.

#### **Black-and-white Warbler - *Mniotilta varia***

Black-and-white Warbler breeds from northeastern British Columbia east across central Canada and south along the eastern United States to Texas (Kricher 1995). In British Columbia, it breeds only in the northeast with numerous vagrant occurrences scattered throughout the rest of the province (Campbell et al. 2001).

On 4 September 1997, a hatch-year male was banded (No. 2110-05926) by Rainer Ebel, the first record for the Mackenzie region. Experienced birders Sandra Kinsey and Laird Law were assisting at the bird banding station that day. The only other record is a single bird seen by Linnea Cross at Gataiga Creek, south of Mackenzie, on 24 May 2006.

#### **Mourning Warbler - *Oporonis philadelphia***

Mourning Warbler breeds mainly across central Canada with northeastern British Columbia being the western limit of its range (Pitocchelli 1993). In British Columbia, the species only breeds in the northeast corner and there are fewer than 10 vagrant occurrences elsewhere in the province (Campbell et al. 2001).

On 11 August 2001, a hatch-year female (Figure 20) was banded (No. 2170-90237) by Jukka Jantunen

at Mugaha Marsh, BC.

In Yukon Territory, Mourning Warbler only occurs as a non-breeder in summer in the extreme southeast corner of the province (Sinclair et al. 2003).



**Figure 20.** Outside its breeding range in northeastern British Columbia, Mourning Warbler is a very rare late summer to early autumn vagrant. Mugaha Marsh, BC. 11 August 2001 (David Lambie). BC Photo 3720.

#### **Canada Warbler - *Wilsonia canadensis***

Canada Warbler breeds in a narrow band across central Canada and in the northeastern United States with northeastern British Columbia being the western limit of its range (Conway 1999). In British Columbia, the species breeds locally throughout the northeast corner (Campbell et al. 2007). There are only two vagrant occurrences for the province, both from the south coast, through 2000 (Campbell et al. 2001).

On 18 August 2004 a hatch-year bird (Figure 21) was banded (No. 2320-44987) by Pierre Goulet at Mugaha Marsh, BC.

In Yukon Territory, Canada Warbler only occurs, and probably breeds, in the extreme southeast corner of the province (Sinclair et al. 2003).



**Figure 21.** Extralimital occurrences of the Canada Warbler in British Columbia are extremely rare, so the bird banded at Mugaha Marsh, BC is noteworthy. 18 August 2004 (John D. Lambie). BC Photo 3063.



**Figure 22.** This hatch-year Harris's Sparrow, banded at Mugaha Marsh, BC, on 26 September 1996, was the first record for the Mackenzie district of north-central British Columbia (David Lambie). BC Photo 3722.

### **Harris's Sparrow - *Zonotrichia querula***

Harris's Sparrow breeds in the Northwest Territories south to northern Manitoba and Ontario and winters in south-central United States. It migrates between the two ranges through the interior of North America (Norment and Shackleton 1993). British Columbia is at the western periphery of migration and most occurrences are rare or extralimital (Campbell et al. 2001).

On 26 September, 1996, a hatch-year Harris's Sparrow (Figure 22) was banded (No. 8041-82217) at Mugaha Marsh by Kevin Hannah. It was the first record for the Mackenzie region.

Since then there have been three additional sightings: 12 October 1997 - a hatch-year bird was seen at 53 Omineca Crescent, Mackenzie, by David Lambie and Vi Lambie; 9 May 1999 - a lone bird was found at Finlay Forest Industries mill site, Mackenzie, BC by Melanie Lambie; and 15 May 1999 - a lone bird was seen by John and Vi Lambie at 53 Omineca Crescent.

### **Rose-breasted Grosbeak - *Pheucticus ludovicianus***

Rose-breasted Grosbeak breeds from northeastern British Columbia southeast across the Canadian Prairie provinces to the northern United States and east to the Atlantic Ocean (Wyatt and Francis

2002). In British Columbia it breeds primarily in the northeast although there are isolated nesting records in the south-central interior (Campbell et al. 2001). There are numerous vagrant sightings elsewhere in the interior including a few coastal areas.

For the past several years a few Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have been regularly seen or heard in the Mackenzie region. In 2008, for example, a female showed up at a feeder in Mackenzie on 25 May, a male was heard singing near the sewage lagoons on 31 May, and one was heard at stop 33 on the Williston Lake Breeding Bird Survey route that runs north of Mackenzie on 17 June. On 19 July a second-year male was banded (No. 8041-82139; Figure 23).

### **Bobolink - *Dolichonyx oryzivorus***

Bobolink breeds mainly in tall and mixed-grass prairie and mixed grass and forb fields in a wide band across central North America from southern Canada to the mid-United States (Martin and Gavin 1995). In British Columbia, it is a local breeder in the central interior from the International boundary north to the vicinity of Prince George. Extralimital records have been reported for the Peace River region and south coast (Campbell et al. 2001).

On 22 and 23 May 1999, a male Bobolink (Figure 24) was observed at two different locations in Mackenzie by John, Vi, and David Lambie and

Gordon Haley. Since males arrive on breeding grounds ahead of females, the Mackenzie sightings may have been an overshoot of a migrating male (Martin and Gavin 1995).



**Figure 23.** Bird banding allows for precise age and sex determination of individuals such as this second-year male caught and banded by Vi Lambie on 19 July 2008 at Mugaha Marsh, BC. (John D. Lambie). BC Photo 3723.



**Figure 24.** Male Bobolink photographed at 53 Omineca Crescent, Mackenzie, BC on 23 May 1999 (John D. Lambie). BC Photo 3724.

#### **Western Meadowlark - *Sturnella neglecta***

In North America, Western Meadowlark is widely distributed in open country from central western Canada south through the interior of the

United States (Lanyon 1994). In British Columbia, it breeds primarily in the south-central region of the province. There is a single breeding record for Bear Flat in the Peace River region. All records for the province north of its southern breeding range are from the spring to autumn period (Campbell et al. 2001).

A single Western Meadowlark (Figure 25) spent most of the winter (December 2002 to April 2003) at 6 Carp Crescent in Mackenzie, the first winter occurrence for northern British Columbia.



**Figure 25.** When spring arrived at Mackenzie, BC in 2003, the over-wintering Western Meadowlark that arrived in December 2002 left the area. (John A. Lambie). BC Photo 3725.

#### **House Finch - *Carpodacus mexicanus***

Originally a bird of western North America, House Finch was introduced into eastern North America in 1940 and spread to occupy most of the contiguous United States and southern Canada (Hamilton 1992, Hill 1993). It first arrived in British Columbia in 1935 and over the following 75 years has spread throughout the south coast and the interior north to Prince George (Campbell et al. 2001, Prince George Naturalists Club 2002).

In 2006, a House Finch regularly visited a backyard bird feeder in Mackenzie, BC from 2 to 23 November (Figure 26). On 1 May 2008, a single House Finch came to Lambie's feeders and later in the year another bird was present from 6 to 18 December. These records provided the province's first winter

occurrence, and some of the few extralimital records, for the interior north of Prince George.



**Figure 26.** House Finch has expanded its range into the north-central interior of British Columbia over the past 70 years or so to Mackenzie, where individuals have now been reported in all four seasons. 23 November 2006 (John Lambie). BC Photo 3727.

### ***Acknowledgements***

It is hard to know where to begin when it comes to saying thanks - so many people have been involved in the establishment and operation of the Mackenzie Nature Observatory's birding programs. Thanks to Alan Simcoe, Rhonda Millikin, and Jim Tuck who helped get the birding project started in Mackenzie. I am grateful to the many volunteers who assisted at the station over the years. Bird banders and assistants at the station when 11 of the above 25 species were captured included James Bradley, Ken Burton, Christopher Coxson, Linnea Cross, Christine Croton, Rainer Ebel, Myles Falconer, Martina Frey, Pierre Goulet, Kevin Hannah, Julian Hudson, Christine Jamieson, Jukka Jantunen, Jillian Johnston, Stefan Jungkind, Sandra Kinsey, David Lambie, John A. Lambie, John D. Lambie, Laird Law, Paul Prior, Amélie Rousseau, June Ryder, Jim Tuck, and Rob Weaver.

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A special thanks to Jukka Jantunen (Figure 27), bander-in-charge for several seasons, for sharing his knowledge and field sightings which resulted in many new species for the district.



**Figure 27.** Jukka's passion for field work, and experience with birds and their lives, has greatly enhanced our knowledge of the avi-fauna of the Mackenzie area. Mugaha Marsh, BC. 8 September 2007 (John Lambie).

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### *About the Author*

Vi, and her husband John, moved to Mackenzie in 1973 and immediately noticed a lack of natural nest sites for cavity-nesting birds. Over the years, 200 plywood nest boxes were built and put up at the town's mill site, around marshes, and in cut blocks. The majority were used by Tree Swallows but a few Mountain Bluebirds nested in the cut blocks. Their interest in nature, and especially birds, intensified as they became more involved in volunteer activities.

Vi participates in numerous birding, monitoring, conservation programs, and surveys, but since 1994 spends much of her time over-seeing the operation and maintenance of the bird banding station at Mugaha Marsh. Vi is a licensed bird bander and also bands migrating birds in her backyard.

For a more detailed account of her activities see Campbell et al. (In press).