



Finch, sparrow among Christmas Bird Count rarities

By Bob Parsons

I was about to write an article on sage grouse when our good friend and photographer Gerald Romanchuk emailed me the preliminary results of the annual Christmas Bird Count held on Sunday, December 18.

Conditions were very good for doing the count and there was not much snow cover on the ground. I would hazard a guess that close to four hundred birders and nature lovers took part in the count, as feeder-watchers, bush beaters and owl prowlers!

There are more than 40 counts in Alberta but we always seem to attract the most participation. The city is divided into a number of 15 zones, with each zone having its captain and a team of willing and enthusiastic counters.

It would appear that about 55 species were seen on the day, close to the average of about sixty species.

There were two big highlights this year, one being the second-ever grey-crowned rosy-finch, while the other, a clay-coloured sparrow, was a first-ever

for the Edmonton count. The grey-crowned rosy-finch is usually found in the vicinity of the Rockies, but I should add that one was spotted recently in Elk Island National Park.

A few years back when doing the Brooks May species count, one counter found three of these finches in an abandoned farmhouse property. This was well outside its normal range.

The clay-coloured sparrow sighting is of interest because this is a migratory bird that should already have been wintering in the southern U.S. for some time!

Many of the buzzing sounds one hears in the open country, despite their insect-like quality, are actually produced by this small sparrow. It is rather dull in plumage but is obvious as it sits on a branch buzzing away to its heart content.

Regarded as a western species only, the clay-coloured sparrow is quite common throughout Alberta. Good places to hear and see this fellow are the Beaverhill Lake area and the Clif-

ford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary, west of the city limits. I have also heard it in the Hastings Lake area where long grass surrounds the active lake. Another bird of interest seen during the count was the yellow-bellied sapsucker. This woodpecker is a common woodland bird, resident in most areas of Alberta, but is rarely seen in the city during our long winter.

Probably spotted at a bird feeder somewhere, it usually hammers on trees for insects, creating a sort of well in which sap collects and insects are trapped.

The voice is a nasal cat-like meow and the hammering has a Morse code quality and rhythm. For identification purposes, look for black bib, red forehead, black-and-white face, back, wings and tail. There is a yellow wash on the belly and males have a red chin. Other birds of note include 47 Canada geese, five bald eagles, a single boreal owl, one gyrfalcon and almost 500 mallards, seen wherever there is open water on the river. Snowy owls were missing



Grey-crowned rosy-finch

this year but there are a few just outside city limits, I hear. A single rough-legged hawk was seen – these hawks do sometimes remain in our area over the winter period instead of heading south. Sixty robins were counted; they seem to hang around running water coming down ravines and hillsides.

Before you all phone me, 3,661 black-capped chickadees were noted and some 4,730 magpies! Sounds like a good count.

Bob Parsons is special events coordinator for the Edmonton Nature Club.

Anderson Vacations offering programs to Jersey Boys hit

Anderson Vacations dates and pricing have been announced for the Edmonton engagement of the Tony, Grammy and Olivier award winning hit musical *Jersey Boys*, the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, playing the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium. The musical will make its Edmonton premiere on August 15 and play through September 2.

Anderson Vacations will run a combination of both day and overnight programs to the *Jersey Boys* on set departure dates this year.

The day program will include return transportation from a local pick-up point in a luxury motor coach, dinner and the show, while the overnight program will also include one night of accommodation at the Sutton Place Hotel, breakfast and a morning of shopping at West Edmonton Mall with a Super Saver Coupon Book.

Jersey Boys is the winner of the 2006 Best Musical Tony Award, the 2006 Grammy Award for Best Musical Show Album, the 2009 Olivier Award for Best

New Musical and the 2010 Helpmann Award for Best Musical (Australia).

Directed by two-time Tony Award-winner Des McAnuff, *Jersey Boys* is written by Academy Award-winner Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, with music by Bob Gaudio, lyrics by Bob Crewe and choreography by Sergio Trujillo.

Jersey Boys is the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons: Frankie Valli, Bob Gaudio, Tommy DeVito and Nick Massi.

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B.C.'s Sunshine Coast provides enjoyable adventures

By Carolyn Hall

The best prawn bisque I have ever tasted was at Tree Frog Bistro in Powell River. Explained chef and owner Marika Varro, "I use shrimp broth, real cream, and [her now not-so-secret ingredient] anise liqueur."

That soup made this serendipitous bistro find a delight, and one of many highlights during our trip to British Columbia's Sunshine Coast.

After vacationing on Vancouver Island for the last 20 years, this year my husband and I decided we'd take a more roundabout route to get there, going via the Sunshine Coast.

We picked up a "circle pac" of ferry tickets from BC Ferries that gave us a 15 per cent discount on four ferry connections that enabled us to travel from Horseshoe Bay, north of Vancouver, to Langdale, from Earl's Cove to Saltery Bay, from Powell River across the Strait of Georgia to Comox and, finally, from Nanaimo back to the mainland.

In between, we explored little towns, visited wonderful art galleries, sampled excellent cuisine, did some easy hikes and had wonderful mini-adventures.

Our first stop on the Sunshine Coast, after getting off the ferry at Langdale, was Gibson's Landing,



Photo by Carolyn Hall

The Persephone tug in central Gibson's Landing is a reminder of the town's days as the site of The Beachcombers TV program.

a popular tourist spot that was the location for *The Beachcombers* TV show.

In the centre of this charming village, right across the street from the recognizable Molly's Reach restaurant and the tugboat Persephone, we found the Visitor's Information Centre where we picked up maps and brochures for things to see and do.

After looking at the little shops, art galleries and a view of Loopy Lola's Loft houseboat in the marina, we had hoped to have lunch at the Oyster House. But our timing was off. We got there an hour before opening, and hunger directed us instead to Molly's Reach where we enjoyed clam chowder and shrimp sandwiches while marvelling at the ocean view. Maybe we'll have oysters next time.

Then off we went up the coast,

looking for more gems. Between Davis Bay and Sechelt, the delightful, bright yellow Blue Dot Art Studio beckoned us to stop and enjoy Anita Lindblom's working-artist gallery. We were inspired by her collection of original watercolour and acrylic landscapes, seascapes and florals, and cheerful hand-painted ceramic pieces.

Moving on, we made additional stops at Pender Harbour (not a village in itself, but rather an area in and around the harbour, including the settlements of Garden Bay and Madeira Park) where we had cinnamon buns and ice cream.

We then sought out Skookum-chuck Narrows Provincial Park, where visitors can view the powerful tidal rapids connecting Sechelt and Jervis inlets.

Continued on page 21

<p>MOOSE JAW TEMPLE GARDENS AND TUNNELS FEB 19 4 days/3 nights, unlimited mineral pool, \$60 slot/meal vouchers pp/dbl. occ. \$299⁰⁰ + gst</p>	<p>COEUR D'ALENE & ROCKIES CASINO RESORT APR 22 5 days/4 nights, \$\$\$ slot/meal coupons pp/dbl. occ. \$369⁰⁰ + tax</p>
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Photo by Carolyn Hall

Kayakers dare the turbulent Skookumchuk Narrows tidal rapids.

SUNSHINE COAST

Continued from page 20

Famous for their whirlpools and whitewater, the turbulent rapids of Skooumchuck Narrows are a challenging playground for stunt kayakers who entertain the folks on shore.

To get to the viewing point there is a four-kilometre walk through a rainforest. It was very pleasant and quiet but we had to watch for protruding roots and rocks. The last ten minute segment of the hike is a little tricky, but if you can walk, you can do it. Take plenty of water to drink. It took us about 45 minutes one way to complete the walk, but it was well worth the time.

As we didn't have reservations for the night, we began to panic a bit when we learned there were no vacancies at nearby Egmont due to a wedding there. Fortunately, we found accommodation a short drive back at Ruby Lake Resort, part of a tranquil bird sanctuary and ecological reserve. The lake's ruby colour at sunset was a bonus.

Chef Aldo Cogrossi's northern Italian cuisine at the resort's restaurant was flavourful and varied. The wonderful menu included intriguing meat choices: wild boar, elk, caribou, arctic musk ox, ostrich and kangaroo, all either wild or raised naturally. I savoured the succulent roasted boar with a selection of wild mushrooms including chantarelle, pine and shiitake. Vegetarians can also fare well with pasta and fresh vegetable choices. Throughout the resort, which is nestled on a peaceful lagoon, we came across many one-of-a-kind birdhouses perched on poles, balanced on stumps, hung near the cottages and peeking from under eaves. In all, there are more than 40, each with a whimsical setting and quirky characters.

We were up early the next morning to catch the ferry at Earl's Cove at the north end of the Sechelt Peninsula, a voyage that takes travellers through scenic territory reminiscent of fjord country. The trip across Jervis Inlet takes 50 minutes. As the boats don't run that often, you want to make sure you have the schedule firmly in hand and get there early.

At Lang Creek, which flows into the Malaspina Strait and out to the Pacific Ocean, we stopped at the salmon hatchery where Chinook

salmon were arriving to spawn. These feisty fish were huge, strong and gathered in large numbers. It was truly a remarkable sight.

The remaining drive to Powell River along the ocean was very pretty. And our leisurely Sunday excursion brought us to Marine Drive on a Sunday where we encountered the Tree Frog Bistro. Its sunny front patio looked inviting, but we preferred sitting on the back deck, with its ocean view.

In addition to the fabulous prawn bisque, we enjoyed the signature Tree Frog salad, black cod in a ciabatta bun, and what my husband called the best burger ever.

While in Powell River, we did an easy 20-minute hike up Valentine Mountain, which at its end has a slightly strenuous climb up about a hundred rough-hewn stone steps. At its summit, we were rewarded with a picturesque vista of Powell River, the islands of Texada, Savary and Cortes, and Vancouver Island. We also saw the collection of 10 WWI ships that make up a floating breakwater that protects the logging pond of the pulp and paper mill.

We next drove around the "old 1910 town" of Powell River, which is one of only seven National Historic Districts of Canada. It has more than 400 original buildings including beautiful and well-preserved Arts and Crafts style homes, a hotel, bank, provincial building, the Pa-

tricia Theatre and others. Probably the best way to see this is through a self-guided walking tour.

Finally, we made our way to Lund, a small community located at Mile Zero of Highway 101 at the gateway to the world-famous Desolation Sound Marine Provincial Park, where kayakers, scuba divers and boaters gather for exploration of the friendly waters there. Lund was originally called Gl'amin and was a permanent village site of the Coast

Salish people and other Aboriginal groups. Now, it is a busy harbour with fleets of commercial prawn boats, yachts, sail boats, float planes and water taxis.

In Lund, we stayed at the historic and recently renovated Lund Hotel located right on the ocean. At the Boardwalk Restaurant, bathed in the golden glow of sunset, we enjoyed traditional fish and chips, with three types of fresh fish: cod, salmon and halibut.

A final evening walk along the marine boardwalk was magical as Annie, a local piper, serenaded us from her home on the hill. Locals, boaters and walking tourists alike applauded each delightful tune.

Eventually Annie piped the sun to rest behind Vancouver Island's Coast Mountains, a serene ceremony tastefully concluded with the playing of Amazing Grace. What a fitting finale to our adventures on the Sunshine Coast.

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Travel tips for a safe and enjoyable vacation

(Marketwire)—With the cooler weather on the way, many Canadians have begun to consider their holiday travel plans. Whether you're thinking about visiting family on the other side of the country or the other side of the globe, or are planning to escape to a tropical resort, it's never too early to research travel tips and to start planning.

Here are some essential travel trips provided by travel experts.

Be sure to leave a complete itinerary of your trip with someone you trust, so you can be reached in case of an emergency.

Research your vacation destination in advance.

Don't over pack. Of course, this tends to be one of the most overlooked travel tips.

When flying, check the baggage allowances for the airline you're taking.

Make sure prescriptions are filled for any necessary medicines. Take the prescriptions with you in case they need to be refilled while you're away.

Pack a photocopy of all your identification in case your wallet or purse and/or passport gets lost or stolen. If you are using travellers' cheques, be sure to record your serial numbers in case they get lost or stolen.

Avoid taking precious jewellery

or expensive watches along; you may be a target for thieves. Take along costume jewellery and a lower-value timepiece instead.

Ensure you have the travel insurance you need.

Many Canadians know they need to purchase travel medical insurance when heading to the U.S. or abroad, but are usually unaware that it's a good idea to purchase it when travelling to other provinces.

The cost of health benefits varies widely between provinces, so purchasing additional medical travel insurance prior to leaving will ensure you are covered for the difference in case of accident or illness.

The standard health insurance plan covers hospital/medical/physician expenses; emergency dental expenses; prescription drugs and X-rays; air ambulance; and living allowance for commercial accommodation and meals if you are delayed by injury or illness beyond your scheduled return

Additional types of travel insurance that can be purchased include coverage for baggage, in case it's lost, stolen or damaged; trip cancellation, in case you have to cancel or return at a different time due to an illness or death; and medical coverage for visitors who are not Canadian citizens.

Know what to expect if returning by air

(NC)—If you are planning to travel abroad by air, it is a good idea to know what to expect when you arrive back in Canada.

Here are some tips from the Canada Border Services Agency you can do ahead of time to reduce your wait time when returning to Canada by air.

- Research your personal shopping exemptions for the value of products you can bring back, such as tobacco and alcohol. You could pay taxes or duty if you bring back too much for your time away. Also check into which products are inadmissible into Canada, such as certain fruits and meats or

products made from the skins of endangered animal species.

- During your return flight, make sure your declaration form (Form E311) is filled out entirely, accurately and honestly before you land. Keep the form handy, in your pocket or passport, until you leave the secure area of the airport.
- Declare all your purchases and have receipts readily available.

The Canadian Border Services Agency has posted very detailed information about acceptable I.D., personal exemptions and inadmissible products on its website at www.cbsa.gc.ca.

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Mail your photographs to: Travel Photo Contest, Edmonton Senior, #200, 10621-100 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T5J 0B3.

The winner for the contest that ended September 30, 2011 is a picture entitled “Water Bomber,

Pow-Wow Days” taken at Lac La Biche by Margaret Koenig of Vimy, Alberta.

The winner of the contest that closed on December 31, 2011 will be announced in a later issue.

To enter online or to view pictures submitted, go to www.seniorsGOtravel.com and click on “Travel Photo Contest.”



This picture entitled “Water Bomber, Pow-Wow Days” taken at Lac La Biche by Margaret Koenig of Vimy, Alberta won the prize for the contest that ended September 30, 2011.



“Peyto Lake in Banff National Park, Alberta” – sample entry submitted by Bert Seinen of Edmonton

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