PICOIDES

Bulletin of The Society of Canadian Ornithologists
Bulletin de la Société des Ornithologistes du Canada

Picoides, July 2003
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PHOTO: KATE DEVLIN

Razorbills on Machias Seal Island, Bay of Fundy

Society of Canadian Ornithologists/Société des Ornithologistes du Canada
WEBSITE: www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/SocCanOrn

Officers for 2002/2003:

President: Dr. Jean-Pierre Savard, Serv. can. de la faune, 1141 route de l'Église, 9me étage, c.p. 10100, Ste-Foy, QC. G1V 4H5 Voice: 418-648-3500; Fax: 418-649-6475; Email: jean-pierre.savard@ec.gc.ca

Vice-President/President-elect: Dr. Susan Hannon, Dept. Biol. Sci., University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB. T6G 2E9 Voice: 780-492-7544; Fax: 780-492-9234; Email: sue.hannon@ualberta.ca

Membership Secretary: Dr. Nancy Flood, Dept. Biol. Sci., University College of the Cariboo, 900 McGill Rd., Box 3010, Kamloops, BC. V2C 5N3. Voice: 250-828-5436; Fax: 250-828-5450; Email: nflood@cariboo.bc.ca

Recording Secretary: Dr. Greg Robertson, 6 Bruce St. Mount Pearl, NF. A1N 4T3. Voice: 709-772-2778; Fax: 709-772-5097; Email: greg.robertson@ec.gc.ca

Treasurer: Dr. Tom E. Dickinson, Dept. Biol. Sci., University College of the Cariboo, 900 McGill Rd., Box 3010, Kamloops, BC. V2C 5N3. Voice: 250-828-5447; Fax: 250-828-5450; Email: tdickinson@cariboo.bc.ca

Editor of Picoides: Dorothy McFarlane, 430 King's College Rd. Fredericton, NB. E3B 2G2. Voice: 506-454-6178; Email: doroth@nbnet.nb.ca. TO ADVERTISE IN PICOIDES PLEASE SEND OR WRITE TO EDITOR.

Members of Council:

Dr. Cheri Gratto-Trevor, CWS, 115 Perimeter Rd., Saskatoon, SK. S7N 0X4. Voice: 306-975-6128; Fax: 306-975-4089; Email: cheri.gratto-trevor@ec.gc.ca

Dr. Kevin Teather, Dept. of Biology, University of PEI, Charlottetown, PE. C1A 4P3. Voice: 902-566-0325; Fax: 902-566-0740; Email: kteather@upei.ca

Dr. Gilles Gauthier, Dep. biologie, Univ. Laval, Ste-Foy, QC. G1K 7P4. Voice: 418-656-5507; Fax: 418-656-2043; Email: gilles.gauthier@bio.ulaval.ca

Dr. Marty Leonard, Dept. of Biology, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, B3A 4J1. Voice: 902-494-21558; Fax: 902-494-3736; Email: mleonard@is.dal.ca

*Dr. Karen Wiebe, Dept. of Biology, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK. S7N 5E2. Voice: 306-966-4406; Fax: 306-966-4461; Email: wiebek@duke.usask.ca

Dr. Rodger Titman, Dept. of Nat. Res. Sci. and Avian Sci. & Cons. Centre, Macdonald Campus of McGill U., Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, QC. H9X 3V9. Voice: 514-398-7933; Fax: 514-398-7990; Email: titman@nrs.mcgill.ca

Dr. Robert Butler, CWS Pacific and Yukon Region, Delta, BC. V4K 3N2. Voice: 604-940-4672; Fax: 640-946-7022; Email: rob.butler@ec.gc.ca

Dr. Bob Clark, CWS Prairie and Northern Region, 115 Perimeter Road, Saskatoon, SK. S7N 0X4. Voice: 306-975-4110; Fax: 306- 975-4089; Email: bob.clark@ec.gc.ca

Dr. Charles Francis, National Wildlife Research Centre, CWS, Ottawa, ON. K1A 0H3. Voice: 819-997-6086; Fax: 819-953-6612; Email: charles.francis@ec.gc.ca

Dr. Marc-André Villard, Dep. de biologie, Université de Moncton, Moncton, NB. E1A 3E9. Tél: 506-858-4334 (direct: 4292); Fax: 506-858-4541; Courriel: villarm@umoncton.ca

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR THE DORIS HUESTIS SPEIRS AWARD

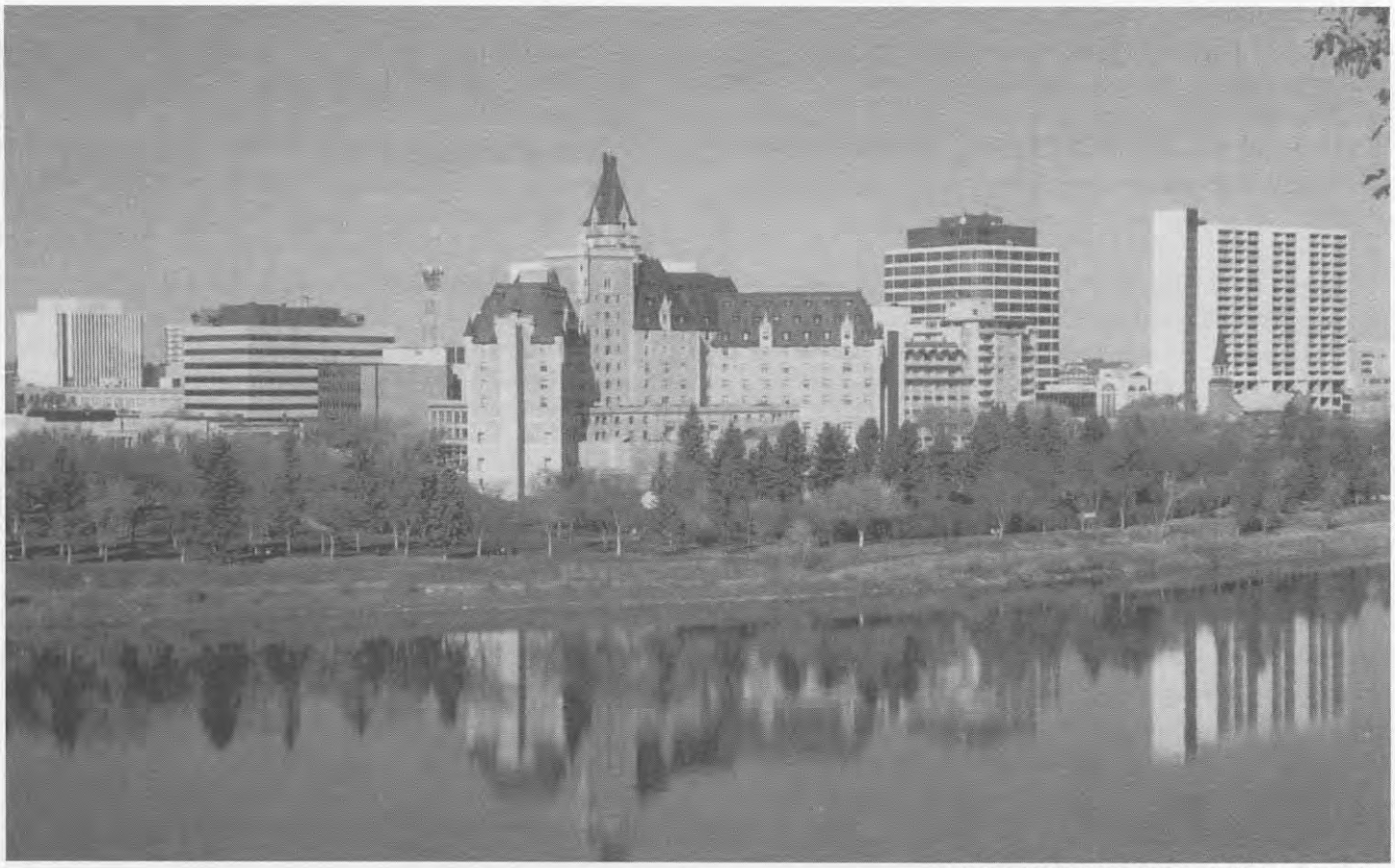
The Speirs award is our Society's most prestigeous honour, presented annually to an individual who has made outstanding lifetime contributions in Canadian ornithology. Awardees have included those who worked at museums, government agencies, private agencies, universities or as volunteers. The most recent winner was Normand David, a person whose work in regional associations and his popular books/articles contributed to the major surge of interest in ornithology among amateurs in Québec in the 1980s.

If you wish to suggest a candidate, please contact the committee chair:

Dr. Susan Hannon, Dept of Biological Sciences,
University of Alberta,
Edmonton, AB T6G 2E9.
tel: 780-492-7544
fax: 780-492-9234
email: ***sue.hannon@ ualberta.ca***

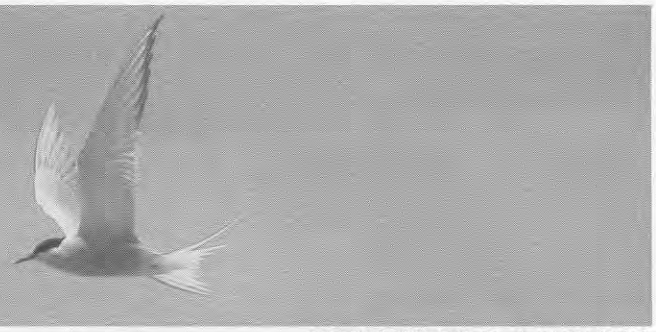
ANNUAL MEETING SCO/SOC, SASKATOON, SK. OCT. 16-18, 2003, AT THE DELTA BESSBOROUGH HOTEL

See page 6 for details.



DELTA BESSBOROUGH HOTEL, PHOTO: J. T. TREVOR

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



ARCTIC TERN. PHOTO: A. W. DIAMOND

Jean-Pierre L. Savard
jean-pierre.savard@ec.gc.ca

As the new president of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists I would like to thank the past president Kathy Martin for the work she has accomplished in her nearly three years at the direction of the Society. She did such a good job that I have anxiety attacks at the idea of taking over her role as President. I would like also to thank the departing councillors Fred Cooke, David Bird, Marty Leonard, Karen Wiebe, Erica Nol, Greg Robertson, Kevin Teather, Cheri Gratto-Trevor, and Leah de Forest for their contributions. Cheri Gratto-Trevor and Kevin Teather will continue for a second term as councillors and Greg Robertson will be Recording Secretary. I would like to welcome our new Vice President, Susan Hannon, and five new councillors, Rob Butler, Bob Clark, Charles Francis, Roger Titman and Marc-André Villard and I am looking forward to working with them. I encourage them to be pro-active during their tenure.

Publication of a Scientific Bird Journal

During the past two decades, I served several terms on the council of the Society and have had a chance to see it grow and evolve. One of the major issues for more than a decade has been the production of a Canadian scientific bird journal. Well, after years of questioning and effort we are closer than ever to seeing it being realised. Bird Studies Canada has agreed, in principle, to proceed with us in this endeavour. It is hoped that the Canadian Wildlife Service will be able to contribute in some way to this effort, making the realisation of the journal a joint effort of the three major organisations devoted to ornithology in Canada. Given the emergence of a concerted US, Canada and Mexican joint effort towards bird conservation through the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), the timing for the new journal is excellent.

During the last year, a committee under the direction of Erica Nol has examined the various issues associated with the production of a scientific bird journal. They assessed the need for a new journal, evaluated possible partnerships, and estimated the costs of such a venture. Part of the committee's findings will be put on our web site in the coming months. The recommendation of the committee was so positive that at our last executive meeting, a new implementation committee was struck with members from Bird Studies Canada and the SCO. Charles Francis will act as the Chair of this implementation committee. In the next issue of Picoides we should be able to more fully describe the new journal. The format of the journal will be somewhat similar to the new Bird Study with similar aims. Spencer Sealy has agreed to be the first editor. It would be produced simultaneously on paper and electronically. The implementation committee has been given the task of finding a suitable title. Currently, neither SCO nor BSC is sufficiently strong financially to publish a journal. Current estimates indicate that a journal of the type we would like to publish (3 issues per year), would cost about $50,000 a year and with only about only $20,000 being recovered in page charges and initial subscriptions, leaving about a $30,000 shortfall. To ensure the viability of the journal during the first five years, we need to raise about 150,000$. After 5 years the number of subscribers should cover publication costs. The big challenge for both SCO and BSC is to raise the necessary start-up funds for ensuring the success of the journal. In the fall, we hope to launch a fund raising effort and will set up a fund raising committee to oversee this initiative. I encourage anyone willing to assist in fund raising efforts to contact me. As you realise, we will need all the help we can get to raise the necessary funds.

Student Awards

Another important initiative of the Society in collaboration with Bird Studies Canada has been the inauguration of the Fred Cooke Student Award. This

initiative of BSC and SCO should help students conduct research in ornithology and attend ornithological meetings. Again we would like to establish a good financial base for that fund so that we can help more students. Please remember that you were once a student and contribute to this effort. It is a great way to contribute to the training of Canadian students in Ornithology. I strongly encourage you include the Fred Cooke Student Award to your donatoins for this year and in the years to come. All contributions are tax deductible.

I would like to remind students of the various awards we have for them and encourage them to apply. Also university professors should advertise these awards in their departments and encourage students to participate.

Membership

Please renew your membership if you have not done so yet. Also make a New Year's resolution to recruit a new member. I hope professors will make sure that their students are members and encourage them to join.

Picoides

I would like also to encourage you to submit material for Picoides, and I would like to remind the new and old councillors that they are encouraged and even expected to submit one item during their tenure. Picoides is an overlooked venue to express opinions, criticisms and exchange ideas. Picoides has started to publish the abstracts of Canadian theses in Ornithology. I would like to enlist the collaboration of every professor to send a list of new theses about birds to Dr. David Bird *(bird@nrs.McGill.ca),* who has agreed to collate them. This initiative should help disseminate in a quicker and more effective manner research results, especially of Masters theses.

Next meeting of the Society

This year the Society will be meeting in mid-October in Saskatoon. It should be an exciting meeting as several of the bird committees of the Canadian Wildlife Service will meet there at the same time (waterbird committee, shorebird committee and songbird committee). It would be a great place for students and university professors to meet government researchers and biologists. There are a couple of symposia planned. Please put the dates on your schedule and consult our web site for more details later. Let us make it the best attended meeting ever.

Do not forget, a Society is as strong as its membership and their involvement. In contributing directly to the student and journal funds you will contribute to the major mandate of the Society and thus directly to Bird Conservation. Send your contributions to the treasurer of the Society.

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Dorothy McFarlane, ***doroth@nbnet.nb.ca***

Due to unforseen circumstances I am a month overdue with this issue of Picoides. Please note my change of address and email for submissions or comments. I apologise for the inconvenience which this has caused Cheri Gratto-Trevor and others who are trying to do their jobs on time as well.

I must apologise also to Graeme Brown, who should have been named as first author in the article (Picoides Feb. 2003) "Public Surveys: Useful Sources of Species Distribution Data".

Also, readers may notice that some photos do not match articles on a page. The photos are needed to fill in space and round out the writing to pages in multiples of four. For this purpose, I really would appreciate a photo or illustration with your article, if at all possible.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue. Your participation makes my job much easier. See you all at the SCO/SOC meeting in October!

Society of Canadian Ornithologists/Société des Ornithologistes du Canada Annual Meeting
16-18 October 2003
at the Delta Bessborough Hotel, Saskatoon, SK

The Society of Canadian Ornithologists/Société des Ornithologistes du Canada will meet in Saskatoon, SK from Thursday 16 October to Saturday 18 October 2003, immediately after a number of Canadian Wildlife Service Bird Committee meetings (Shorebirds, Landbirds, Waterbirds) on Wednesday and Thursday, 15-16 October. The meeting will be held at the Delta Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon, with a poster reception at the University of Saskatchewan and banquet at Wanuskewin Heritage Park. Field trips (to sites such as Last Mountain Lake, Lake Diefenbaker, and areas around Saskatoon such as the Allan Hills) will be on Sunday, 19 October. The meeting is timed to coincide with Whooping Crane migration, as well as migration of Sandhill Cranes and waterfowl.

Please register as soon as possible by submitting the attached Registration Form, and book your hotel rooms EARLY at the Delta Bessborough to obtain the best rates. See below for further information. Visit the SCO/SOC website at: http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/SocCanOrn/index.html for any updated information. Registration will be open 6-10 pm Thursday 16 October at the Terrace Lounge, Delta Bessborough, before the meeting starts on the 17th and 18th, and at breaks during those days. Registration will include the opening reception, poster reception, and the four coffee breaks. Members of SCO/SOC in 2003 whose registration forms (with payment) are postmarked before 1 Aug. 2003 will pay $20 if students, and $30 if non-students; non-members of SCO/SOC in 2003 whose registration forms (with payment) are postmarked before 1 Aug. 2003 will pay $25 if students, and $35 if non-students. Registration after this date will be $30 if SCO/SOC member students, $35 if non-member students, $45 if member non-students, and $50 if non-member non-students. SCO/SOC membership is $10/year for students, and $15/year for non-students.

SCO/SOC
Saskatoon 2003

Saskatoon is the largest city in Saskatchewan (230,000) and one of the prettiest in western Canada. Known as 'the city of bridges' because of its seven bridges across the South Saskatchewan River, it has public access to over 21 km of riverbank trails through beautifully landscaped parks and natural areas. The Meewasin Valley Trail meanders past the historic Delta Bessborough Hotel. The Delta Bessborough Hotel is situated downtown along the riverbank, and is known as the 'castle on the river' because of its impressive chateau style architecture. Saskatoon is also home to the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan's largest university with over 15,000 full-time students. Numerous research institutions are located on or near the U of S campus, including the Prairie and Northern Wildlife Research Centre (Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada), Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre, Saskatchewan Research Council, National Hydrology Research Centre (Environment Canada), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and the Canadian Light Source (Synchrotron).

Airlines with current connections to Saskatoon International Airport include Air Canada, Westjet, Northwest, and local airlines such as Transwest Air and Norcanair. From the airport, it is about a $15 taxi ride to the Delta Bessborough Hotel. There are numerous national car rental agencies represented at the airport.

Useful websites about Saskatoon, the university, etc., include the following:

Saskatoon tourism: http://www.tourismsaskatoon.com/
Saskatchewan tourism: http://www.sasktourism.com/
University of Saskatchewan: http://www.usask.ca/
Wanuskewin Heritage Park:
http://www.wanuskewin.com/
Canadian Wildlife Service main page: http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca
Canadian Light Source (synchrotron):
http://www.clsi.ca/aboutus/about.php
Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre:
http://wildlife.usask.ca/
Saskatchewan Research Council: http://www.src.sk.ca

National Hydrology Research Centre:
http://www.nwri.ca/nhrcdesc-e.html
Agriculture Canada: http://www.agr.gc.ca/

Business Sessions

Wednesday-Thursday 15-16 October: CWS/NABCI bird committee meetings (Shorebirds, PIF/Landbirds, Waterbirds) (Bessborough/CWS Conference Room). A combined meeting of these bird committees, organized by Dr. Charles Francis, CWS HQ, will be held at CWS (115 Perimeter Road) on Thurs. pm in the conference room. Contact the committee chairs for more information about these meetings. (Shorebirds, *guy.morrison@ec.gc.ca* PIF/Landbirds, *erica.dunn@ec.gc.ca*; Colonial Waterbirds, *tony.gaston@ec.gc.ca*; Inland Waterbirds, *chip.weseloh@ec.gc.ca*)

Thursday 16 October, 1-5 pm, Bessborough: SCO/SOC Council meeting.

Saturday 18 October, approximately 3-5:30 pm, William Pascoe Room, Bessborough: SCO/SOC Annual General Business meeting.

Scientific Sessions

Friday 17 October, 8:30 am-12:15 pm, William Pascoe Room, Bessborough: Ecology and Conservation of Prairie Birds (40 min plenary by Steve Davis, followed by a series of 15 min talks).

Friday 17 October, 1:30-5:00 pm, William Pascoe Room, Bessborough: Current Issues in Bird Conservation. Invited speakers for 40 min talks: Ted Leighton (West Nile disease), Elaine Wheaton (climate change), Peter Blancher (hemispheric bird conservation), and Pierre Mineau (pesticides).

Friday 17 October, 6:30-9:30 pm, Natural Sciences Museum (between Biology-W. P. Thompson and Geology buildings), University of Saskatchewan: Poster session.

Saturday 18 October, 8:30 am-12:15 pm, William Pascoe Room, Bessborough: Ecology and Conservation of Birds in the Boreal Forest (40 min plenary by Fiona Schmiegelow, followed by a series of 15 min talks).

Saturday 18 October, 1:30-3 pm, William Pascoe Room, Bessborough: Open session (series of 15 min talks).

Social Events

Thursday 16 October, 6-10 pm: Opening reception for all attendees, Terrace Lounge, Bessborough. Appetizers will be available, and a cash bar.

Friday 17 October, 6:30-10 pm: Poster reception, Natural Sciences Museum (between Biology-W. P. Thompson and Geology buildings), University of Saskatchewan. Buses will be supplied to take attendees from the Bessborough to the reception and back. Appetizers will be available, as well as a cash bar. In addition to displayed posters, the reception will also include a slide show of the important natural areas of Saskatchewan by Branimir Gjetvaj, and a display of the translation of a 17th century natural history text from New France ('Histoire Naturelle des Indes Occidentales' written by Jesuit missionary Louis Nicholas) by a team of researchers.

Saturday 18 October, 6:30-10 pm: SCO/SOC Banquet, Wanuskewin Heritage Park (Wanuskewin Road and Highway 11, 5 km north of Saskatoon). Buses will be supplied to take attendees from the Bessborough to the banquet and back. The banquet will be held at the Wanuskewin Heritage Park Interpretative Centre, which

SASKATCHEWAN RIVER, PHOTO: J. T. TREVOR

features Northern Plains Indian culture. The theatre and interpretive displays will be available for viewing. The banquet will feature authentic native cuisine including bison kabobs, herbed whitefish, and bannock. The First Nations elders directing the facility have recently decided that no alcohol will be served on the premises, so it will be a 'dry' banquet. The cost of the banquet will be $20 per person.

Field Trips

Field trips are scheduled for Sunday 19 October. They will be approximately 5 hours each, from 8 am to 1 pm. Cost of each will be $30 per person, which includes a small lunch (6" sub plus soft drink). Two trips are offered: both will initially involve looking for Whooping Cranes at local sites where they have recently been seen, then proceeding to either Last Mountain Lake or Lake Diefenbaker. Last Mountain Lake is the site of the first federal bird sanctuary in North America, and is well-known for large numbers of Sandhill Cranes, geese and other waterfowl in the fall. Lake Diefenbaker is a large artificial lake resulting from the Gardiner Dam (finished in 1967) - in the fall, this area has large numbers of Sandhill Cranes, geese, and other birds.

Hotel Reservations

The Delta Bessborough is situated in the heart of downtown Saskatoon on five acres of private waterfront gardens, between two riverfront parks on the South Saskatchewan River, and the Meewasin Valley Trail. It is Saskatoon's most distinguished landmark, and has recently been extensively and beautifully renovated. For more information, visit the following website: http://www.deltahotels.com/hotels/

We have negotiated a special rate for this meeting, of $98 (plus tax) for a single or double room. There are a limited number of rooms available at this rate, so we encourage you to book as soon as possible. To get this rate, you must mention the group name: SOCIETY OF CANADIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS, when booking. For reservations, phone the Delta Bessborough directly at 306-244-5521, or by calling the Central Reservations Office at 1-800-268-1133. The last date to book at this rate is 11 September, but if you don't book early, there may be no rooms left at the cheaper rate.

Location:

Delta Bessborough Hotel
601 Spadina Crescent East
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 3G8
Tel: 306-244-5521
Fax: 306-653-2458

Driving Directions:

Directions from the Airport:
Exit airport area on Airport Drive. At first set of lights turn left onto Circle Drive. Go into the furthest right hand lane. Follow Circle Drive until second set of lights (Husky Gas Station). Make a right turn to city centre. This leads onto Idylwyld Drive. At 22nd Street turn left. Continue until you reach the river and can't go any further, and turn right on Spadina Crescent. The Delta Bessborough is the large "Castle" like structure on your left.

Directions from the North:
On highway #16, left on 22nd Street. Continue until you reach the river and can't go any further, and turn right on Spadina Crescent. The Delta Bessborough is the large "Castle" like structure on your left.

Directions from the South:
Hwy 11 To Circle Dr, head west, follow signs to Idylwyld Dr. In downtown area, north on Idylwyld to 20th St, turn right heading east on 20th to Spadina Cres. and turn left on Spadina Crescent. The Delta Bessborough is the large "Castle" like structure on your right one block ahead.

Directions from the East:
Follow Hwy 16 heading northwest to Idylwyld Drive. In downtown area, north on Idylwyld to 20th St, turn right heading east on 20th to Spadina Cres. and turn left on Spadina Crescent. The Delta Bessborough is the large "Castle" like structure on your right one block ahead.

Directions from the West:
Hwy 16 heading southeast to Idylwyld Drive, follow Idylwyld Drive south. At 22nd Street turn left. Continue until you reach the river and can't go any further, and turn right on Spadina Crescent. The Delta Bessborough is the large "Castle" like structure on your left.

AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIAL

Equipment to support both PowerPoint presentations and 35 mm slides will be available. For PowerPoint presentations, speakers should bring files on CDs. Computer projections equipment will include a PC computer running Windows 2000, Office 97 (or higher). PowerPoint presenters are STRONGLY advised to send test files well before the meeting, to ensure their files will work on the meeting equipment. Files may be sent to Steve VanWilgenburg (steve.vanwilgenburg@ec.gc.ca), CWS, 115 Perimeter Road, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X4. Make sure you include contact information so he can get in touch with you if necessary. If other equipment (such as overhead projectors) is needed, contact Steve VanWilgenburg as soon as possible to see if it can be made available.

POSTERS

Posters should be a maximum of 92 x 92 cm in size. They will be displayed during the poster reception on poster boards.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Members and other ornithologists are invited to contribute to the scientific session. Please send in an abstract for an oral or poster presentation, using the instructions below. DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT OF THE ABSTRACT BY THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR IS 1 SEPT 2003. Indicate preference for oral or poster presentation (students will get preference for oral presentations). Abstracts should summarize findings, not methods. Oral presentations are limited to 12 minutes, plus 3 minutes for questions. To apply, submit all abstracts by email for receipt by 1 Sept. 2003 to: Cheri Gratto-Trevor: cheri.gratto-trevor@ec.gc.ca

Instructions for preparing abstract for submission:

Please read and follow these instructions. Include the following information on a single page. Examine the format and style in the sample abstract. The text of the abstract may be a maximum of 250 words. Submit by email only: make note or spell out or explain special characters such as plus or minus, umlaut, etc. Submit ASCII or Word file for receipt by midnight 1 August 2003 to Cheri Gratto-Trevor: cheri.gratto-trevor@ec.gc.ca

Include the following 7 points of information:

1) the abstract:
Abstract title (in bold). FIRST AUTHOR, address of first author, SECOND AUTHOR, address of second author, …….LAST AUTHOR, address…..
Abstract text….
(Identify presenting author with asterisk in multi-authored papers; see example of author, address, and abstract below)

2) Email address for necessary correspondence, including notification of program position. If no email address available, include phone numbers.

3) List of all authors, even if one. This information is used to create the author index. List authors in format: last name, initials (e.g., Smith, J. A.).

4) Enter 'POSTER' or 'ORAL' or 'EITHER' to indicate preferred means of presentation. If invited talk, indicate 'ORAL, INVITED'.

5) Equipment needed (PowerPoint presentation, 35 mm slide projector, overhead projector).

6) Recommended session (if not invited talk): PRAIRIE, BOREAL, or OPEN

7) Other comments or special scheduling requests.

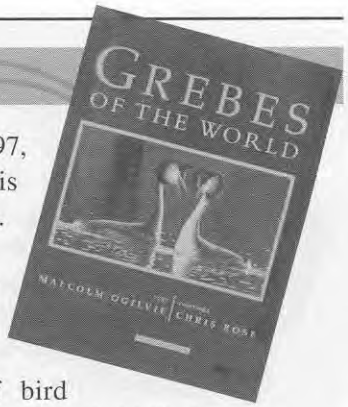
Examine the following example for desired submission style.

Comparing intelligence of shorebirds versus waterfowl. JOHN A. CALIDRIS*, SUSAN B. CHARADRIUS, Biology Department, University of Superior Studies, Utopia, SK S7N 0X4 Canada, and HAROLD D. LIMOSA, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, 115 Perimeter Road, Halifax, NS B0M 1L0 Canada.

Field experience suggested that shorebirds were infinitely superior in intelligence (and aesthetics) to all waterfowl, but this hypothesis has never been rigorously tested. Using an exotic triple-box hypolink design, we verified that……..

REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION

BOOK REVIEW: GREBES OF THE WORLD



By Malcolm Ogilvie (text) and Chris Rose (paintings). 2003. Bruce Coleman, publisher. Uxbridge, United Kingdom. ISBN 1872842038. 112 pages. illustrated. f49.95. Distributor: NBHS Mail Order Bookstore Ltd. 2-3 Wills Rd. Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN, UK. nbbs@nbbs.com, www.nbbs.com

"Grebes of the World" is a visual treat for both those who enjoy birds and good art. It would make a most unusual coffee table book, but for bird lovers Malcolm Ogilvie has amassed a wealth of information on the 22 species of grebes of the world, together with Chris Rose's stunning full-page paintings of each species in its watery habitat.

Grebes belong to an ancient bird family: they have been found in fossils from 80 million years ago. In his 11-page introduction to the world's grebes, Ogilvie's text is descriptive and specific, helping the non-specialist to understand the species' range, variation, plumages, and fascinating behaviour. Appendices include lengths and weights, breeding details, status and conservation (including subspecies), the meanings and derivations of grebe names and even aids to remembering the latin names. Chris Rose illustrates with delicate drawings the winter plumages, with all species compared on a double-page plate - a useful guide to the relative sizes, eye colour and bill characteristics of each species.

The information found here is comprehensive in terms of known details of numbers and threats, varying depending on which country the species inhabits. For example, Clark's Grebe *Aechmophorus clarkii*, subspecies *clarkii* found in Mexico, is considered vulnerable with 500- 1,000 individuals; whereas the subspecies *transitionalis* found in North America is of little concern with about 50,000-100,000 individuals. The status of each species and subspecies is thus quantified. Categories of conservation concern are those used by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Maps are provided for range distributions throughout the world.

Ogilvie gives details of the decline of some grebes, like the Junin Flightless Grebe of Lake Junin, Peru, whose colonial nesting and feeding habits are unique and whose decline has brought world-wide attention to the problem of heavy metal pollution from up-river mining and water-level fluctuations from the damming of the outlet river from the lake. Fortunately, this lake was designated a Ramsar Site by the Peruvian government in 1997, although little money is available for restoration work.

Most of the book is taken up with individual species accounts, and often with memorable descriptions of bird behaviour. For the well-known Pied-billed Grebe the author says," The power of the bill and its associated muscles enables the grebe to feed on large crustaceans and spiny fish…it has evolved a technique for removing the two main claws of the crayfish by taking each in turn and shaking it vigorously to break the claws off. Spiny catfish are dealt with by repeated biting and pinching…". For another species, the White-tufted Grebe of South America, the author describes its courtship display, which is not found in any other species, called the "bumping ceremony". One can read in fine detail every move of these birds as described initially by Jon Fjeldsa. A full page is devoted to the famous courtship display of the Great Crested Grebe, and each species is allocated some fascinating details of a part of the life-cycle.

Rose's illustrations make this a book for lovers of wildlife art. As both a biologist and a member of the (British) Society of Wildlife Artists, he has won both British and European Bird Artist of the Year awards. In North America, his paintings were selected in 1992 and 1993 for the prestigious annual Bird and Wildlife Art Exibition at the Woodson Art Museum in Wisconsin.

The paintings are exquisite and are brilliantly reproduced here. Birdwatchers know the joy of the fleeting moment when they see their favourite subject close at hand - close enough to see each wondrous detail - all the while holding their breath to keep the binoculars perfectly still. In the field such moments are rare and short lived; in this book each turn of the page gives you such a breathtaking look for as long as you want to look. Under this accomplished artist's control, the composition and the quality of light - even in the rain - is of quality that a photographer of birds always hopes for but all too rarely gets. It is Rose's painting's which will invite most readers into the details of the text, and which will very probably make some young person, wondering where to spend his life and talent, into an ornithologist, or an artist, or both.

Reviewed by Dorothy and Murray McFarlane

COSEWIC AND SPECIES AT RISK IN CANADA

Marty L. Leonard, ***mleonard@is.dal.ca***
Co-chair Bird Specialist Subcommittee

With the Species at Risk Act recently proclaimed, readers of Picoides may be interested in knowing a bit about the structure and function of The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). COSEWIC is a national body that is independent of government and charged with the task of assessing the conservation status of plant and animal species thought to be at risk in Canada. COSEWIC's membership includes the Co-chairs of the eight species specialist subcommittees (terrestrial mammals, marine mammals, birds, marine fishes, freshwater fishes, amphibians and reptiles, lepidopterans and molluscs, vascular plants and lichens) and an Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge subcommittee, three non-governmental scientists and a wildlife expert from the provincial/territorial governments and each of four federal agencies (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Federal Biosystematics Partnership).

The business of the Bird Specialist Subcommittee may be of particular interest to Picoides readers, so I will briefly describe it composition and some of its duties. Dick Cannings and I Co-chair this subcommittee and its members include Sydney Cannings, Ken DeSmet, Michel Gosselin, Richard Knapton, David Mossop, David Nettleship and Gilles Seutin. The subcommittee provides expertise in avian biology and conservation and is responsible for, amongst other things, identifying bird species for consideration by COSEWIC and commissioning, reviewing and evaluating the bird status reports that provide the basis for assessment by COSEWIC. Selection of subcommittee members is based on their expertise in areas such as avian systematics, ecology, population biology, genetics or conservation biology. Membership is typically for a four year, renewable term and openings on the subcommittee are advertised by the COSEWIC Secretariat and posted on the COSEWIC web site (see below). Readers may be interested to know that in September 2003 this subcommittee will be soliciting candidates for three positions.

Those interested in learning more about the workings of COSEWIC, vacancies on the committee, the species at risk list (including 57 birds) and the species on candidate lists for assessment should consult the COSEWIC web site at http://www.cosewic.gc.ca.

ATLANTIC PUFFIN, PHOTO: A.W. DIAMOND

BIRDS IN URBAN CANADA - AN UNEXPLOITED FIELD OF STUDY?

Tony Erskine, ***tony.erskine@ec.gc.ca***

"Avian Ecology and Conservation in an Urbanizing World" was the title of a recent book arising from a Cooper Club symposium in 1999. I read the review in Auk (119: 889-892, 2002) with interest, as I have explored this subject intermittently for 20 years outside of my regular work.

The authors of the book and its reviewers were all university people in the USA, so I was not surprised to find no mention in the review of Canadian studies, nor of differences in Canadian urban bird ecology arising from more northern environments. Possibly no Canadian studies were presented in the symposium, or none the reviewers thought worthy of mention in limited space.

My only summary of Canadian urban studies for a symposium in 1978 (publ. Acta Congr. Int. Ornithol. 17: 1321-1326, 1980), was limited by the scarcity of such work in Canada as well as by publication space. Publications here since then included mostly single-species studies, such as ones on urban Merlins in Saskatoon and Edmonton, other falcons wintering in Edmonton, suburban Cooper's Hawks in Victoria, and goldfinches and cowbirds in Guelph and London. There has been not much said on communities or ecology.

Some of my own publications on the subject have noted the major influence of the Canadian climate on urban bird ecology. For example, compared to cities in USA or Europe, we have a slower growth rate of trees and shrub cover in new areas of our cities and towns. As Canadians are equally urbanized as in other developed countries, with a wide range of northern climates impinging on them, urban birds here could offer promising opportunities for insightful research. The field thus seems 'wide open'. Could this be another subject which needs a new Canadian bird journal for its outlet?

Editor's Comment:

One recent study on urban bird ecology is one by Kathy Martin's student Stephanie Melles, who wrote "Effects of landscape and local habitat features on bird communities: A study of an urban gradient in Greater Vancouver". See abstract in Picoides Fall 2001. Also see page 15, this issue.

Are there any other studies such as these out there, especially those not published? Please send them to me. – The Editor

ARCTIC TERN, PHOTO: A.W. DIAMOND

THE LAST OF THE NORTH AMERICAN CRESTED MYNAS

Glen Chilton, ***glen.chilton@stmc.ab.ca***

The tale of the Crested Myna in North America is racing toward a close. It must surely count as one of the strangest conservation stories of recent years. The story is almost entirely Canadian, and the ending almost defies belief.

The Crested Myna is native to China and southeast Asia. Although it was almost certainly introduced to North America by immigrants to Vancouver from the Far East, the precise details are lost to history. Some speak of their release by an overly zealous customs official, and others of a ship's captain that grew tired of their noise. I favour the notion that a couple of pet birds outlived their owner, and were released to the wild. Everyone seems to agree that the North American population, soon to number in the thousands, was established by a small handful of individuals in the dying years of the 1800s. This means that the myna became established in Vancouver just after the city itself was incorporated.

Careful censuses were not conducted in the early years, but estimates in the 1920s put the population in a few square blocks of downtown Vancouver as high as 20,000 individuals. Even though they were not enthusiastic colonizers, satellite populations established themselves in Seattle, Washington, and Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. A pair in Victoria were shot before they could become entrenched.

For reasons not quite clear, the Crested Myna then went into a steady decline. One of the possible causes was the range expansion of the more aggressive European Starling into the lower mainland. A loss of foraging opportunities may have contributed, as Vancouver became more industrial and urban, and less agricultural. Mynas never seemed to get the hang of Vancouver's cool, damp climate, and so the best nesting opportunities may have vanished as buildings became better insulated. With the smallest of possible founding populations, the Crested Myna may have simply gone into genetic meltdown after 100 years. Even though they were favourites for birdwatchers from far and wide, as an introduced species they were not the target of any special conservation efforts in their decline.

On a trip to Vancouver in mid-February of this year, I tried to track down the last remaining individuals. I spent two days searching a warehouse district at the south end of the Cambie Street Bridge, described as the final stronghold of the Crested Myna. As far as local naturalists could determine, the population was down to just two individuals. Searching among the dumpsters and asphalt alleyways, I saw a great many starlings over those two days, but I saw no mynas.

On 1 March 2003, the Vancouver Sun ran an article which almost certainly closed the book on Crested Mynas in the wild in North America. According to the article, a man in his 50s with a strong German or eastern European accent visited a wild bird store in Vancouver, and claimed to have found the remains of the last two mynas. When asked, he claimed to have buried them in a quiet corner of Stanley Park. No other details were available, and the man's identity remains a mystery. No one has seen mynas in Vancouver since.

Today, the Crested Myna in North American is represented by just a single individual. Two siblings were taken into captivity as youngsters by a wildlife rehabilitation centre in Vancouver in May of 1986. Although one bird died early on, the other thrived. Given the precipitous decline of the wild population, the operators of the wildlife centre were advised by members of the Vancouver Natural History Society not to release the young myna. Seventeen years on, I was allowed to see this bird, and found it to be in very good health, and very well cared for. Its keepers call it "Morris". This bird, the last of the North American Crested Mynas, must be of some scientific value. If not exactly the myna equivalent of Martha, the last Passenger Pigeon, it is still iconic of Canada's changing avian landscape. The operators of the wildlife centre are being encouraged to deposit Morris' remains with the National Museum in Ottawa when it finally passes away.

CANADIAN BIRD-RELATED THESIS ABSTRACTS

ATLANTIC PUFFIN. PHOTO: A.W. DIAMOND

Exurban Development and the Nesting Success of Birds Breeding in Hardwood Forest Fragments.

Judith Phillips*, Dawn Burke† and Erica Nol‡.

JUDITH M. PHILLIPS*, Biology Department, Trent University, Peterborough, ON, K9J 7B8. Current address: 909 Greenbriar Ave., Ottawa, ON, K2C 0J8, Canada; *email judephillips@hotmail.com*

DAWN M. BURKE†, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Applied Research and Development Branch, 659 Exeter Road, London, ON, N6E 1L3, Canada.

ERICA NOL‡, Biology Department, Trent University, Peterborough, ON, K9J 7B8, Canada.

Housing developments within or adjacent to isolated forest fragments may produce changes in the bird community, including reduced abundance and species richness of interior-nesting bird species. Increased rates of nest predation may be partially to blame for these changes. We studied nests of Wood Thrushes (Hylocichla mustelina), Ovenbirds (Seiurus aurocapillus) and American Robins (Turdus migratorius) breeding in 16 woodlots in southern Ontario. Wood Thrushes experienced significantly increased rates of brood parasitism (83% vs. 33%) and parasitism failure (23% vs. 3%) in exurban sites (9-18 houses within 100m of woodlot edge) compared to rural sites (0-3 houses within 100m of woodlot edge). Ovenbirds experienced non-significant increases in brood parasitism in exurban sites compared to rural sites (50% vs. 26%). Neither species experienced changes in seasonal fecundity between treatments. American Robins experienced significantly increased rates of nest predation (48% vs. 25%) and significantly reduced nesting success (94% vs. 97%) in exurban sites compared to rural sites. American Robins breeding in rural woodlots could expect to produce more than twice the number of female fledglings per season as those breeding in exurban woodlots. Compared to rural sites, exurban sites had significantly more edge per unit area (127.8±8.8m/ha vs. 170.0±10.3m/ha) and significantly less core area (3.95±0.83ha vs. 0.43±0.27ha), since houses were often embedded into woodlot edges. Changes in reproductive parameters may be due to changes in patch variables rather than addition of houses. Housing developments should be sited away from woodlot edges to minimize changes to physical and ecological properties of woodlots.

SCO TAVERNER AWARD REPORT 2002

Lovell, S. F. 2002. Neighbor-stranger discrimination and individual recognition of neighbors by song in a suboscine, The Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*), MSc. Thesis, University of Calgary

Bird song and its functions have been studied extensively over the past 50 years, but almost entirely in oscine passerines. Few studies have investigated any aspect of song in suboscine passerines. This is surprising because song development differs greatly between these two groups. Learning and auditory feedback play a major role in the development of songs in all oscines studied. In contrast, song ontogeny is apparently genetically-programmed in suboscines and vocal learning is not required for the production of normal song.

A territorial animal that possesses the ability to discriminate between familiar (neighbors) and unfamiliar (strangers) individuals or individually recognize its neighbors may benefit by conserving energy by avoiding unnecessary conflicts with familiar individuals. The ability of territorial oscine males to discriminate between the songs of neighbors and songs of strangers, and to recognize individual neighbors by song has received considerable attention, but is virtually unstudied in suboscines.

I investigated neighbor-stranger discrimination (hereafter NSD) and individual recognition (hereafter IR) of neighbors in a suboscine, the Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*) during the breeding season of 2002. This study was conducted at Bryant Creek (51E 02' N, 114E 47' W) which is located in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, approximately 80 km from Calgary, Alberta. Alder Flycatchers breed in willow (*Salix* spp.) and bog birch (*Betula glandulosa*) thickets bordering streams and beaver ponds in the area.

Studies of avian NSD and IR use song playback experiments that simulate interactions between a territorial bird and its neighbor or a stranger. To test for NSD ability in the Alder Flycatcher, I performed a series of song playback experiments and recorded the vocal and behavioral responses of territorial males to the songs of neighbors and strangers broadcast from the regular boundary shared by the subject and the neighbor. Seventy-two hours later, I performed a series of song playback experiments to test for the ability to recognize individual neighbors and recorded the vocal and behavioral responses of territorial males to the songs of neighbors played from the regular boundary and on the edge of the subject's territory opposite the regular boundary of the neighbor. Each experiment consisted of two trials (either presentation of a neighbor or stranger song for NSD experiments or a song of a neighbor broadcast from two locations for IR of neighbor experiments).

Experiments were completed successfully on 23 subjects for the NSD experiments and 10 subjects for the IR of neighbor experiments. In the NSD experiments, subjects responded to songs of strangers by increasing the number of vocalizations and approaching the speaker closer, in comparison to when songs of a neighbor were played. In the IR of neighbor experiments, male Alder Flycatchers responded to songs of neighbors broadcast from the opposite boundary by giving more vocalizations, vocalizing much sooner, approaching the speaker closer and more quickly than to songs broadcast from the regular boundary.

The results show that Alder Flycatchers can discriminate between songs of their neighbors and strangers and individually recognize the songs of their neighbors. By discriminating between neighbor and stranger songs, Alder Flycatchers can reduce the amount time and energy spent responding to familiar individuals and devote more time to attracting a mate or foraging.

NSD experiments only test a subject's ability to discriminate between two classes of stimuli: familiar (neighbors) and unfamiliar (strangers) songs. IR is a more complex type of discrimination. Alder Flycatchers may benefit from IR of neighbors by being able to assess the relative threat that an individual neighbor presents and respond accordingly.

Suboscines resemble oscines in both ecology and behavior and, presumably face many of the same behavioral and ecological pressures that oscines do. Understanding how suboscines deal with challenges that oscines meet using the learned variation in their songs is critical to understanding the evolution and function of songs in both groups. This study is the one of the first comprehensive tests of NSD and IR of neighbors in a suboscine. It contributes to our understanding of the evolution and functions of song in the suboscines by demonstrating that they, like their oscine relatives, can recognize their individual neighbors

Acknowledgements:
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Squires, K. A. 2002. Pre-incubation behaviour of Harlequin Ducks (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) in Labrador: testing the function of male vigilance an aggression. MSc. Thesis, University of BC.
kasquires@shaw.ca

Male behaviours such as vigilance and aggression are usually assumed to function in paternity assurance during the pre-incubation period. However, the functions of these behaviours may be to protect females from conspecifics and predators during feeding and resting thereby enhancing their ability to form clutches. I studied pre-incubation behaviour in a population of Harlequin Ducks to determine how male vigilance and aggression are related to female foraging, resting and date of clutch initiation. In 2000 and 2001, 217 hours of time-activity data on 12 paired females and 16 paired males were collected on two rivers in central Labrador during the pre-incubation period. Males face greater risk of losing paternity due to mate loss than to extra-pair copulation (EPC) because EPC attempts were rare and did not result in cloacal contact due to female resistance. Most aggression was low-level 'head-nodding' by both members of a pair. Though high-level male aggression was directed at other males, it occurred during feeding and not resting, despite close proximity between resting pairs and unpaired males. High-level aggression by males was likely used to defend feeding areas and not to 'mate guard'.


HARLEQUIN DUCKS, PHOTO: TINA NEWBURY

Harlequin Ducks were observed in lake outlets throughout the pre-incubation period except during spring snow melt when they were observed feeding close to flooded lakeshores. The proportion of time that males were vigilant during feeding bouts was greater when pairs were observed at the lakeshore than in the river outlets (22% versus 5%). Males were more vigilant than females and were vigilant when other males were not within sight. The frequency of male vigilance was unrelated to the female fertile period suggesting no paternity assurance function. Male vigilance and female feeding and resting were not positively correlated and vigilance and aggression were unrelated to date of clutch initiation. Males may use vigilance to detect predators to enhance female survival in 'risky' habitat.


HARLEQUIN DUCK EGGS, PHOTO: COLIN JONES


ARCTIC TERN, PHOTO: A.W. DIAMOND

THE CURLEW
Vernon Watkins

Sweet-throated cry, by one no longer heard
Who, more than many, loved the wandering bird,
Unchanged through generations and renewed,
Perpetual child of its own solitude,
The same on rocks and over sea I hear
Return now with his unreturning year.
How swiftly now it flies across the sands,
Image of change unchanging, changing lands
From year to year, yet always found near home
Where waves in sunlight break in restless foam.

Old though the cave is, this outlives the cave,
And the grey pool that shuddered when it gave
The landscape life, reveals where time has grown,
Turning green, slowly forming tears to stone.
The quick light of that cry disturbs the gloom.
It passes now, and rising from its tomb,
Carries remorse across the sea where I
Wait on the shore, still listening to that cry
Which bears a ghostly listening to my own;
Such life is hidden in the ringing stone
That rests, unmatched by any natural thing,
And joins, unheard, the wave-crest and the wing.

DUSK IN SOUTH BAY
BriAnne Addison

Laying on my back
On hard, cold rock,
But it's worth it.

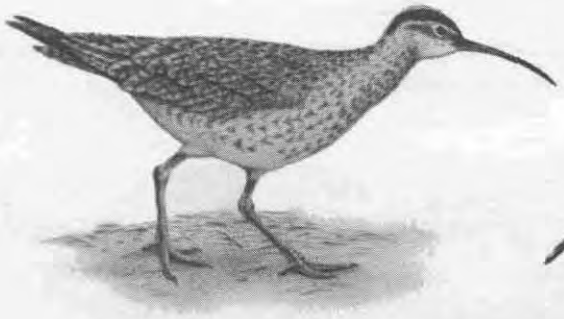
I watch the puffin
Singly circle, and come 'round again
Wings beating madly,
Whistling,
And pale yellow tufts fly.

The backdrop
Turns blue to pink.

The fog rolls in
And a horned cousin
Comes out to wheel.

First a few,
Then more and more
Until the whole bay
Is filled with
Little horn-billed jets.

The whistling fades
As night falls,
But I hear the laugh
Of a petrel.



Taken from Chorus, an anthology of bird poems compiled by Susanne Knowles, 1969, Funk and Wagnalls, New York.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Society of Canadian Ornithologists/Société des Ornithologistes du Canada
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Graphic Designer of Picoides: Matthew McFarlane
Voice: (506) 452-2137
Email: mmcfarlane1031@rogers.com

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WHOOPING CRANES, PHOTO: BRIAN JOHNSON

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