

Link: www.bcfo.ca/trip-reports/2003-extension-report.htm

BCFO Extension 2003:
The Blaeberry Valley, British Columbia. June 23-25, 2003

Day 1

Following a very successful and informative Annual Conference at Radium Resort, 27 of us settled into a convoy of vehicles on Monday, June 23 and headed north in the Rocky Mountain Trench. Our eventual destination was the Goldenwood Lodge in the Blaeberry River valley. The Blaeberry flows southwest out of the towering Rocky Mountains, joining the Columbia River north of Golden. As should be the case, it was our desire to explore yet another part of British Columbia. We were ready to test the raw beauty of the Rockies and their western foothills, and to search out the birds that nest in or migrate through the Southern Interior Mountains Ecoprovince. The weather? Well, it was threatening, but we were determined.

Local birder Bob Ferguson met us just as a nasty rainsquall hit the Brisco General Store, but by the time he led us down to the Columbia wetlands and riparian forests below Brisco, the sun had burst through. Virginia Rails, Soras, and an immaculate Common Yellowthroat filled our scopes. Bobolinks, blackbirds and swallows lined the fences and irrigation pipes. Mixed waterfowl, Wilson's Phalarope and Wilson's Snipe added to the 30 species we saw here. And our luck with the weather held out. Just as we raced back under the porch of the Brisco store, the rain returned. We relaxed with a coffee and stayed dry as we drove north.

Still led by Bob, and with the sun breaking through again, the valley bottom at Spillimacheen was our next stop. Keen eyes spotted distant Bullock's Orioles and a singing Swainson's Thrush. A cooperative Northern Waterthrush sang and teetered on a log as it fed close to the road. We enjoyed about the best look one could imagine of a Veery as it gathered nesting material among the wet roots of willows. Hammond's, Alder and Willow flycatchers, Eastern Kingbirds and Western Wood-Pewees were finding insects, while Purple Finches and Mountain Chickadees were a bit of a surprise in this mixed marsh habitat. We identified 26 species here.

After a group lunch in Golden, we continued north, arriving at scenic Goldenwood Lodge at 3 PM. Rooms were allocated in the lodge itself or in beautifully appointed wood cabins. One of our new Taiwanese members even chose to sleep in an authentic teepee. Excellent meals were served buffet style in the spacious dining lodge, all prepared with Swiss flair by our hosts Barbara Friedli and Andre Weilenmann. We birded the Goldenwood property first, finding Rufous, Calliope and Black-chinned Hummingbirds and Red-eyed Vireos, among others. An evening walk through the lodge property (Interior Douglas-fir Biogeoclimatic Zone) led to Old Johnson Road, where a Ruffed Grouse was heard and a Magnolia Warbler seen. We will never know whether it was our poor vocal imitations of a Barred Owl 20 minutes earlier, or the realistic imitation of both Northern Pygmy-Owl and Western Screech-Owl emanating from my grandson's toy saxophone, but a pair of Barred Owls raised our excitement as they suddenly duetted from a nearby aspen/spruce/fir stand. Their sounds were chilling. We had fleeting glimpses of them as they approached. Most memorable!

Day 2

Local resident and birder Doug Leighton joined us early on this clear, calm morning and drove us to the old Willowbank Mountain logging road. This road served the huge sawmill in the village of Donald to the north, but has since been abandoned. Our target was a pair of Broad-winged Hawks that Doug had found here earlier. Except for a Red-tail, all hawks remained hidden, but Nashville, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Townsend's and Orange-crowned warblers, and American Redstarts added to our warbler list. Led by nuthatches and chickadees, a few Cassin's and Warbling vireos were among the many mobbing passerines brought in by the saxophone's pygmy-owl notes. Persistence paid off for those of us who ventured the 5 km to a clearcut at the end of the road. A Northern Pygmy-Owl flew in silently to investigate a territorial intruder...which was hiding in a yellow plastic toy. Scope views! And 24 species for the morning.

Doug took us higher in the afternoon, to about 1600 m, on the Susan Lake Road off the Big Bend Highway. A walk along the road produced the expected Wilson's Warblers and Hermit Thrushes, both summer residents in this high, semi-open fir-hemlock forest. Fox Sparrows were along a wetted fringe and White-

crowned Sparrows were on territory in young second growth. A female Blue Grouse with chicks (probably Richardson's subspecies, *Dendragapus obscurus richardsonii*) moved ahead of us on the road. The mystery bird of the day? A soaring raptor that passed over us. It still has everyone baffled.

A noisy dinner followed. Simon Liao, president of the National Bird Society Taiwan, and his colleague, Flicker Liu, entertained us and invited us to bird with them in Taiwan. Sounds great! We are convinced that all we have to do is sit by that one big tree and every Taiwanese bird will eventually land in it

Day 3

Logging continues in the Blaeberry valley. We set off early with Doug, hoping to beat the logging trucks and find a Blackpoll Warbler, Gray Jay and Golden Eagle. We found all three, along with 28 other species, at various stops in this spectacularly scenic valley. Red-naped Sapsucker, MacGillivray's Warbler, Varied Thrush and Hairy Woodpecker were among the birds at our first stop. The target site for Blackpoll Warbler paid off, although some of us could not hear the male's high frequency song. At one point, a Blackpoll just about took our heads off as it responded to a call. A bonus here was a family of Boreal Chickadees, sitting still long enough for good looks. Snowshoe Hares, elk and a Blue Grouse with chicks were on the road as we drove toward the head of the valley. Here we found Black Swifts, Steller's Jays, a Spotted Sandpiper and a high-flying Northern Goshawk. (Was that the Susan Lake mystery bird?)

It's a challenge to get ornithologists to look at rocks, but June Ryder, a professional geologist familiar with most of the province, had no trouble getting us all to look in the right directions for a few minutes. She described the tectonic forces that have created one of the most spectacular mountain ranges in the world. We were in the heart of the Rockies. Within view of the retreating Mummery Glacier, June showed us just how tectonic plate movement, subduction and the heat generated by subduction have folded, tilted and overturned the sedimentary layers that make up much of the Rockies. We learned how the glaciers of the big ice age (~15,000 years ago) and the little ice age (the 17th and 18th centuries) carved the U-shaped valleys around us. She pointed out debris flows, avalanche tracks, exfoliation and stream erosion. The relentless force of gravity continues to reshape the peaks and valleys. An inspiring view, as June's specimen landforms and rocks framed our outdoor classroom.

Time prevented us from visiting a Vaux's Swift nesting site in the Blaeberry, but there they were as we arrived back at the lodge - 3 Vaux's Swifts...and Barn Swallows, to round out our bird list of 121 species.

Our mammal list was equally impressive: shrew sp., bat sp., Snowshoe Hare, Muskrat, Beaver, Columbian Ground Squirrel, Yellow Pine Chipmunk, Red Squirrel, Coyote, Marten, Black Bear, Moose, Elk, Mule Deer and White-tailed Deer.

Our sincere thanks go to Dannie Carsen and Sandra Kinsey for arranging accommodations, transportation and local guides for the extension; to Bob Ferguson and Doug Leighton for guiding us; to van drivers Jim Fliczuk and Jack Bowling; and to Barbara and Andre for being such gracious hosts. Our extensions just keep getting better.

Bryan Gates, Extension Leader

P.O. Box 8059
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3R7
Canada

Web: www.bcfo.ca