

## Birding Outing for March 19/26

The temperature was in the mid teens and climbing. Jackets were tossed back into the cars. Overhead, four Turkey Vultures were circling with a Cooper's Hawk in hot pursuit. Kildeer were calling nearby

Spring is in the air!

More than 20 naturalists gathered for our Thursday outing, which resulted in us splitting into two groups: the walk to the OK Falls Water Treatment Plant and beyond for those interested, and the walk in reverse, along the channel to the treatment plant and then back to the start along Rail Rd. (photos attached of the group gathering and waving across the channel to the other team. Thanks to photog Greg Tellier.)

Yours truly headed toward the treatment plant with 11 naturalists. Alex led the others to the channel. Alex's wonderful report follows mine. Lots of great sightings today!!

### To the Treatment Plant

As we set off, it was great to hear the call of the Kildeer in the field behind the residence at the corner of Rail Rd. A sweet family of Kildeer was often seen in the field last year so perhaps the birds are back to nest nearby again this season.

As friends connected and conversations got going, we could hardly miss the announcement of spring from the Song Sparrows. They were dotted all along the route today and were like a moving choir of song.

The sparrows were eager to be seen and photographed as well. There they were perched atop a bush or posing on a branch hitting the high notes with gusto as cameras snapped.

Off in the distance, the elegant neck and head of a Great Blue Heron rose above the wheat-coloured grass, hitting a striking and ever so still pose.

On the other side of the road, at the property with the long line of whimsical bird houses, a male Western Bluebird, resplendent in his intensifying colours, posed atop an arbour in front of impressed birders admiring the bird's spring look.

As we strolled, we noticed the pussy willows popping out and buds bursting on so many of the road-side bushes. We also spotted a decked-out beekeeper tending hives adjacent to the entrance of Wildwood Ranch. More spring activity in the natural world.

As we continued on, so did the Song Sparrows. More songs coming from the trees and shrubs all along the way.

Closer to the treatment plant, a birder eagerly pointed to a female Downy Woodpecker in full view, working her way up a small tree. What a great look at this sweet bird, which may have been the source of the tapping we heard as we approached the area.

As we were enjoying the sight, in flies the male, with the splash of orangey-red feathers on the back of his head, a little askew and funky.

How wonderful to see these birds close to each other on the same branch for a moment before the male took off for a neighbouring tree.

The Red-winged Blackbirds were filling the air with their calls and taking in the sights from perches all around the Water Treatment Plant. A lone female, the only one we spotted today, will have her choice of fellas ere long, before the other ladies show up.

As we reached the channel, several members turned back, leaving a half dozen of us to continue along the channel.

A nice selection of the usual swimmers were on the water: Common Merganser ladies, Bufflehead couples, Mallards and a smattering of Canada Geese. It must have been a bad day for one grumpy goose when a couple of geese on the bank flew down to join the trio on the water.

Grumpy drew his head down and aggressively swam, snarling and hissing at all of them, one at a time. It was amusing to see them swimming away, leaving grumpy in a circle of water by himself.

Nice to see the other club members across the channel, tracking a pair of Ravens. Sure enough, the birds flew to their robust nest of sticks perched on a ledge near a crack in a rock face. Interesting to also see a Red-tailed Hawk harass one of the Raven pair flying in the area. The hawk didn't last long.

Meanwhile, across the path on our side, a couple of American Robins were getting into it, although we thought this might be a love spat rather than a life dispute. Love is in the air.

Our stroll back to the cars ended with a bird, backlit on the backside of a tree a distance away. What fun straining our eyes, binoculars and even telephoto lenses. A crest, not that big. The Kingfisher that's usually in the area?

No white on what we could see of the breast so not a Kingfisher. Ah, how about a young Stellar's Jay? Sure enough, fuzzy images on the telephoto lenses for the win. A nice wrap to our walk.

Here are the birds we enjoyed today:

### **From the start to the Water Treatment Plant, with thanks to Ralph Morgan**

26 species

Canada Goose 30  
Mallard 16  
Ring-necked Duck 1  
Bufflehead 3  
Common Merganser 1  
California Quail 3  
American Coot 1  
Killdeer 3  
Great Blue Heron 1  
Turkey Vulture 4  
Cooper's Hawk 1

Red-tailed Hawk 1  
Downy Woodpecker 2  
Northern Flicker 5  
American Kestrel 1  
Say's Phoebe 4  
Black-capped Chickadee 2  
Pygmy Nuthatch 3  
Bewick's Wren 1  
Western Bluebird 2  
American Robin 2  
House Sparrow 12

House Finch 6  
Song Sparrow 4

Spotted Towhee 1  
Red-winged Blackbird 19

### **From the treatment plant back to the cars** 15 species

Canada Goose 79  
Mallard 7  
Bufflehead 12  
Common Goldeneye 4  
Barrow's Goldeneye 1  
Common Merganser 3  
Eurasian Collared-Dove 2  
Red-tailed Hawk 1

Steller's Jay 1  
Common Raven 2  
Bewick's Wren 1  
European Starling 4  
American Robin 4  
Song Sparrow 4  
Red-winged Blackbird 2

### **Alex's report**

What an awesome outing today! SONC observers group II, made up of 11 went North along the old KVR line and along Shuttleworth creek and down the Okanagan River and back along the sewage treatment plant road to complete the circle. As we all convened to start, four Turkey Vultures soared by, welcoming in Spring. There was a large flock of Canada Geese in the pasture with a couple of Killdeer running around as well. Just as we set off a Coopers hawk flew by high up.

The first part of the trail was quiet, but as soon as we made it closer to the buildings and the creek, we saw California Quail running about, European Starlings atop the trees, a couple of Eurasian Collared Doves fly by and one Red-tailed hawk soaring along. We heard two Say's Phoebes and Red-winged Blackbird calling but never did see them. There were a few House Sparrows, a Dark-eyed Junco and several House Sparrows and House Finches, all probably drawn by a couple of home feeders.

A couple of American crows called as they flew by and a flock of Mallards flew out from the East, with a few more drifting down the Creek. As we made our way down the trail two Fox squirrels popped up and chased each other in a tree. We saw four of these non-native squirrels in total. By this time most of us realized that we had overdressed.



We continued along the creek towards the river and found more Mallards and a Bufflehead in the catchment pond at the mouth of the creek. A couple of Song Sparrows were calling from the brush as well. The home on the South side which has several

feeders, was hosting several House sparrows, a couple of Dark-eyed Juncos and a single White-crowned Sparrow was heard calling but was too shy to make an appearance.

As we started South along the river channel a couple of Common Goldeneye were swimming around with some Buffleheads and Pied Billed Grebe dived just downstream. Another Say's Phoebe called from the East and a few mallards flew over. The pasture had lots of Canada Geese and a half dozen Killdeer running about. Some Song sparrows called at various places along the whole route and two Steller's Jays flew out of the trees.

We crossed over on the control structure to continue and the small pond on the West side had several Gadwall, a pair of Hooded Mergansers, all being watched over by a Great Blue Heron sitting in a Ponderosa Pine. An added bonus was two Western painted turtles basking in the sun.



As we walked down the channel we found some House Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos and the first of our Spotted Towhee's all close to a feeding station at one of the homes. An eagle was soaring by the cliffs and after some observation of this back lit bird we came to the consensus that it was a Golden Eagle. The cliff faces were very active. Two Canyon Wrens were heard calling, and there was a constant stream of Violet Green Swallows heading North. One of the observations of the day was a pair of Common Ravens tending to a nest in a large crack in the rock face.

Things only got better with the high-pitched call of a Golden-crowned Kinglet in the thicket that frustrated us by not showing itself, however a short distance later one was visible on some dead water birch where it flitted about with some Black-capped Chickadees. Two Northern Flickers were also calling from atop a dead branch nearby. Just as we started to walk away from this spot a Belted Kingfisher was heard flying onto a nearby perch.

We picked up a few more of the same along the way including a pair of Red-tailed Hawks working on the next generation and crossed another control structure to come in behind the treatment plant where we found two Say's Phoebes calling from the fence and a couple of American Goldfinches flew over. In the small riparian area just South of the buildings we watched as a Northern Flicker removed material from a nest hole in a dead tree and listened to a Spotted Towhee calling from beneath. A single Common Merganser on the river added to our count for the day.

We continued North along the road to the calls of the Red-winged Blackbirds on the reeds and a distant Bewick's wren calling from the brush. We saw another Turkey Vulture soar to the South and what we felt was the same pair of Red-tailed hawks. We did get two more a bit further on.

The regular tapping of a Downy woodpecker was heard, and it was found at the very tip of a dead branch. A second one popped up just down the road. Right about that time a Virginia rail called from behind us making sure it got onto our count for the day.

The next highlight of the day was a pair of Pygmy Nuthatches on a dead piece of a tree exploring a fairly fresh nest hole. We found a few more in the pines later with some of the many Black-capped Chickadees that singing everywhere. A few more Bewick's wrens were also calling from the bushes. A Bald Eagle flew over and as we looked over a small pond, we discovered some American Widgeon, a male Green-winged Teal and a single American Coot.

The last part of the walk produced more House Sparrows, House Finches and Song Sparrows. A Red-tailed hawk was perched on a fence post; some European Starlings flew between the pines and a couple of Killdeer and American Robin were searching for food in a small pasture. At the end of the outing, we had walked about 4km and tallied 45 species. View the trip report at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/490062>



Thanks to everyone who came out today and made this a really terrific preview of spring.

Until next time, happy birding.

